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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 30, 2010
(Part A)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 30, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Speaker: I have the honour to table the 2009 annual report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(e), this document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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SPONSORED TRAVEL BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 15(3) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, it is my duty to lay upon the table the list of all sponsored travel by members for the year 2009 as provided by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

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BALANCED REFUGEE REFORM ACT

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Federal Courts Act.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in relation to best practices in settlement services.

PETITIONS

AIR PASSENGERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition regarding an air passengers' bill of rights.

Thousands of Canadians are calling on Parliament to adopt Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights. Bill C-310 would compensate air passengers on all Canadian carriers, including charters, anywhere they fly.

The bill provides compensation for overbooked flights, cancelled flights and long tarmac delays. The bill deals with issues such as late and misplaced baggage. It requires all-inclusive pricing by airlines on all of their advertising. The airlines would have to inform passengers of flight changes, either delays or cancellations. The new rules would have to be posted at the airports. Airlines would have to inform passengers of their rights and the process to file for compensation. If the airlines followed these rules, it would cost them nothing.

Legislation of this type has been in effect in Europe for five years. Why should an Air Canada passenger be treated better in Europe than in Canada? The petitioners call on the government to support Bill C-310, which would introduce Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights.

• (1010)

EARTHQUAKE IN CHILE

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is signed by Canadians calling on the Canadian government to match funds personally donated by the citizens of Canada for the victims of the earthquake in Chile. On February 27, 2010, an 8.8 magnitude earthquake occurred in southern Chile.

Canadian communities have mobilized and have held fundraising events. At least two events have been held in Winnipeg in the last few weeks. When will the Prime Minister and the government give the same treatment to the victims of the earthquake in Chile as was done for the victims of the earthquake in Haiti and match funds personally donated by Canadians to help the victims of the earthquake in Chile?

ABORIGINAL HEALING CENTRES

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I present petitions this morning from hundreds of people across this country, including people from my own riding.

Routine Proceedings

People are very concerned about the move by the government to end funding to the aboriginal healing centres. The petitioners claim that this is not in keeping with the apology that was given by the Prime Minister in the House on the commitment to resources for healing and reconciliation.

Funding will come to an end at the end of this month. There are programs in two aboriginal communities bordering on Sault Ste. Marie where excellent work is going on to help survivors of residential schools. These petitioners, my constituents and people from across the country ask the government passionately to please continue the funding so that this healing can continue.

NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition on behalf of over 100 residents of the greater Toronto area, Etobicoke and Mississauga. These people are largely representatives of the Korean community who are concerned about the treatment of North Korean refugees in China. The Chinese government continues to send these refugees from oppression in North Korea back to North Korea when they are found.

The petitioners, citizens of the greater Toronto area, call upon the House of Commons and the Government of Canada to support my Motion No. 383 and vigorously participate in the international effort to urge the Government of the People's Republic of China to ensure the safe passage of North Korean refugees who leave North Korea to South Korea.

LEIF ERICSSON DAY

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as Canada's second Finnish Canadian MP, I am very proud to rise today to present a petition to honour the voyage of Leif Ericsson and to recognize the contribution of Scandinavian people to Canada.

The petitioners specifically ask for support of former Motion No. 37, and that the government honour the historical voyage made by Leif Ericsson who became the first European to visit North America over a thousand years ago, and recognize the contributions of Scandinavian people from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Finland to Canada by joining other nations in declaring October 9 as Leif Ericsson day.

The petitioners and I look forward to the government's response.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians who call upon the House of Commons to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters in the world, dumping nearly 200,000 tonnes of asbestos into underdeveloped countries every year.

The petitioners point out that Canada also spends millions of dollars subsidizing the industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

The petitioners call upon the government to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers who may be put out of work and for the communities they live in; to

end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and abroad; to stop blocking international conventions, such as the Rotterdam convention, which are designed to protect workers from asbestos; and also, as the United States Senate has done, to recognize April 1 as asbestos disease awareness day.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning I am presenting a petition signed by more than 670 residents of Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-Rouville, a semi-urban, but primarily rural, community, where the people are worried about the potential closure of their post office. Although the government is trying to reassure us about maintaining the moratorium, this community is very worried about the debate that has been opened on this issue. We know that when the post office is closed in a semi-rural community like this one, the centre and very heart of the community is compromised.

I have the honour to present this petition on behalf of the people of Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-Rouville, in my riding of Chambly—Borduas.

• (1015)

[English]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wonder if you could ask the House for unanimous consent to introduce my private member's bill.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER ACT

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-504, An Act respecting the establishment of a National Strategy for Autism Spectrum Disorder.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the House for giving consent to move this bill forward.

I am pleased to rise in the House to introduce a bill that would provide relief to thousands of Canadians across the country who have loved ones living with autism.

If passed, Bill C-504, An Act respecting the establishment of a National Strategy for Autism Spectrum Disorder, would establish national standards for the treatment and delivery of autism-related services, study the possibility of transferring federal funds to assist provincial governments in providing treatments, establish a medical surveillance program monitored by the Public Health Agency of Canada, and estimate the amount of funding required for health research into treatments and service delivery for autism.

If passed, this bill would bring relief to thousands of Canadian families who have loved ones living with autism.

Government Orders

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

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed from March 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is once again an honour for me to speak about this proposed agreement between the Conservative government and Colombia.

One might initially wonder why anyone would oppose a free trade agreement with a country that could benefit from the economic growth such an agreement could bring. The answer is found in the details of the agreement, of what it does and does not do.

We feel that this discussion should be about fair trade as well as free trade. By definition, fair trade means fully respecting human rights as a precondition for all trade deals.

Tragically, the number of people executed in Colombia for working towards better human rights, particularly labour rights, has now reached the hundreds. These workers are executed in different ways, often by brigades that represent the state in some form or another.

Unfortunately, even though the Bloc Québécois and NDP both feel it is important to oppose this agreement, the Liberals—in keeping with their lack of principles and beliefs in anything—are saying one thing and then the very opposite, just as they did last week in response to a Bloc motion about the Quebec bridge.

We all remember that, instead of saying they wanted Canada to reclaim the Quebec bridge so that repair work could be completed in the interest of public safety, the Liberals said that maybe the government could split the bill with CN. But CN had already committed to doing the work. This is a bold new trend for the Liberals. They do not want to offend anyone. After all, they consider themselves the “natural governing party”. They are just sitting there, biding their time until it is their turn to govern again. It was interesting to hear the Liberal leader say that people are looking for

an alternative. The mere fact that he said so suggests that he does not consider himself to be that alternative.

When it comes to issues like the free trade agreement with Colombia, the Bloc and the NDP have the political courage to speak out against an agreement with a country that does not respect human rights. This is a matter of principle, and human rights principles are non-negotiable.

By once again seeking the middle ground, the Liberals are showing their intellectual and moral weakness. Their latest tactic is to ask the government responsible for failing to respect human rights, the Colombian government, to self-assess. Imagine asking students to grade themselves. That is more or less what we are asking Colombia to do.

This agreement is an utter failure when it comes to human rights. Moreover, as a former environment minister, I can say that when it comes to the environment, the proposed agreement with Colombia has the same weakness, the same flaw as the North American Free Trade Agreement.

In the early days of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the United States was worried that *maquiladoras*—industrial parks, for want of a better word—would spring up all along the U.S. border. People were worried about poorly paid jobs. After all, that is the purpose of a free trade agreement: to pay workers as little as possible. In other words, because Mexico's environmental standards are inferior to those of the United States, people were worried that American jobs would be outsourced to jurisdictions with lower environmental standards to bring down production costs.

NAFTA was the first agreement in the world to take environmental considerations into account, albeit in a side agreement. As proof that these considerations are not an integral part of the free trade agreement, not a single case has been successfully prosecuted since NAFTA was signed. Nevertheless, this has opened up the possibility of doing better for the future.

What is tragic about this is that instead of learning from NAFTA, we are in the process of making the same mistake again. The wording in the agreement with Colombia has been lifted word for word from NAFTA.

● (1020)

Instead of learning from its mistakes, the Conservative government wants to repeat them. There is only one explanation for this: it does not want any environmental standards to apply to these agreements.

In any case, since the Conservatives came to power, they have been constantly doing things that are detrimental to the environment. In last year's budget, they scrapped the Navigable Waters Protection Act. In the budget implementation bill introduced yesterday, they confirmed their desire to scrap the environmental assessment process in Canada. It is appalling, but once again they are relying on the weakness of the Liberals who last year—it is always worth pointing these things out—sided with the Conservatives to scrap the Navigable Waters Protection Act.

Government Orders

This year, the budget implementation bill will pass because, as usual, enough Liberal members will go and hide behind the curtains to give a de facto majority to the Conservatives, despite their minority status. This is the sad reality in Canada at this time.

This is the Conservatives' fifth budget since coming to power and they are trashing all environmental laws. Not only are they leaving a fiscal and financial debt to future generations, but they are also leaving serious environmental liabilities that only future generations will be able to absorb. However, those future generations will not even have the money to do so because nothing will have been done to build the economy of the future, a green economy where jobs are created and clean and renewable energy infrastructure is established. There is no vision for this. The government only has eyes for the oil sands and that is starting to have devastating effects on our economy. It is therefore not surprising that the Conservatives are prepared to do even more damage with the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

I remember the first time I faced this issue. I was a law student at McGill University in the early 1970s. I was president of the McGill Law Students' Association and Ralph Nader took part in a debate on multinationals, involving Eric Kierans, Ralph Nader and me. I remember Ralph Nader telling us to be careful because multinationals were becoming more powerful than nation-states. To be perfectly honest, I did not believe him. I thought nation-states were becoming a thing of the past and that the way of the future was globalization. Globalization of values, perhaps; globalization of cultures, perhaps; but when globalization is aimed at just one thing, namely making working people poorer, that is when everyone needs to start asking questions. When globalization seeks the lowest common denominator in terms of the environment and human rights, we must stand up and oppose it.

For that reason, I am pleased that the NDP and the Bloc, the progressive forces, are standing together to stop this agreement with Colombia. For the same reason, I am shocked that a party that has the gall to continue calling itself liberal is trying to find all imaginable and possible excuses to support an agreement that violates the environment and human rights, and that will only impoverish the people, particularly those working in Colombia's agricultural sector. It is inexcusable coming from those who call themselves progressive.

They are unmasked on a regular basis and it is worthwhile, each time, to point out that the Liberal Party of Canada, as Mr. Fowler stated at the weekend conference, has but one thing on its mind: telling people what they want to hear in the hope of being elected. Once elected, it does nothing. That is the sad reality of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Let us see what has happened since NAFTA was signed. The Ethyl Corporation was awarded tens of millions of dollars in damages from the Government of Canada because, in order to protect public health, we prohibited the use of a gasoline additive. Dow Chemical is taking Canada to court. We will be watching to see if Canada decides to defend itself because Quebec has decided to ban 2,4-D. That is tragic because it is a carcinogen. It is in the public's interest to prevent Dow Chemical from using it. However, under this agreement, the government will probably be weaker than Dow Chemical.

It is for such reasons that we must oppose these types of agreements. We in the NDP will stand up and oppose this agreement with Colombia.

•(1025)

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with reference to the political nature that exists within the House, I would ask my colleague to subtract that for just a moment. Instead of the orange, red and blue teams playing a little game with each other, would he specifically respond to how, in this particular agreement, he personally would strengthen the labour agreements within it?

NDP members have mused openly about how they would include this within the text of the particular bill but I would like the member to be more specific. I would ask that he avoid the politics of the situation for just a moment and get to the gist of the matter. If he is claiming that the mistakes we learned from NAFTA should be applied here, could he tell us what those mistakes were? How would he fix this particular agreement when it comes to labour standards?

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, when we hear a question like that, it is clear that the person asking the question has not read the agreement.

Believe it or not, there is a provision of up to \$15 million for fines on people who kill labour activists. When someone kills a labour activist, they pay a fine. That is what the Liberals are supporting here.

We have obligations in terms of human and environmental rights, and towards future generations. But here we are, signing an agreement with a country that does not respect these rights and that will not respect them. Canada must at least set an example: if a country wants to trade with us, it must prove that it is able to respect human rights. The country cannot simply keep tabs on itself and pay fines when someone kills a labour activist.

•(1030)

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thoroughly enjoyed the speech by the member for Outremont. He certainly understands trade issues and is one of the foremost members in the House on trade issues.

Government Orders

I want him to comment on the incredible condemnation across the country of the Liberal backroom deal that has happened in the last few hours. The Liberals tried to spin this self-assessment of the Colombian government but the Council of Canadians is calling this amendment a Liberal sellout on human rights. The Canadian Union of Public Employees is saying that it is unconscionable that the Liberals plan to whitewash this deal. Various other organizations from across the country, such as the Canadian Labour Congress, are saying that the bad bill just gets worse. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation finds it incredible that Liberal MPs have proposed an amendment that would have the same government of Colombia make a report on whether there are human rights violations. The Canadian Auto Workers are calling for an immediate halt, as well as the United Church and the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

Nobody agrees with this appalling Liberal sellout of human rights. As Robert Fowler said last weekend, the Liberals are in the process of losing their souls. Could the member for Outremont comment on that?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, I must take issue with the affirmation that the Liberals would be losing their souls because they do not have them to lose. That point needs to be made to begin with. They have none to lose because they have no principles. They do not believe in anything. The only thing they believe in is power and telling people what they want to hear in the hopes of winning the next election. That was Mr. Fowler's point.

With regard to this deal and the long list that my colleague from British Columbia has just read of groups across Canada that are denouncing the Liberal Party's sellout and its abject failure to stand up for human rights, we should remember the good words of someone else who was at the thinkers conference on the weekend, Eddie Goldenberg, former chief of staff to Jean Chrétien, who had the merit of being one of the only Liberals to ever tell the truth.

In a speech to the London Chamber of Commerce in the spring of 2007, Eddie Goldenberg mentioned, on an issue related to this treaty, that when the Liberals signed the Kyoto protocol they did it "to galvanize public opinion". It was a public relations stunt. He admitted that they had no plan to respect the timing and the exigencies of the Kyoto protocol. They signed it to get votes and then went on to have the worst record in the world in terms of greenhouse gas production. That is what the Liberal Party is about.

Interestingly enough, once Eddie Goldenberg had finally let the cat out of the bag and told people what was going on—

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am sure the member will want to correct the record. He would not want to infer that any member of the House does not speak the truth. In his statements he referred to all members of a particular political party not speaking the truth. I am sure he wants to correct that record.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I am not sure that is what the hon. member for Outremont said. Could the hon. member for Outremont very quickly complete his comment?

M. Thomas Mulcair: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for listening, unlike the Liberal member who does not like anybody saying anything negative against him. This is Parliament and it is a place for speaking and for debate.

The subject of debate is a free trade agreement with a country that does not respect human rights and does not respect the environment. The Liberals are in favour of it because they have no principles on either of these two issues.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here we are again debating the bill on the implementation of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, which is now called Bill C-2.

Today, just as when we dealt with it as Bill C-23, the Bloc Québécois is totally opposed to Bill C-2. The difference now is that the Liberals, like the Canadian government, will become accomplices to the many human rights violations in Colombia.

Just like their Conservative colleagues, the Liberals could not care less about all the recommendations made by the unions and human rights organizations opposed to the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia because that country has one of the worst track records in the world when it comes to human rights. We see that there are two parties and two views, but one and the same vision.

It is no secret that acts of violence and intimidation, as well as fearmongering against Colombian unionists and aboriginal and Afro-Colombian communities, are widespread in Colombia. While dozens of union activists are murdered each year and aboriginal people are evicted and expelled by force from their lands in order to attract foreign investors, Canada is preparing to sign an agreement with a government criticized for its involvement in corruption scandals.

And that is an understatement. The fact that the bill on the implementation of the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia is the first bill submitted to the House by the Conservative government confirms that party's desire to rush it through, in order to cut off debate on the agreement and to silence its opponents.

Why is the Conservative Party still insisting on implementing this agreement even before an assessment of its impacts on human rights is carried out? Such an assessment would help to measure the impact of policies, programs, projects and actions on human rights and would help to evaluate the repercussions of the legal obligations in the agreement.

The Liberals' proposed amendment to the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, which the member for King's—Hants introduced last week in the House, is not enough for the Bloc Québécois to support Bill C-2. Any assessment of the agreement's human rights impact must be carried out by an independent agency. Otherwise, it will have no legitimacy.

It is vital that an independent, transparent, neutral assessment be conducted before the free trade agreement is implemented. Even the Public Service Alliance of Canada is calling for one:

—any human rights impact assessment must be carried out by credible third party, independent human rights experts, before the deal is implemented.

Government Orders

Recently, a delegation of 22 election observers, including four Canadians, took part in a two-week international election monitoring mission in Colombia. I would like to share some of the delegation's observations from the field. Speaking on behalf of the delegation, Ms. Pickard said this:

Our first-hand experience contradicts claims the free trade deal will strengthen Colombia's democracy. We found widespread evidence of human rights violations, corruption, resurgent paramilitary groups, and drug violence.

There's a climate of fear among the population, which makes basic democratic principles that Canadians take for granted—like open debate, freedom of political association and participation in the election process—extremely dangerous for Colombians to pursue.

The group's findings show that the free trade deal being pursued by Ottawa is not the way for Canada to be supporting democracy in Colombia. Instead, the Canadian government should be demanding an independent human rights assessment and fundamental reforms in that country before moving forward with the trade deal.

Why a free trade deal with Colombia?

• (1035)

The sole objective of the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia is to facilitate Canadian investment in that country, particularly in the mining sector.

The Bloc Québécois is not against treaties that relate to protecting investment. The Bloc is opposed to implementation of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement because it contains clauses copied from chapter 11 of NAFTA. That chapter has been criticized by many people. As soon as a law, for example on environmental protection, reduces the profits of foreign investors, the national government is exposed to huge lawsuits.

The provisions of the agreement will be prejudicial to small farmers and will lead to the expulsion of indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians and rural communities to the benefit of the mining companies, which, on the strength of their investors' rights, will be able to exploit the resources with no real constraint. The situation in Colombia is already unfavourable to these people. Armed groups and paramilitary groups are taking over millions of hectares and using violence to force the displacement of the local population and thus profiting from investments in the oil or mining sectors.

As was confirmed by a member of the Groupe de recherche sur les activités minières en Afrique, or GRAMA, when he appeared before the Standing Committee on International Trade, they could not find a mechanism of ensuring that a Canadian mining investment could be made with any sense of security that there was no previous violation of human rights, that the investment would not be potentially supporting people who had engaged in human rights violations, potentially encouraging them to continue that activity, and reinforcing their position, or that the land tenure of the leases, the mineral leases and so on, could be assured to be conflict-free.

This same person recommended that the free trade agreement be subject to a human rights impact assessment. The assessment would eventually lead to the establishment of mechanisms guaranteeing the right of the Colombian government to revoke an exploration concession on lands that were clearly identified as having been a place of forced displacement or massive human rights violations.

As has been mentioned, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement tends to grant greater protection to Canadian companies that invest in the mining sector and exploit its resources.

The Bloc Québécois fears that the investment protection measures provide disproportionate protection to Canadian investors to the detriment of local peoples and the environment.

The Colombian government may pass legislation governing the activities of mining companies, but the Bloc Québécois has always preferred the adoption of mandatory standards and accountability measures to govern the foreign operations of Canadian mining companies.

The Canadian government prefers to dismiss the recommendations of the National Roundtables on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Canadian Extractive Industry in Developing Countries, which included the adoption of mandatory standards on social responsibility and the creation of an independent ombudsman position. The Canadian government prefers to please the mining lobby by proposing standards for voluntary social responsibility.

The serious concerns which led the Standing Committee on International Trade to request a study of the impact of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement on human rights have not disappeared. It is for this reason that implementation of an independent, impartial and complete study of the impact of this agreement on human rights is essential.

If the Conservatives and the Liberals insist on implementing the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, they will be sending a negative message to Quebeckers and Canadians. The Canadian population will become passive witnesses to the violation of human rights in Colombia. In fact, Canada will become complicit in human rights violations in Colombia.

• (1040)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that this bill was dead. This was a dead deal until the government got an unexpected gift from the Liberal Party. The Liberal critic rode into town and made a deal with the Colombian government, and surprise. The government is probably still in a state of shock over this development. The Liberal Party is facilitating this deal that was effectively dead until a couple of weeks ago.

I would like to ask the member if she would like to comment on the Liberal role in this process?

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say something intelligent but it is very hard to know where the Liberals stand these days, as the New Democratic member mentioned. The Liberals say one thing and do another.

Government Orders

They reversed their position on the free trade agreement and I am hardly surprised to see them changing position again on Bill C-23, which has become Bill C-2.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the history of both the Bloc and the Parti Québécois is that they have been historically in favour of free trade agreements. Certainly, when the debate evolved back in the 1980s and the 1990s, they were certainly on board with the free trade agreement with the United States, which eventually evolved into NAFTA.

Now, her colleague from the NDP talked about the fact that we should learn from mistakes made in NAFTA and apply them in this particular free trade agreement, and perhaps the Canada-Jordan agreement coming up, and to others as well.

Specifically, what has changed from what was NAFTA and what is in this particular agreement that creates so much passion for her to be against it?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, we have seen great problems with chapter 11 of NAFTA on investment. It enables foreign investors to appeal directly to international tribunals, bypassing the filter of the public good that governments would apply.

The concept of expropriation is so broad that any legislation that would have the effect of reducing an investor's profits can be deemed expropriation and result in a lawsuit. The amount of the suit is not limited to the amount of the investment and includes all potential future profits. It is totally abusive.

This chapter has been condemned by everyone. As soon as a piece of legislation, for example to protect the environment, reduces a foreign investor's profits, the government of the country that welcomed the investor is exposed to astronomical lawsuits. Under the Conservatives, now with Liberal support, Ottawa is turning up the heat and negotiating many such agreements.

The Bloc Québécois is opposed to the bill implementing the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia because of the provisions copied from chapter 11 of NAFTA.

That is my answer.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as always, it was a pleasure to listen to my colleague. In listening to what she had to say, I realized something. More and more, the Liberals support Conservative Party positions, even though those positions, especially in regard to human rights, richly deserve our condemnation.

Last week, the Liberals supported the Conservatives again by voting against their own motion. Does my colleague see another worrisome development there? Are the Liberals and Conservatives basically the same?

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, everything my colleague just said is true. We have been wondering where the Liberals are going ever since Parliament resumed, and even before the House was prorogued.

I can only agree with what she said, which is all too true.

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share with members the details of the labour cooperation agreement that was negotiated in parallel with the Canada-Colombia free trade deal. Trade is the engine of economic growth around the world and Canada is a nation that derives its wealth from exports.

In 2008 the free trade agreement was signed between Canada and Colombia. When this bill is implemented, Canadian businesses and exporters will gain unprecedented open access to Colombia. We are not alone in our efforts.

The European Free Trade Association consisting of Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein has concluded free trade negotiations with Colombia, and so has the United States. The economic opportunities in Colombia are significant. This is an emerging market of 44 million people and an economy that is growing. Forecasts suggest that 4.7% growth in Colombia's GDP will occur over the next five years.

In 2009 two-way merchandise trade between Canada and Colombia totalled more than \$1.3 billion with hundreds of Canadian companies doing business with Colombia. It is also an investment destination for over 50 Canadian companies, principally in mining, oil exploration and manufacturing, sectors that are vital to Canadian prosperity and innovation.

As the Prime Minister noted earlier this year in his address to the World Economic Forum, we need to embrace enlightened sovereignty in the context of international trade. He said:

Notions rooted in a narrow view of sovereignty and national self-interest must be reconsidered. We cannot do business as though for one to have more, another must have less.

In other words we need to grow and prosper together. That is the Canadian way of doing business and it is an idea that is worth bringing to international markets.

I would like to speak briefly about how this new agreement will be of benefit to citizens of both countries. Here in Canada, many of our citizens have been dealing with hardship caused by the global economic recession. Now there are many encouraging signs that a sustained recovery is underway and that is thanks to our sound financial system, our resilient private sector, and of course our government's decisive response through the economic action plan.

It is important that the Government of Canada and its citizens continue to stay focused on improving the economy and to do this we need to create opportunity by investing in long-term growth and competitiveness. However, it is just not enough to do this in a manner that only benefits Canadians. We take our international leadership obligations seriously and we want to help improve the lives of those with whom we do business.

Not only is trade responsible for generating much of the world's economic wealth, it also has lifted many people around the world out of poverty and despair. Under the terms of this agreement both parties are committed to ensuring that their laws respect the International Labour Organization's 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

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This means that both countries are committed to ensuring that their laws respect basic values including: the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of forced or compulsory labour, and the elimination of discrimination in the workplace.

However, the labour cooperation agreement that we have reached with Colombia does not stop there. To further protect the rights of workers we are also committed to ensuring acceptable protections for occupational health and safety and minimum employment standards such as minimum wage and hours of work.

Finally, the agreement helps to ensure that migrant workers receive the same legal protection as nationals with respect to working conditions. This labour cooperation agreement demonstrates that Canada is eager to share the values it cherishes with those who it engages as business partners.

It is worth noting that what we have achieved with this new agreement is part of a wider set of objectives that our government has established for engaging with other countries in the Americas.

● (1050)

In addition to building increased trade and investment linkages, we see to strengthen and promote our fundamental values of freedom, democracy and human rights.

I would like to take a moment now and address, specifically, the matter of human rights and of how this agreement will help to concretely make a difference in the lives of citizens of Colombia.

Progress on human rights will not happen by shunning Colombia. We need to engage it as a trading partner so we can talk about how to improve the lives of its citizens, and this is the right course of action.

Over the past four decades, Canada's development assistance program has invested \$355 million in Colombia, with a pronounced focus on human rights. Over the last three years alone, we have provided \$32 million in development assistance to Colombia. We are one of the largest supporters of the work of the Organization of American States to support peace and demobilize paramilitary forces in Colombia.

Our global peace and security fund is helping to promote peace, protect victims rights and strengthen Colombia's judicial system. Canada also enjoys a frank and open dialogue with Colombia's government at the most senior levels.

Engaging with foreign governments that have made significant gains in improving human rights is the most effective way to secure progress and development. We are committed to working with Colombia to ensure it is able to meet the obligations of the new agreement. To complement this agreement, Canada is providing Colombia with \$1 million in labour-related technical assistance funding.

It would be a mistake for Canada to turn its back on Colombia and its people. To do so would risk undermining the will Colombia has shown with improving its track record on security and human rights. The labour provisions negotiated in the context of this FTA are some of the most comprehensive and robust ever negotiated by Canada with any of its trade partners.

The labour cooperation agreement commits both countries to enforce their domestic labour laws and to respect internationally recognized core labour standards.

It creates institutions and mechanisms for intergovernmental consultations and joint activities, as well as for independent evaluations and dispute settlement. Citizens can submit complaints to Canada and Colombia concerning any of the obligations found in the agreement.

It also sets out clearly that there are some very real financial consequences for those who fail to respect the obligations in this agreement, with penalties up to \$15 million annually. These penalties will accrue in a special cooperation fund. This fund was negotiated to ensure the proper resources were available to improve fundamental human rights in the case where one partner was not living up to the obligations under the agreement.

This fund cannot be used without Canada's approval, ensuring that these key labour issues will be addressed in the most efficient and effective manner. Labour unions and other associations have called for those measures, and we have delivered.

The NDP has falsely claimed that this and other free trade agreements will allow foreign companies to commit serious crimes and to only pay a fine, and this could not be further from the truth. We expect that every country we sign a free trade agreement with will uphold the rule of law including prosecuting those who murder activists and trade unionists.

However, we also recognize that certain criminal acts are part of a larger campaign to undermine fundamental human rights. That is why we negotiated the establishment of this cooperation fund to ensure proper resources exist to tackle systemic challenges to fundamental human rights.

This is an important year for Canadian economic leadership on the world stage. Canada is hosting the meeting of G8 leaders as well as the G20 summit in June 2010. Engaging with foreign governments that have made significant gains in improving human rights is the most effective way to secure progress and development.

● (1055)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was astounded to hear what the minister had to say today, someone who has always described herself as the minister of natural resources. She basically did it again in this speech. The agreement before us is not a trade agreement but an agreement to protect investors.

The minister must admit that Colombia is especially rich in mineral resources. Gold, coal and nickel are often extracted using traditional methods with little concern for even minimal environmental standards.

Will the minister admit that this is not a trade agreement but an agreement to protect investors for the sole purpose of weakening international environmental rules?

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•(1100)

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, actually what the member says is completely erroneous, except for the fact that I was the minister of natural resources, and am fully aware of the importance of natural resources to a country's economy and prosperity.

However that being said, the important part of this aspect of the free trade agreement, the labour cooperation agreement, is to make sure that when one is investing in the country, one is also helping that country and its citizens to raise their labour agreements and their workplace conditions, to work with them and to ensure we have competitiveness of Canadian exporters and service providers in the sectors that are focused on here, including manufacturing, agriculture and agri-food, financial services, mining, oil and gas.

That is extremely important, but what is important as well is utilizing these tools of trade in order to lift the sustenance and the abilities of the citizens of Colombia, through something like a labour cooperation agreement. The two actually go quite well together.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must admit I feel sorry for the minister, because the Prime Minister's office speaking notes are absolute rubbish.

The minister should know full well, if she read any American newspaper, that the U.S. Congress has refused to ratify any agreement with Colombia, that the European Union is refusing to participate and move forward, and that Norway in EFTA has pulled out of any agreement with Colombia as well. The United Kingdom has pulled out of its troop agreement with Colombia because of the massacres and the massive human rights violations taking place from the military arm of the Colombian regime.

Every single human rights organization and labour organization disagrees with the minister and disagrees with the government. The latest of so many reports indicates there are consistent and clear patterns and clear areas where companies risk benefiting from human rights violations and/or benefiting those responsible for human rights violations.

The government could prove its case by having an independent human rights assessment. Why has it not done that? Why has it not gone to human rights organizations and actually tested its theory on the practitioners of human rights?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated already, the Canada-Colombia labour cooperation agreement actually raises the bar for labour and human rights, while providing Canada with an opportunity to share its best practices in labour standards.

Our government is committed, as we indicated in the Speech from the Throne, to increasing economic development and labour rights to support Colombia in its efforts to improve the prosperity of its citizens. We have said before and will say again that engaging with foreign governments that have made significant gains in improving human rights is the most effective way to secure progress and development in these countries.

The question the member poses does not look at the bigger benefits that are available to the citizens of Colombia as well. We want to engage Colombia, and that is why this free trade agreement

is so important. But more important is the fact that we are including within this free trade agreement a labour cooperation agreement that will allow us to share our best practices.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise in the House today, and I hope there will be many more members who rise after me to debate this bill and to defeat this bill, because that is what we are aiming to do.

It was very interesting to hear the Minister of Labour just a few moments ago. I guess the Conservatives are feeling a bit vulnerable with respect to this bill now, feeling they have to send in more ministers to defend their very bad position on this Bill C-2, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

I want to begin my remarks by thanking the NDP trade critic, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, who has done such an amazing job of bringing public awareness to this agreement and how devastating it will be for the people of Colombia.

We are the fourth party in the House, but I will say that we pack a lot of punch. With our friends in the Bloc, we have been holding up this bill for more than a year, and I know this is very troubling to the Conservative government. As with everything else, the Conservatives would just like to ram this bill through. They do not have any respect for this place. In fact, they are quite contemptuous of the House and its proceedings. Should we dare to actually debate something in depth and give analysis, they consider that to be very problematic. But I am really glad we are debating this bill and are shedding the full light of day on what this agreement is all about.

It strikes me that so often these terrible trade agreements are negotiated by nameless bureaucrats and appointees and representatives in backrooms. God knows where they meet; it is all done in secret. We know, in fact, that this particular deal took over one and a half years to negotiate.

There is so little we know about the process. There is so little vested in citizen participation. In fact, there is not any citizen engagement. More and more people, not only in Canada but around the world, are rejecting the whole notion of trade taking place through secret agreements done behind closed doors. This manifestation of globalization, this delegation of power to people who are not accountable and not elected, is something more and more people are disturbed about and are rejecting.

I am really glad we are taking this on in the House and are saying we will not put up with it. We will not allow this agreement to go through and we will do everything we can to stop this free trade agreement from being ratified by the House of Commons. As the member for Burnaby—New Westminster has pointed out, the U.S. Congress and the European parliaments have taken a similar stance. It is the present Conservative government and the Liberal Party that is supporting it who are way out of step and way out of line.

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I have heard a number of the speeches in the House on this agreement. I remember when it came up a year ago. It was then Bill C-23. We debated this same bill and I heard many of the arguments.

I remember some comments that the member for Elmwood—Transcona made a few days ago in debating Bill C-2. He pointed out, and rightly so, that citizens, consumers themselves, are saying they want to see fair trade. People as consumers are rejecting products and services that are based on trading practices that they know to be exploitative and based on the whole ideology of the race to the bottom and the conferring of greater and greater rights on multinational corporations. The member's comments were just the tip of the iceberg in terms of reflecting that there is a change in society and that people are no longer willing to put up with these kinds of agreements.

We are being fed a line that somehow this agreement will be good for the people of Canada and for the people of Colombia. There is really no evidence to show that. We do know, however, that it will be very good for corporations that will benefit from this trade agreement. There lies the evidence of what is going on here.

As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility and a duty to examine these agreements from the point of view of the public interest, not from the point of view of private and corporate interests. That is what we are here to do, to defend the public interest and the rights and potential and the vision of what citizens in both countries want to see in terms of their own personal development, their community and their society at large. That is only one of the reasons this agreement should be rejected.

• (1105)

I read some of the background information to the bill and noted that information has been provided by the Canadian Labour Congress and Human Rights Watch in the *Now* magazine. They have compiled a lot of information about the bill and came up with 10 reasons why it should be rejected. They call it the Colombia count. Their number one reason is that more labour leaders are killed every year in Colombia than in the rest of the world combined: 474 since 2002 and 2,865 in the last 25 years. That is truly an appalling record and very disturbing when we couple that with the fact that Colombia has labour laws that actually shut down and stifle workers' rights, that its rate of unionization is less than 5%, the lowest of any country in the western hemisphere, and that we have had these paramilitaries, these deadly groups that have been murdering people and stifling rights. In 2008 alone, 27 high-ranking army officials were accused of kidnapping and executing civilians. The litany of the horrors goes on and on.

While we heard from the labour minister today that this side agreement is somehow lifting the bar and that we should be proud of it, members of the NDP reject the whole premise that there is some kind of side agreement which is not in the main body of the text. We are calling for an independent human rights assessment. That is the least that should be done in terms of any movement on the bill. We owe it to our brothers and sisters in Colombia. We owe it to the memory of all of the labour leaders and the community activists who have been murdered, harassed or imprisoned and prevented from doing the kinds of things that we would consider to be entirely legitimate and democratic here in Canada. We owe it in their

memory to ensure that there is an independent human rights assessment.

I believe that if we had the courage to turn down this agreement, we would actually have support from people in Canada. In my own community in east Vancouver, we have businesses up and down Commercial Drive, which is a very well-known place in Vancouver and a wonderful place to visit. Many of the businesses are engaged in a program and a campaign to promote fair trade. We believe it is the first street in Canada to be named a fair trade street where businesses are encouraged to both sell and use products that are as a result of free trade. It is really remarkable that small, independent businesses are actually choosing to take that route. They are actually saying that they have made the choice not to buy products from suppliers, companies or corporations that have been engaged in the exploitation of workers and engaged in practices that degrade the environment.

It is a wonderful thing when we see that expression coming forward from the grassroots, the local communities. It tells us that there is another path, another vision, an alternative that is based on the notion of trade that supports the rights of people, and that is the fundamental test.

These trade agreements are about the privileges and the huge benefits that these multinational corporations get. We should completely reverse that and say that these agreements need to be about the rights of workers, of civil society, of the environment and of social standards. If we could base our agreements on that, we would see very different agreements in place. We would be prepared to look at that and negotiate those kinds of agreements.

I would like to see more people up in the House defeating Bill C-2. We do not want it to go ahead. This is a bad bill. Let the House of Commons speak for the people of Canada and say that we reject this free trade agreement because it is a bad trade agreement that will only hurt the people of Colombia.

• (1110)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in her speech, the member for Vancouver East touched on the human rights violations and specifically talked about trade unionists but I would like her to address another issue.

Canada's Coalition to End Global Poverty has put together a very good document dealing with the fact that Colombia's civil society organizations are concerned that the free trade agreement would not impact on the kinds of egregious human rights violations that we see. They point to very deep connections between human rights violations and commerce in their country. These range from systematic attacks on the trade unionists who resist the liberalization and deregulation of local industry to the dispossession and disappearance of peasants, Afro-Colombians and other indigenous populations. The indigenous populations often live on the lands where the mining and other economic activity is taking place.

Could the member for Vancouver East talk about the fact that indigenous populations are being forced off their lands and are losing access to their culture and language? What would she like to see done to protect those indigenous populations?

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•(1115)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has raised a whole other area of the trade agreement that is of deep concern to us and that is the impact on indigenous people.

When we look at this trade agreement we see that it has all kinds of benefits and luxuries. It is lined with profits for the huge multinational corporations that go into these resource-rich areas. Basically, indigenous people are taken off their land and their rights are trampled on. That is just another reason why this agreement should be rejected.

For an agreement to superimpose itself on traditional practices, take away people's land and destroy the land is something that is serious. It is something we have not fully understood the consequences and impacts of what that will mean in those local communities. I respect the member for raising this because it is another reason to reject this agreement.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for Vancouver East for her presentation on an issue that is very important to our country and to the province of British Columbia for the opportunities for expanding trade and opening new markets.

As a member of the international trade committee, I had the privilege of travelling to Colombia a few years ago and meeting with the folks on the ground. I would be the first to agree that it is a very challenging situation but caring Conservatives in our country are looking at this issue through a different lens.

We heard from Connie Watson, the CBC reporter who travelled to Colombia and listened to the people on the ground. She said that a rising tide lifts all boats and that expanding opportunities for the Colombians will open new markets. How will the status quo help the folks from Colombia get out of the poverty that they are in today?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that is exactly what the CBC reporter said. I think her words have been taken out of context. What does expanding trade and opening new markets actually mean? It sounds good but I am concerned that the primary purpose of government has become more new markets, more goods and more consumerism, and I think we need to question that.

I think a lot of people are questioning both the use of resources and how natural resources are being exploited but are also questioning how that exploitation is also an exploitation of human beings, human rights and labour rights. This agreement is flawed because it does not address what is taking place in Colombia. It does not give protection to people. While it might create new markets, the consequences of that are devastating on local communities in Colombia.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am just delighted and very distressed at the same time to speak today to the bill to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

It is quite something to see the government decide, unlike its neighbour to the south—which it often emulates—to negotiate and sign an agreement with a country that fails to respect a number of fundamental rights. Workers' and human rights, in particular, come

to mind. Colombia also does not honour certain environmental regulations and standards that, elsewhere in the world, are a given.

I can already hear the government opposite claiming that the members on this side of the House oppose all international trade agreements. That is totally false. That is what the government is claiming, but it is not true. We do not oppose international trade agreements, but we think they should come with regulations and standards. In addition, agreements ensuring human rights must be an integral part of the agreement. This is not about adding side agreements such as those the government is claiming it negotiated in the wake of previous agreements or of the Canada-Colombia agreement. We must have agreements that will truly change behaviour and practices nationally and internationally.

We cannot support this agreement because it is not a trade agreement. It aims first off to protect investors. There are provisions allowing certain investors to take to court any foreign government that would take measures resulting in a reduction in investment or profits. It is clear that this allows certain multinationals to take national governments to court because they chose to implement the best environment and labour practices.

This agreement will have the counterproductive effect of weakening the social safety net and environmental protection measures. All international agreements should raise standards and promote fair and responsible trade.

One of Colombia's greatest assets are its natural heritage and its extraordinary ecosystems. Colombia is the second richest country in the world in its biological, animal and plant diversity—10% of the world's animal and plant species are found there. Given this natural heritage and biodiversity, we must protect these resources essential to the survival of the people in order to build long lasting societies.

So, what does the government do? It decides to sign an agreement that will weaken environmental protection. In Colombia, there are considerable mining resources—gold, emeralds, carbon and nickel—which, unfortunately are still being mined using methods considered rudimentary in the rest of the world.

•(1120)

This means there are many rivers and lakes in Colombia that are now polluted. We see populations displaced within Colombia, particularly among the indigenous people, precisely because these water resources are threatened by mineral exploration and extraction methods that are archaic and worthy of the stone age. It undermines local communities, particularly indigenous populations.

In addition, these mineral resources that are being extracted with these old-fashioned methods use a vulnerable labour force. I am not the one saying this. In 2005, the International Labour Organization estimated that on the Latin American continent, Colombia was one of the countries that unfortunately had the largest proportion of children working in mineral resource exploitation and extraction. This means that 400,000 children in Colombia work extracting its mineral resources. That is completely unacceptable.

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We are not talking about workers' rights, we are talking about social rights, human rights. If we believe that our children should not be cheap labour to be used for making profits, we cannot accept this.

During this time we have a government opposite that is negotiating international agreements and telling us this agreement is a trade agreement, when fundamentally it is an agreement that protects investors. Protects them at whose expense? At the expense of the 400,000 young people working in the mines and extracting the resources? At the expense of union organizers and workers who do not even have a legal framework for collective bargaining? At the expense of the ecosystems that are threatened?

We must never allow international trade agreements designed to protect investors at the expense of natural resources and human rights to flout human rights and children's rights. We cannot agree to that. Canada decided to sign the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the United Nations, and it specifically provides that we must fight against child labour and defend these young people and children being used as cheap labour in the mines. Canada must fight that.

But it gets worse. This government, which often follows the lead of the United States, should now follow its lead before implementing the Canada-Colombia agreement. In 2006, the Americans called a halt to it. They put their foot on the brake when it came time to implement the agreement with Colombia they had signed in 2006. They said they would go no further and would not ratify the agreement if minimum labour standards and protection for union activity were not guaranteed.

I will conclude with this. What we expect from the government is that it honour its international human rights commitments and that it not try to sell us an agreement that includes side agreements on the pretext that human rights and environmental protection are guaranteed.

• (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague made a great speech.

The NDP has been pushing for progressive fair trade and fair trade agreements that look at the things the member was talking about, such as promoting human rights, a win-win on jobs, raising the quality of jobs and raising Canadians' standard of living, and respecting and enhancing environmental stewardship.

The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement does the contrary. It clearly fails the human rights test and has only marginal positive economic impact for Canada, and of course destroys the environment.

I would like to hear the hon. member's comments as to what this is actually going to do in terms of the environment and human rights.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, it will have a disastrous effect. We will basically be agreeing to rules which are already unacceptable. The government should draw inspiration from the June 2008 report of the Standing Committee on International Trade.

What did this House of Commons committee recommend? It recommended that the agreement include legislated provisions requiring Canadian companies and businesses to act responsibly where human rights and environmental law are concerned. This goes to show that Canada and the members of this House who are the majority on the committee, in other words opposition members, approved this June 2008 report. We are not against international trade or free trade agreements. We want legislated provisions to be included to ensure that Canadian companies will act responsibly in terms of human rights and environmental law.

• (1130)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie on his remarks.

There is a saying that goes: Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are. I would like to hear the member on this coming together of the Canadian government and the Liberals concerning the Colombian regime, when we know that this is a regime that actually violates human rights and labour rights. There is also the issue of tolerance toward paramilitaries, the almost incestuous ties between the government and these paramilitary groups committing crimes. We can see that the Liberals are siding with the Conservatives to ensure that this free trade deal can be closed. This goes beyond trade.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, it is completely unacceptable and it goes beyond the issue of trade.

I was talking about the fact that we know entire populations are being displaced in Colombia because natural resources are disappearing, among other things. Take farmers, for example, who are threatened by these armed groups. Entire populations of farmers are being displaced, and the threat is always there. It is nothing new. It is also nothing new in the labour world. More than 2,600 union activists have been killed since 2006. The Liberals knew about this. They were in power. They knew about the situation these people were facing. In 2007 alone, 39 union activists were murdered, and 46 were murdered in 2008, an increase of 18% in one year. The Liberals were aware and are aware of the situation. By supporting the government, they are condoning these actions.

[*English*]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to join other members of the House, my caucus and our party's international trade critic, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, to once again voice my strong opposition to Bill C-2.

It would be extremely irresponsible for the government to push for the passage of this free trade agreement with Colombia, a country that by far has the worst human rights record in the western hemisphere and is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists.

The Conservatives' claims that trade will bring human rights improvements to Colombia are entirely contradicted not just by the facts that I will raise in my address today, but also by the text of the agreement.

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The latest in this debate is the proposal by the member for Kings—Hants to allow the Colombian government to assess its own human rights record. The Liberals are joining forces with the Conservatives vis-à-vis letting the Colombian government report on itself. This proposal is lacking in all forms. Could members imagine allowing elementary school kids to give themselves their own grades or allowing criminals to choose their own punishments?

Recently another government added its voice to the growing chorus against this trade deal. The Flanders government, another European government, rejected investment trade between Colombia and Belgium. What were its reasons for doing so? The Flanders government stated that in Colombia there is a huge gulf between the human rights rhetoric and the reality. The Belgian government at least understood that full respect for fundamental human rights must be a precondition for any trade agreement.

It is disappointing that the Liberal Party has backtracked from its earlier position that a full and independent human rights impact assessment should be carried out before a final free trade agreement is ratified with Colombia, especially considering the fact that nothing has changed in Colombia.

Recent UN and Amnesty International reports show escalating violence against indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, including murder and forcible displacement from communal lands.

The National Labor School of Colombia reported that 45 trade unionists were murdered in 2009. These reports and unacceptably high impunity rates have in the past been enough to stall and even stop similar free trade agreements in allied countries, including Belgium and the United States.

During recent legislative elections in Colombia in which President Uribe's allies were the big winners, polling stations in one-third of the country's municipalities were at risk of violence, corruption or fraud according to the ombudsman's office and election observers who reported vote buying and pressure on voters.

A pre-election observation mission to Colombia in February predicted this would happen based on a tour of the country. The mission's Canadian members concluded that entering into a free trade agreement with Colombia now would not only send the wrong message to Canadians and the Colombian regime, it also may make Canada and Canadian companies passive supporters of continued violence in Colombia.

The reality is there is no chance that rights assessments could fairly be carried out after ratification of the free trade agreement and then by the Colombian government.

The Liberals need to respect the June 2008 recommendation by the Standing Committee on International Trade that an impartial human rights impact assessment be carried out by a competent body which is subject to independent levels of scrutiny and validation before Canada considers ratifying and implementing an agreement with Colombia.

Now that I have talked about the most fundamental flaw in the updated bill, let us go over the main flaws in the agreement and some facts about the current situation in Colombia. The three most

appalling aspects of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement are the following.

First and foremost, this agreement fails due to its lack of labour rights protection. Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists. They are victims of violence, intimidation and assassination from paramilitary groups linked to the Colombian president. In fact, 2,690 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia since 1986. In 2008, the number of murders was up by 18% over the previous year.

● (1135)

There are some important facts about the Colombian government and President Uribe. Uribe's government has been accused by international human rights organizations of corruption, electoral fraud, complicity in extrajudicial killings by the army, links to paramilitary and right-wing death squads and the use its security forces to spy on the supreme court of Colombia, opposition politicians, government politicians and journalists.

With this type of reality in Colombia, it is clear that in its current form the agreement does not include strong enough labour standards. The division of labour provisions from the main text of the agreement, in addition to the absence of any substantial enforcement mechanism, will do nothing to encourage Colombia to improve its horrendous human rights situation for workers. In fact, in its current form, the agreement could, in many cases, justify the use of violence.

For example, in the agreement the penalty for non-compliance is currently determined by a review panel, one that has the power to require the offending country to pay up to \$15 million annually into a co-operation fund, which means basically money is taken from one pot and put into another.

Unfortunately, this type of enforcement measure will do little to encourage the government to change its current approach to trade unionists. If and when a trade unionist is killed, under the provision, all the government would be required to do is pay into this development fund capped at \$15 million per year, essentially equating the murder of a trade unionist to paying a fine.

The second way in which the agreement fails is its lack of environmental protection. Environmental issues are addressed in a side agreement, this time with no enforcement mechanism to force Canada or Colombia to respect environmental rights. One fact is nearly 200,000 hectares of natural forest are lost in Colombia every year due to agriculture, logging, mining, energy development and construction.

Another fact is almost four million people in Colombia are internally displaced persons. Sixty per cent of this displacement has been from regions where there is a rich supply of mineral, agricultural or economic resources. In these areas, private companies, their government and paramilitary supporters have come in and, in turn, forced local communities and individuals from their homes.

The side agreement process has serious flaws. In the past, we have witnessed how these side examples are unenforceable. For example, in the case of NAFTA, not a single successful suit has been brought forward under the labour side agreement.

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The third major flaw in the agreement is found in the investor chapter. Copied from NAFTA's chapter 11 investor rights, the CCFTA provides powerful rights to private companies. The provision in this chapter gives private companies the ability to sue governments, enforceable through investor state arbitration panels. The arbitration system set up by the investor chapter gives foreign companies the ability to challenge legitimate Canadian environment, labour and social protections.

Canada needs to set the example. It would be highly irresponsible to turn a blind eye to the Colombian situation. We cannot allow Canada to abandon its values and its support of internationally recognized human rights in order to gain economic advantage for its companies at the expense of millions of displaced impoverished Colombians.

The proposed amendment by the member for Kings—Hants will do nothing to stop many instances of human rights violations and will not hold the Colombian government accountable to anyone but itself. I call on all parliamentarians to join me and my caucus in our strong opposition to Bill C-2.

● (1140)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have not seen either Conservatives or Liberals stand to defend their position. It is very simple why they have not. It is because their position is fundamentally indefensible. I would like the member for Sudbury, who spoke very eloquently on this issue, to comment on the flood of national organizations that have condemned the Liberal sellout on human rights.

Every group from the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the United Church, Canadian Auto Workers, British Columbia Teachers' Federation, Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Council of Canadians, and it goes on and on, all see this as a massive sellout to the Colombian government. It is a government whose president grew in his political career through his connections with the Medellin Cartel. It has been continually connected with paramilitary groups, murderous thugs who have killed dozens of human rights advocates and labour activists in Colombia, as well as the brutal Colombian military that regularly kills innocent Afro-Colombians and aboriginal Colombians.

Given all that, why does the member think the Liberals and Conservatives are concocting this sellout of fundamental Canadian values, of Canadians' fundamental concerns for human rights?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his constant work on this issue. He spoke a bit about the organizations that have come out against this trade deal, from many of the local unions, to our church groups, right across our great country. I had the opportunity to sit down and talk with a local farmer from my riding who heard my speech on this bill prior to prorogation, Bill C-23. As a farmer, he asked me why the Conservatives thought he truly want to sell his product with blood on his hands at the expense of trade unionists, at the expense of the environment. No one wants to see this and that is what the trade deal would do.

The New Democrats want to ensure we bring forward fair trade. We have been talking about fair trade. That is what we need to bring forward when we look at trade agreements with other countries.

● (1145)

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I admire the passion with which my colleagues have advocated their position.

As a lawyer, I have been in the courts on human rights matters. I was the former chair of Canadian Food for the Hungry and a member of the B.C. Bar Association. I remember a letter from a Colombian jurist who asked for help. The individual needed the assistance, support and the encouragement of the legal world in other countries. It is personal relationships that will break the cycle of violence. It is not abandoning countries like Colombia, but it is embracing it, getting to know the people, working with them and sharing our values. We do that not only through the commerce of ideas but the commerce of goods and services.

That is what our government advocates. We will break that cycle of violence. We will help the people in Colombia and we will do it by working with them, not by walking away.

Could I hear my friend's response to that?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I do not think anyone is saying that we should walk away from Colombia. What we have said, as I mentioned earlier, is we would like to see a fair trade agreement.

In relation to the relationships, it is important to recognize that when a fund is set up and money has to be paid into that fund if a trade unionist is killed is not what we want to see in a free trade agreement. We want to see fair trade. We would be more than happy to discuss what we could put into a fair trade agreement with Colombia, but as it stands right now, this free trade agreement is not something New Democrats can support.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am also rising for the second time to speak to this issue, which is particularly important to me.

I am responsible for status of women issues, and the last time I rose in the House to speak to this bill, which was then Bill C-23, I did not have enough time to make an eloquent speech, because all I did was read out the names of the women who worked in unions and who had been killed because they were union activists. Naming the women killed in 2008 took up all of my time.

Despite what the Minister of Labour had the audacity to say this morning, things have unfortunately not changed, and it is wrong to believe that other countries are working with Colombia and have signed free trade agreements with Colombia, fully aware of the human rights issues.

That is all very easy for us because we are far from Colombia. We are very far from the people who are suffering. We are very far from the people who are being killed. It is easy for us to say we can use human relations to improve the fate of people who have only known suffering so far and whose rights have been denied. It is very easy to say.

It is easy as well to think that a free trade agreement can improve the living conditions of Colombians. It is easy to think such a thing, but we are not that naïve. On this side of the House—at least in this party because I should not speak for the other one—we are not naïve. Our eyes are wide open.

The government is agreeing to sign an accord with a country whose government is widely known to be shot through with corruption, a country that engages in international drug trafficking, a country that still commits acts of violence and even murder on a regular basis. It is taken for granted. People there are afraid to walk down the street because they never know when they might die.

There is a very surprising fact that I would like my Conservative and Liberal colleagues to ponder. Why do they think the countries that have a common border with Colombia refrain from signing any free trade deals with it when they would be the most likely to do so, given their shared border? Have my colleagues ever wondered about that?

It is only natural that these countries do not sign any such agreements because the people there are very close to what goes on every day in Colombia. They see and hear what we in this House choose not to see and hear.

It is very sad that the government refuses to listen to all the requests we have received from unions, groups that take an interest in humanity, and all the groups that defend rights here in Quebec and Canada. All these groups are begging us not to pass this bill without ensuring it has iron-clad guarantees, because Colombia is continuing to do what it always does.

Instead of that, the government imposes constraints as easy as putting a price on someone's heads. The head of an employee, a worker or a union member is currently worth \$200,000. That is what they say. But what is \$200,000 to a drug trafficker or a hired gun? That is the question they need to ask themselves.

There are fines for committing murder. Can someone tell me where are we headed? Where are we headed as human beings?

•(1150)

It is confusing sitting in this House when we see what goes on. Does the government over there not have anyone who thinks for themselves? Can it not make decisions without CFAC? Is that the problem? It always needs someone to tell it what to do and then it does so with blinkers and with no thought and no consideration for the consequences.

As I was saying, it is easy not to think of the consequences when one lives far away, when one is not there every day with the people who are suffering and the people who are dying. It is very easy, but for the love of heaven, at some point in time the ministers of this government will have to start talking to each other, read more and look at what is happening in the world. Rather than read

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L'Osservatore Romano, which only covers religious matters, let them look at what is going on in Colombia and get on with the job that should have been done long ago.

We do not ask a country to sign a free trade agreement and ignore the workers. That is not done. What the government has tried to have us believe this morning, though its Minister of Labour, is that everything was just fine in the best of worlds, that every country wants a free trade agreement with Colombia, perfect country that it is. Once we get there after concluding our free trade agreement with Colombia, it will become perfect. The government will no longer be corrupt. There will be no more murders. Employees and workers will have decent working conditions. Everyone will have a roof over their head. No one will be worried, and no one will be selling cocaine. That might upset some of them.

I think we have to be serious when we talk about people's lives. The government is refusing to bring back home people who are accused and risk getting killed in other countries, like the two young men from Montreal who had an unfortunate accident in a schoolyard in Kuwait. It refuses to bring them back home. Nothing is being done for them, but now prices are being put on the heads of union leaders in a country we know nothing about.

We were in Argentina last week. My colleagues and I had discussions with people who look after trade among South American countries. Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay have agreements together and work together because it is a good thing to have free trade agreements, but these agreements take into account the needs of each as well as human rights, unlike the free trade agreement the government wants us to approve here in this House. How is it that Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay, which have a lot to offer and need a lot, have not concluded a free trade agreement with Colombia?

Who are we to think that we are better than others and will succeed where others have failed? Colombia has to clean up its yard, it must clean up its human rights record, recognize its errors and implement the practices and procedures that will ensure respect for human rights and protect the lives of individuals, even if they are union workers. Let Colombia do that, and then we will reconsider. So long as this does not happen, we are not going to ask the fox to tend the henhouse. That is what we are doing at the moment.

So, we will continue to say no to this agreement, as we have done in the past. My only regret is that the Liberal Party changed its mind on this.

•(1155)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thoroughly enjoyed the speech by the hon. member for Laval, who has a very good understanding of the situation in Colombia.

I would like her to comment on all the national organizations which have been denouncing for the past few days the Liberal Party's flip-flop on human right issues in Colombia.

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Under its previous leader, the Liberal Party expressed concern about the human rights situation in Colombia and said it did not want to proceed with the agreement until an independent, impartial assessment of the situation had been carried out and the impact of this agreement, which raises many concerns with those involved with human rights, were known.

The Liberal Party's flip-flop drew an outcry from many national organizations. Its new leader seems to have little concern for human rights.

I would like to hear the member for Laval on that.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the New Democratic Party, the only other party in this House besides the Bloc Québécois that refuses to sign on to this agreement.

Why is he surprised? The Liberal Party has become unrecognizable. It is now voting against its own motions and voting with the government while contending to vote against it. How can this flip-flop by the Liberal Party surprise him? Personally, I do not find it surprising. The leader of that party condoned torture, under certain conditions, and the war in Iraq, under certain conditions.

What I find surprising is that the Liberal Party is holding on to its leader. If the members of that party no longer wish to be Liberals, all they have to do is cross the floor.

• (1200)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is it is even worse than that. The current government had essentially given up on this deal because the opposition members had stalled it now for a year. The government was walking away from this deal. Then, all of a sudden, the new Liberal critic took the initiative on his own to usurp the power of the government and met the president of Colombia. He came up with an amendment and then came to the government and saved it with this bill.

So, we are here solely because of the Liberals, at this stage. It had nothing to do with the government.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. He is right, of course.

This situation is inexplicable. Life is full of such mysteries. The mayor of Quebec City, who was misled over the past few weeks, would agree that we have the right to be angry because we were misled by people whom we believed were as liberal as they claimed to be. Unfortunately, the opposite has turned out to be true. Today, it is clear that the Liberal Party will do whatever it takes to maintain the status quo and avoid an election, just as the Conservative Party is prepared to do and say whatever it takes, to stoop to new lows just to keep its hold on power for a little longer before going to the polls because it is not ready. I think that what is going on here now is deplorable. This is a very sad day for democracy. I hope that they will have the courage to do something different.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak in opposition to Bill C-2.

I want to acknowledge the tireless work that our trade critic, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, has undertaken in trying to raise some of the important issues about what is wrong with this agreement.

It has been over a year that the member and my colleagues, both from the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois, have managed to hold up this piece of legislation. I hope that our arguments in the House will convince other members to vote against it.

We have heard from the government that New Democrats oppose trade. That is actually not correct. What New Democrats consistently speak about in and outside the House is the need for fair trade.

New Democrats have outlined some elements of what a fair trade agreement would look like. A fair trade agreement would promote human rights, be a win-win situation on jobs, raise the quality of jobs, raise Canadians' standard of living, respect and enhance environmental stewardship, and preserve Canada's ability to legislate in areas vital to its interests. It is these kinds of elements of a fair trade agreement that the people of Nanaimo—Cowichan and throughout Canada would be interested in.

The member for Vancouver East talked about a fair trade zone on Commercial Drive in her riding. In my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan many businesses and organizations are very interested in fair trade. They would like to see the elements of fair trade agreements promoted not only internationally but in Canada as well because sometimes our projects do not respect environmental stewardship, for example,

People have talked about this trip to Colombia. My understanding is that the trade committee, after it came back from Colombia, made a number of recommendations. One of them included the following:

The Committee recommends that an independent, impartial, and comprehensive human rights impact assessment should be carried out by a competent body, which is subject to levels of independent scrutiny and validation; the recommendations of this assessment should be addressed before Canada considers signing, ratifying and implementing an agreement with Colombia.

I am going to focus my speech on human rights. I am going to be quoting extensively from the February 2010 Amnesty International report entitled "Colombia: The struggle for survival and dignity: Human rights abuses against indigenous peoples in Colombia". Because this is such a recent report, I believe it reflects the reality on the ground in Colombia.

We have heard the arguments that we need this trade agreement in order to deal with human rights. That is not what the labour activists and the indigenous people of Colombia are saying. They are concerned that this type of agreement will actually make the conditions in their communities worse.

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I want to begin with this quote because the indigenous people of Colombia have consistently refused to get involved with any of the violent factions, no matter which side they are on. This is a quote from the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council, February 12, 2007. It states:

In each moment of tragedy we have relied on our roots and our word, each time they beat us we respond with reason and the strength of unity, each time it is necessary, the mobilization of thought and peaceful action is our tool to live.

The indigenous people of Colombia have seen some of the most egregious acts of violence. To be able to stand and still promote peace as a way to resolve the difficulties that they are facing requires a tremendous amount of courage. I want to cover a few points in this report. Under a section on the internal armed conflict, the report states:

There is little agreement on the underlying causes of the long-running conflict in Colombia. However, the fighting has provided a useful cover for those seeking to expand and protect economic interests. More than 60% of displaced people in Colombia have been forced from their homes and lands in areas of mineral, agricultural or other economic importance.

That statement raises all kinds of concerns because there is no protection in this agreement. The recommendation that the trade committee put forward has not been incorporated. There is no protection to have indigenous people not removed from their land.

● (1205)

Again, quoting from the report:

The impact of Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict on Indigenous Peoples has been profound and destructive. They have been killed, harassed and driven from their lands by all the parties to the conflict. Despite their determined refusal to be drawn into the hostilities, the threats facing Indigenous Peoples are intensifying.

They give an example:

The Awá Indigenous People were particularly hard hit in 2009 and, according to ONIC, accounted for more than half of all killings of Indigenous people during the year. The catalogue of human rights abuses inflicted on the Awá is emblematic of the dangers facing Indigenous Peoples in Colombia today.

In 2009, at least two massacres were carried out against the Awá in Nariño Department. The first, on 4 February, was carried out by the FARC and resulted in the deaths of 15 people, including two pregnant women, in Barbacoas Municipality. On 26 August 2009, 12 Awá, including six children and an eight-month old baby, were killed and several more injured in El Gran Rosario by gunmen wearing military uniforms and hoods who attacked the community at 5 a.m.

That is just one example. This was in 2009. I have heard government members opposite talk about how much better things have become. Clearly, in 2009, that was simply not the case for the people of Awá.

In case people in the House think only New Democrats, the Bloc and Amnesty International are raising the issue, in July 2009, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people visited Colombia and expressed concern at the grave, critical and profoundly worrying situation facing indigenous peoples in the country.

The report goes on to say:

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in its concluding observations on Colombia published in August 2009, expressed concern "over the continuation of acts of violations of human rights against Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples, including killings, extra-judicial executions, forced recruitment and enforced disappearances in the context of the armed conflict". It also noted that "while illegal armed groups bear significant responsibility for violations, reports continue to indicate the direct involvement or collusion of State agents in such acts

and that members of the armed forces have publicly stigmatised Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities".

The report continues:

According to ONIC, the survival of 32 Indigenous groups is at grave risk as a result of the armed conflict, large-scale economic projects, and a lack of state support. The risks faced by these Indigenous Peoples are so serious that in his January 2010 report on Colombia, the Special Rapporteur on indigenous people called on the Colombian state to invite the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide to monitor the situation faced by these communities.

In terms of the prevention of genocide, Indigenous peoples in Colombia are so seriously threatened that the United Nations has been called upon to intervene.

Another section, "Caught in the Conflict", says:

Killings, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, threats and forced displacement—all continue to ravage Indigenous communities in Colombia. ONIC has estimated that more than 1,400 Indigenous men, women and children were killed as a result of the conflict between 2002 and 2009. They also recorded more than 4,700 collective threats against Indigenous communities during this period, as well as 90 kidnappings and 195 enforced disappearances. Those responsible for these abuses, be they members of guerrilla groups, paramilitaries or members of the security forces, are rarely held to account.

I am not equating our own country to Colombia by any stretch of the imagination, but we have seen the tragedy of displacement for the indigenous peoples of Canada through residential schools and forced relocations. We have seen loss of language and loss of culture.

That is essentially what the section entitled "The Tragedy of Displacement" is dealing with. It says:

Displacement is one of the greatest threats facing Indigenous communities. Often living in areas of intense military conflict and rich in biodiversity, minerals and oil, Indigenous Peoples are at particular risk of forced displacement. Although Indigenous Peoples make up only around 3.4% of the population, they account for 7% of Colombia's total displaced population, according to the Director of the Office in Colombia of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

A quotation by the Constitutional Court says:

We are haunted by the images of the anguish when we had to leave, running with what little we had or could carry in order to outrun death and desolation. Amidst this anguish, we are in charge of our families, accepting activities that are not traditional in our cultures, such as getting jobs as domestic servants or, in the worst of cases, even selling our bodies...As Indigenous women we have to fight for recognition as displaced people, fight for access to [a] health and education [system] that is not ours, prepare meals with food that is alien to our culture and body; fight so that our families don't disintegrate and our sons and daughters don't lose our culture.

● (1210)

The report goes on to say:

This fracturing can result in a breakdown of cultural continuity as young people find themselves in alien environments and deprived of the social and cultural networks and practices necessary for the survival of their communities.

The section, "A Question of Land, Consultation and Consent", says:

A critical issue for Indigenous peoples is their right not to be removed from their traditional lands without their free, prior and informed consent—one of the core rights contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Economic development on their traditional lands must also be subject to the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples. Consent must be given freely without manipulation, threat, or fear of reprisal.

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Recently in the throne speech, we heard the Conservative government indicate that it was now prepared to take the next steps around the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We have a situation in Colombia where clearly there has not been that free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples. Why would the Conservative government sign an agreement that was not supportive of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has done a terrific service to the House of Commons by speaking about the impact on aboriginal peoples.

The Assembly of First Nations has raised major concerns about this agreement, ignored by both the Liberal and Conservative Parties. Concerns have been raised by other human rights organizations. I would like to just cite one report, from MiningWatch Canada and CENSAT/Agua Viva, which said:

Testimony gathered in the course of this study suggests consistent and clear patterns in key areas where companies risk benefiting from human rights violations and/or benefiting those responsible for human rights violations. Under these circumstances, increased investment in the extractive sector is at risk of entrenching and even expanding the already astonishing toll on the human rights of Colombians.

Every Conservative and Liberal member is aware of this. They know about the impact on aboriginal peoples, because it is primarily aboriginal peoples in Colombia who are impacted by this violent forced displacement from land. Why are the Conservatives and Liberals ignoring aboriginal people?

• (1215)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question.

I want to come back to the Amnesty International report just for one moment, because there had been a number of recommendations made that would actually protect indigenous peoples in Colombia. One of them is that the free, prior and informed consent as outlined in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples must be implemented.

In addition, they have asked that the trade agreement comply with the January 2009 Constitutional Court ruling on indigenous peoples and displacement, which calls on the government to devise and implement a plan to guarantee the rights of displaced and endangered indigenous peoples.

If the Conservative government and their Liberal colleagues were truly concerned about the rights of indigenous peoples in Colombia, there are a number of key recommendations that they would see were entrenched within this agreement to absolutely protect those rights.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan for her comments. Coming from British Columbia, I know we have some leaders in the first nations communities right in our own backyard, Westbank First Nation and Osoyoos First Nation, and we are concerned about rights of all Canadians and people around the world.

As a member of the trade committee, as I mentioned, I had an opportunity to go to Colombia. We are concerned about the situation

and we want to reach out and help them, so the status quo will not help. We want to find ways to lift up both economies.

I heard the member comment about free and fair trade. Canada is a trading nation. Over two-thirds of our GDP relies on trade. We continue to grow and have the best country in the world. Our quality of life is the envy of folks around the world.

My hon. colleague talks about free and fair trade, but her protectionist party is not the positive way. Could she elaborate on one trade agreement in the history of Canada that the New Democratic Party has supported?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Speaker, that is a very interesting question. I am actually going to flip it the other way around.

My riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan has been directly impacted by the softwood lumber agreement and we have seen job after job leave my community. So when I talk about a fair trade agreement, I want an agreement that protects my community, that makes sure that jobs stay in my community, that there is environmental stewardship, that when we contract with another country in the world, we actually make sure that we are not dragging down the standards in our own country.

That is what a responsible member of Parliament should do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would have liked my learned colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue to ask a question, but that will come, I am sure.

This morning the member for Outremont also talked about his knowledge of environmental matters, because he was an environment minister. My colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie came next and talked about his ideas on that. They have experience in this area.

I had the great honour of being minister of industry, trade and commerce in Quebec for a time. And so I am going to try to talk a little more about the commercial, industrial and investment variables that an agreement of this nature should include.

To begin, I think that, as a matter of principle, what we must not flout are the principles themselves. A principle cannot be negotiated. A principle is not something we adopt if it suits us and change later when the wind changes. That is not how it works. People on the government side, in the Conservative Party, have somewhat hard heads, as we know, and they are digging their heels in. They say they want to sell this bill as a matter of principle. That is fine, they are entitled to do that. And we are entitled to oppose it. Our principles are not the same.

From time to time, the official opposition is, on principle, with us and with the NDP, which stands by its principles. But I am wondering how it is that the official opposition has decided, for somewhat nebulous reasons and on principle, to change sides.

The purpose of a government is to propose things. The purpose of opposition members and the House is to improve them, or to oppose them if the necessary improvements cannot be made.

Government Orders

The government has introduced a bill that, in our opinion, must be widely denounced. Even Human Rights Watch, in February 2010, said that the social situation in Colombia was out of the ordinary and was not improving. If it is not improving, can we, as a government and as parliamentarians, bring pressure to bear to improve it, at the same time as this government wants Canada to sign an agreement with which we are in complete disagreement?

We know very well that the agreement in front of us is not a trade agreement because there is very little trade between Canada and Colombia. It is not the same volume of trade that there is between Canada and the United States, for example. It is an agreement for investments. When we look at it more closely, we see that these investments will be made by corporations from here in mines down there. The investments are not in the urban core and not part of the urban fabric. They will be made in remote areas, where the people live off the land and where the natural resources are, ready to be exploited. So there will be investments.

In a former life, people often hired me to make investments for them. There are some standard provisions. For example, it is normal to have provisions so that if something happens, the business plan cannot be followed as originally laid out. In business speak, those provisions are called covenants, or obligations to do or not do something. I sign a contract and say that if *A* happens, *A* being something that will decrease the value or profitability of my investment, I have various avenues of recourse. The final recourse is a refund because of a given situation. Unfortunately, it has happened that an investment was made and it was not profitable. The investor is then reimbursed.

• (1220)

There is still one thing in this agreement that I do not understand. If events were to diminish the profitability of their projects, the companies—and not the state—could basically take justice into their own hands. They could sue the government because their expected production was not met. They could ask for a full reimbursement of their investments and the profits that were not made. That is rather odd. That clause makes no sense in terms of trade.

What types of events could decrease the expected profitability laid out in an investor's business plan? Almost anything, really. If, in order to protect the environment, equipment needed to be added to purify the air, treat waste and improve extraction methods, the expected profitability would obviously decrease.

All environmental aspects would be excluded because, in the short term, they are costly. They might be lucrative in the long term—we see this more and more—but in the short term, for a private investor, they involve costs. The same is true concerning how the labour force is treated. Countries like this use child labour. People there are forced to work, and the working conditions are not like ours. If we want to improve working conditions and reduce the number of children working in mines, what will happen? Salaries will increase, profitability will decrease and businesses would then be able to sue the government. This kind of argument makes no sense.

It goes too far. The concept of expropriation is too broad. Legal proceedings can be far too onerous. We are told that if we invest in a country and expropriation takes place, there will be compensation.

I do not understand why this government is about to give compensation to Canadian businesses and investors in Colombia, yet it refuses to give Quebec any compensation for harmonizing its sales tax. Zero. Nada. Niet. Nothing. What a double standard.

As a final point, I would like to talk about the impact of this agreement, which goes only one way, since it will be Canadian investors who will invest in Colombia. How will this affect Colombia? It will perpetuate the current system. In Canada, it will mean unfair competition for Canadian companies that do not invest in that country, but must compete with other companies that invest there. Workers will no longer be allowed to organize themselves or execute business plans. The only executions will be of those who organize workers and a number of union leaders, as some members have already mentioned.

For all these reasons, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP, out of respect for our principles, will vote against this bill.

• (1225)

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's comments. I am not going to refer back to his vast experience. He sort of reminds me of my former colleague Réal Ménard, whom he replaced very effectively in the riding of Hochelaga, when he used to make his speeches. The hon. member's comments are accurate, they focus on the main issue and they are straight to the point.

As I usually do, I am going to ask a direct question on something that is of interest to me personally. I would like my colleague to elaborate on the possibility of getting compensation. I read the agreement, and this issue is not clear. The possibility of using NAFTA's chapter 11 would allow businesses to be compensated by the Canadian government for losses incurred in Colombia. If this is indeed the case, this agreement not only does not make sense, but it is also very bad.

I have another question. Can the hon. member think of companies that might be interested in doing business with Colombia, other than mining and mineral exploration companies?

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Madam Speaker, it is an honour to be compared to my predecessor, Réal Ménard, who, I am told, was a great orator here. To have succeeded him, both in Hochelaga and in this House, is an honour that I share with the constituents of Hochelaga.

I did have the opportunity to travel to Colombia to assess investments that were not made at the time. We tried to look at the issue of risk management. Indeed, investing implies the management of risks. We put money down and we may end up getting more or less than our investment. In particular, when we invest abroad, there may be various ways to get compensated when events that are out of our control occur such as, for example, the full nationalization of a specific mineral. The decision is made by the country. I have nothing against compensation, but not huge compensation on an investment and on the expected return.

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So, what is going to happen? Mining companies, but also other types of businesses are going to invest in Colombia. A former NDP leader used to talk about corporate bums. These people will invest there, and if things do not work out, they are going to get a refund that will even include a return. This does not make sense. It does not make any sense.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member seems to have significant interest in the aspect of this free trade agreement that is related to investor confidence, fairness between countries and fairness for Canadian investors.

I am a small-business person myself and have been for decades. I am a Spanish speaker, and I am the kind of potential investor who would be interested in investing in a Colombia that is fair and sustainable, and I could capitalize on the biodiversity and interesting cultures there.

I would ask whether the hon. member has considered that the shift from traditional agriculture and traditional cultures and the rainforest to large plantations by large multinationals would be the kind of concern he would have, as we shift and put pressure upon those economies.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Of course, we cannot give the whole picture in ten minutes. I focused on investments, but if we take agriculture, for example, the situation is clear and there is no need to travel to Colombia to see it. We can see it in Quebec right now. Some entrepreneurs and investors come from China, for example, and buy our farmland. We see it in Quebec. We are fighting against that. We think it does not make sense. The food that feeds people comes from the land. Therefore, it is very important to own our land. So, if this is happening here, one can well imagine that it can easily happen in Colombia.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is my honour to take the floor on this matter of the possible free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

After hearing my brilliant colleague from Hochelaga, I am flabbergasted to think that Canada might possibly sign a free trade agreement with Colombia. This cannot be.

I am even more flabbergasted to learn that the Liberal Party, which established the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, will be supporting this proposed agreement. I can understand why the Conservatives' belief in the charter might be questionable. Their focus is more on prison than anything else. But can we be seeing this from the Liberals, who created the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms? One woman, Ms. Betancourt, has been detained inside her country by the guerrillas for more than 22 months. At the moment, over 130 persons all over Colombia are being held by guerrillas.

I went to Colombia in 1995 for the world road cycling championships. I can assure my colleagues that the situation has definitely not changed, because Colombia has tried to get other international competitions and been refused. Fortunately the army

was there, but four trucks full of cycling equipment were stolen all the same.

There is no security in Colombia for persons who want to invest there. The proof of this is that they have stopped counting the number of murders by Colombian paramilitary groups. If only for that, we should vote against this proposed free trade agreement. It makes no sense.

We in Abitibi—Témiscamingue are now host to the head of the Colombian postal union. I will not say where he lives, because I might have the misfortune to be heard by certain paramilitary forces, who could then come and kill him. This person was threatened to such a degree—two of his brothers and his sister were murdered and his wife threatened with death—that in the end he managed to obtain refuge in Canada. He has found shelter, let us hope, with us, in the north.

Will a country such as Canada sanction the displacement of communities? It is not we who claim this: Amnesty International says that 305,000 people were displaced in that country in 2007 alone. In 2008, 380,000 persons had to flee their home or their workplace because of the violence. Generally speaking, this does not happen in Bogota or Cali, but rather in the small villages or small remote regions, because the land is wanted to operate a mine there, or to engage in farming on some long stretch of property.

In Quebec there is probably unanimous support for this position, apart from a few members of the Liberal Party, who will, I hope, be absent for the vote. At least I hope those members will be absent when the vote is held. In Quebec we are against this free trade agreement, because it flouts the most basic rights of the individuals who live in that country. Down there, it is not “my way or the highway”, it is “my way or you die”.

I invite my colleagues opposite who are preparing to vote in favour of this Canada-Colombia free trade agreement to go and see the film called *The Coca-Cola Case*.

• (1235)

Once they have seen *The Coca-Cola Case*, I hope that, first, they will stop drinking Coca-Cola and, second, they will decide not to vote for this free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

This agreement has only one purpose, and that is to help mining companies make more money. All the Xstratas, the Rio Tintos and the Algomas of this world are already in Colombia or will set up operations there. Colombia does not treat its people very well. In my riding, which is a mining area, we know that people in Colombia are not only displaced, but threatened and even murdered to clear the way for a mine.

We believe that this House must take a stand, and I appeal to my Liberal colleagues. You can say what you like about the Liberals, but they were the ones who brought in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I hold the belief, the hope and the deep conviction that Canada is still a highly democratic country where all forms of expression are possible, even though sometimes not everyone is happy with what is said. The same cannot be said of Colombia, and this free trade agreement will not make any difference.

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Coca is and will remain the raw material most widely cultivated and sold in Colombia. I would say that if we approve the free trade agreement, we will be sending a signal that we agree with the virtually non-existent fight Colombia is waging to do away with all the coca plantations.

Today, a great many people in Colombia are being kidnapped and held by Maoist and Trotskyist guerrillas. Colombia currently does not have the sort of democracy we enjoy here. I have a hard time believing that members are going to approve this supposed free trade agreement, whose sole purpose is to help certain mining companies go ahead with more mineral exploration and mining.

Since 1985, 4.6 million people in Colombia have been forced out of their homes and off their land. This figure alone should give pause to my Conservative and Liberal colleagues across the way and convince them to vote against this deal. We must vote against this free trade agreement. It is unacceptable, and we should not allow it to go ahead.

I will close by saying that I hope we will all take a stand. I can say that the Bloc Québécois will never agree to this free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, in the days since the Liberals breathed new life into what was a dead agreement and a dead deal, basically allowing the Colombian government to self-assess, numerous Canadian organizations have responded against what the Liberals are doing here. The Council of Canadians, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the B.C. Teachers' Federation, the CLC, the Canadian Auto Workers, the United Church of Canada, the Public Service Alliance and many other organizations have responded against what the Liberals are doing to help the government get this agreement through.

Does the member understand what the interests of the Liberal Party and Liberal caucus are in supporting the Conservatives to get this very bad agreement through this House?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Madam Speaker, I had forgotten to mention this, but the hon. member from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine correctly drew my attention to it and wanted me to point it out; because I am a lawyer, I am very familiar with this matter.

In reply to the hon. member's question, I do not know why the Liberals are going to support this agreement. I hope at least that Liberals from Quebec will not do so and will be absent or abstain from voting. That is the least that Quebec is asking. If they do otherwise, they will have to live with their consciences.

When I look at it, in fact, members of this House are not the only ones who are opposed to this agreement. We all represent associations in our constituencies. In mine, it is unanimous: the mayors, the municipalities, the associations and the unions in Abitibi-Témiscamingue are all opposed, be it the FTQ, the CSN, the Canadian Labour Congress' representatives in our area, and every other association, such as Development and Peace.

People from Development and Peace have met with me on a number of occasions. The government should meet with them as well. This agreement does not benefit Canada; the benefits will go to Canadian corporations. No citizen of Canada will benefit, because citizens of Canada even have a hard time going to Colombia to work, and do not want to, especially not in the union movement.

• (1245)

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will not dare to ask my learned colleague why lawyers feel obliged to say that they are lawyers. Every time we hear them, it seems that they feel some need to do so. So I will not ask him about the bicycle race he entered in Colombia either. We might like to know the results of the competition, but we can talk about them later between ourselves.

A little more seriously, Madam Speaker, I would like to hear what the hon. member has to say about workers' rights. I have been a union member, a trade unionist; I was proud to be one and am proud to declare it again. So when workers' rights are mentioned in the context of a trade agreement, we have to make sure that trade can take place, of course, but also that rights are respected in the country with which the trade is to take place.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member. I will quickly answer the first part of his question. Clara Hughes, who just won a medal at the Olympic games, made her first appearance at the World Championships in Colombia, and she won a silver medal.

To answer the rather obvious questions that the hon. members did not ask, I did not participate in the World Championships. I was the Canadian cycling association president at the time and the international president of mountain biking, and I went to check out a possible site. I assure you that we never went back to Colombia.

That being said, to answer the question so cleverly asked by the hon. member, I do not think that, if I were a trade unionist, Colombia is the place where I would choose or want to choose to go to and help workers. I had a chance to meet the president of the Colombian postal union, who has now found refuge with us. He told me that he was lucky to have found refuge outside his country, as he would be dead otherwise. So I do not think that working as a trade unionist in Colombia is a very good idea.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again to speak to this issue. Perhaps I will speak somewhat longer this time so I can add a little more to what the hon. members for Hochelaga, Abitibi—Témiscamingue and others have said on this subject.

The first questions I had upon seeing the Canada-Colombia free-trade agreement file were the following: Who is it for? Why? What does it mean? It is much more easily understood from Canada's perspective. But, as for Colombia, it is a country that people rarely visit except to watch biking competitions or to attend conferences. Personally, I have never been to Colombia. I have heard about it, and I am well aware that it is a country in South America.

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Recently, I read that Colombia has around 50 million inhabitants. So it is relatively populous. It is situated very close to the equator. It is quite mountainous and even has glaciers. A population of 50 million is fairly large. But, according to figures, that population is mostly poor. It is very unfortunate. The country is so poor that 48% of its people, according to statistics for 2006 or 2007, live below the poverty line. That shows just how rampant poverty is in Colombia.

What kind of trade do we have with Colombia? Our imports amount to \$644 million, according to the 2008 figures, and our exports to \$704 million. That gives us a better idea of our imports and exports. Canada exports mainly motor vehicles and automotive parts, as well as grain. These exports accounted respectively for 23% and 19% of the total in 2007.

Most Canadian investment in Colombia is in the mining sector. This is where we start to understand a little better what the agreement is all about. A country like Canada has an interest in signing a free trade agreement. We already have one with the United States and one with Mexico. We are busy negotiating another with Europe. I could come back to that another time. The Europeans lecture us about the seal hunt, but we overlook that entirely. They call us barbarians. That is more or less what they did last June by voting—not just at the Council of Europe but in the European Union—to ban all products derived from seals. This only shows that when we are considering doing business with someone, it is important that the other country involved be careful about expressing opinions on our way of doing things.

Getting back to the agreement between Canada and Colombia, this is not a mere hockey game or soccer match. Who will benefit? What interests do they want to protect? Why are they so interested in Colombia? Is it to help Colombians emerge from extreme poverty? Is it to ensure we get a military base there? That is not it at all. But there are Canadian interests in Colombia, and they have to do with mines. That is where the real interest lies. It all becomes obvious why they are suddenly so interested in Colombia and in doing business there. It is not really about doing business as such, because free trade agreements are generally intended to improve trade and to increase Canadian exports and Colombian imports. In this agreement, they want to protect investors, or actually those who invest in mines.

● (1250)

In view of the way in which these infamous mines are exploited, the word exploited is well chosen. The people who work there are exploited. That is why our colleagues in the Liberal Party, who are supposedly very concerned about workers' rights, should take a closer look at the agreement.

That is not even mentioning human rights. The mere fact that children work in these mines and we are completely closing our eyes to the situation is reason enough to object to the free trade agreement. Colombia exploits children for purely speculative reasons and to serve a system in which more and more profits are made at the lowest possible cost. That is the real situation and it should lead us to refuse to sign agreements like this.

Other reasons that my colleagues raised during the recent debates explain quite eloquently why we object to this free trade agreement.

As a native *pure laine* Quebecker, I am interested in doing business with other countries in order to increase my wealth or to share the wealth. However, I want the parties to be equal and to treat each other with respect. There can be no doubt that foreign investors, some of them Canadian, exploit children in Colombian mines. That is crux of the matter. That is where problems can arise.

I am hearing some comments. I am well aware that my Liberal friends would rather talk about something else. Where I come from, folks would refer to the peanut gallery. Seems they have less to say now. They understand that it is easier to get a message across when it is relatively quiet than when every person in the peanut gallery wants to put in their two cents' worth.

When seriously considering a free trade agreement, we should be guided by respect. We have to assess trade volumes and make sure we have the numbers to back us up. Trade volumes could be higher, but it is not necessarily “le Pérou” as we say in French, it's not Peru, which is not far away, meaning that it is not very significant.

If the purpose of this agreement were to boost trade volumes, then fine. But when we dig a little deeper, we discover that the true purpose of this agreement is to enable unscrupulous investors to make money. One would have to be truly unscrupulous to invest in companies that do whatever they please. Fortunately, we live in a democracy, so we have access to that information. The more informed people are, the better they understand the consequences of making various decisions, such as this decision about the free trade agreement.

Canada buys only raw materials from Colombia. That is why a free trade agreement with Colombia just to benefit the mining sector is not justified.

In 2007, energy products accounted for 31% of imports and agricultural and agri-food products for 58%. In dollars, Canada buys \$138 million worth of coal and related products, \$115 million worth of coffee, \$72 million worth of bananas and \$62 million worth of cut flowers.

Regardless, we have to re-examine the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. As things stand, shame on Canada and parliamentarians if they support this agreement.

● (1255)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, I greatly enjoyed the speech by my colleague from the Bloc Québécois.

I am very pleased to see that, like the NDP, the Bloc Québécois stands for key values in Canada, values which are shared by the Quebec nation as well as the people of British Columbia, Ontario and the Prairies. All Canadians across the country share these fundamental values of human rights.

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There seems, however, to be a contradiction. The Conservatives and Liberals have chosen not to bother with human rights. They want to dismiss them. They want to endorse, or more specifically give a blank cheque and a merit award to this regime that has the blood of the trade unionists killed in Colombia on its hands, not to mention the violent forced displacement of people, mostly Aboriginals and Afro-Colombians. This merit award was nonetheless given to the Colombian regime by the Liberals and the Conservatives.

I would like the member to tell me how come these two parties do not grasp the importance of human rights, which are essential. How should members of all stripes defend human rights in this House?

Mr. Raynald Blais: Madam Speaker, I am not here to explain the inexplicable or defend the indefensible.

However, I can understand certain aspects without getting into his criticism of the Liberals and the Conservatives. I do not want to compare the Canada-Colombia debate to another debate. Nonetheless, I would appreciate it if our NDP colleagues were as respectful of the principle of self-determination for the people of Quebec. That is also a principle worth fighting harder for.

I completely understand what my NDP colleague was saying. Self-determination for the people of Quebec should also be respected by all parliamentarians in this House.

It is indeed difficult to explain, but we see that it is like a system that protects a system. The Liberal-Conservative or Conservative-Liberal system—because in the end it amounts to the same thing—literally protects a system represented by investors. These same investors, regardless of where they are and where they want to invest, want things to be as deregulated as possible. That is precisely what the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement offers.

• (1300)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, I understand that the hon. member does not want to make comparisons. However, will he not admit that supporting such a free trade agreement sets a dangerous precedent for a democracy like ours, which respects human rights—or certainly makes every effort to do so?

Does this not pose a strong threat to Canada and Quebec's tradition of respecting human rights?

Mr. Raynald Blais: Madam Speaker, with the current Conservative government, principles have been tossed out the window at a staggering rate over the past five years. Indeed, the very least that a government should do when preparing to sign a free trade agreement with another country is to ensure that human rights will be respected. That includes not only labour rights, but also the humane treatment of all members of the human race.

This is a situation where a country and certain interests are casting that aside. That is why, yet again, we must say loud and clear that we oppose the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the government's proposed legislation on a free trade deal between Canada and Colombia.

Despite what we hear repeatedly from the other side, the NDP is not against trade. We are not against fair trade. We are not against good trade. In fact, we are all for it, but it has to be fair and it has to be sustainable. This trade deal is not that.

This is a troubled bill. There are many problems with it. I will not go into them all. My colleagues have done a good job in talking about such concerns as workers, labour abuses, human rights and outright murders in Colombia, just to mention a few. One of the things I want to talk about is how this deal offers no real protection for the environment.

As we know, Colombia is one of the countries in South America that is especially blessed in parts of the country with productive rainforests, especially in the southeastern lowlands near the Amazon.

Tropical rainforests are disappearing from the face of the globe. Around the world more than 32,000 hectares per day are being cut down. Rainforests are down to only 5% of the world's land surface presently, and much of this remaining area has been impacted by human activities and no longer retains its full original and rich biodiversity. Worse, rainforests are so rich in plant and animal life that we do not even know most of what we are losing, such as countless undiscovered species, renewable botanical and animal resources, and a pharmacopoeia of potential new drugs.

Aside from species extinction, deforestation means that we are losing something else: the lungs of our planet and one of the world's great carbon sinks. It is not just the oxygen they produce, it is also the carbon they store in biomass. When forests are destroyed, the carbon they contain is released into the atmosphere in the form of carbon dioxide, which most of us realize leads to a greater probability of dangerous climate change.

Much of the rainforest in Colombia is currently being slashed and burned. Why? Because of rapidly expanding agribusiness plantations for fruit and other crops.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has said that over the last 20 years over four million Colombians have been forcefully displaced by plantation companies and paramilitaries in order to take the land and destroy the forest for new agri-business agriculture. In 2007 alone there were more than 300,000 refugees, mostly Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities.

Is that the type of production we want to help expand and accelerate with a flawed free trade deal? As the evidence submitted to the Standing Committee on International Trade in 2008 showed, this trade deal is primarily centred on agribusiness-type agriculture.

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This deal offers no protection whatsoever for the environment. There is no effective method of enforcement. The only thing in it is a complaint mechanism, which would be simply to file a complaint with a bureaucrat with no independent review and no rigorous analysis.

The environmental playing field is totally uneven with this deal. Expert witnesses before the international trade committee confirmed the weaknesses of the environmental provisions side agreements. The standards for environmental protection are lower than the already very weak statutes of NAFTA.

There are no effective proactive measures for environmental monitoring or for preventive enforcement. The lackluster enforcement of environmental laws in Colombia would only make this situation even worse.

If that is not bad enough, it goes even further.

This deal is exporting NAFTA's chapter 11 mistakes, which we in northern Ontario suffer daily, to new countries. Chapter 11 allows multinational corporations to sue governments when actions taken have impacted their bottom lines, actions like passing laws to protect the environment or biodiversity.

Instead of helping to encourage conservation of South America's valuable rainforest, we will be tying their hands. As soon as they try, if they ever try, to pass conservation legislation that may affect the profits of investors, they will open themselves up to a tidal wave of litigation and liability. Talk about putting profits before people, and profits before the planet.

● (1305)

From an environmental point of view, the trade deal with Colombia is very troubling. It must be renegotiated to take into account environmental and human rights considerations, among others.

Sure, there is some lip service paid to accountability on human rights. The Liberals, the Conservatives and the Uribe government have agreed to produce and table in both Parliaments an annual report on the human rights situation in Colombia and amend the deal. However, in effect, the Colombian government will be forced to police itself, the very same government associated with various right-wing paramilitaries to start with. This amendment is like putting lipstick and a dress on a pig so the Liberals can feel better about taking Bill C-2 to the prom.

There is nothing in the amendment about the rules of trade, which will be the underlying cause of environmental problems, and no clear mechanism for the ongoing monitoring of the effects of free trade, for instance investment provisions, on the human rights of the population as well as on the environment.

I am not sure why the Liberals seem to be supporting this bad trade deal. They were opposed to it in 2008. The only things that have changed since then are the Liberal critic for this went down to Colombia to get a small but unfortunately ineffective amendment to this bad trade deal. And the environment as an issue seems to have dropped off the back of their platform in general. It is interesting that they would do such an about-face on human rights and the environment for the sake of a relatively minor trade deal.

Colombia ranks fairly low on the market for Canadian exports out of Latin America and the Caribbean and that has actually been falling in comparison to our trade with other countries in the region. The majority of Canadian investment in Colombia is in the mining sector. Perhaps that is really what this trade deal is about, as the previous member has pointed out.

Gauri Sreenivasan of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation said:

Beyond that issue [of free trade], in Colombia, Canadian oil and mining companies are active in some of the most conflict-ridden zones of the country, even beyond the issue of royalties. These zones are characterized by high levels of military and paramilitary control. The overlap between the two is sobering. Colombian regions that are rich in minerals and oils have been marked by violence. They are the source of 87% of forced displacements, 82% of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and 83% of assassinations of trade union leaders in the country.

I do not see how this flawed trade deal will improve the situation. In fact, it seems to me it will make it worse. Certainly all human rights organizations agree that it will.

The Conservative government is negotiating a number of bilateral trade deals like this one. Its intention seems to be to hand over as much oversight and responsibility over multinational companies as possible under the guise of free trade, and there is little to no accountability. This is totally unacceptable as a basis for trade deals in general. It is especially unacceptable in the context of Colombia, the country with just about the worst human rights record in all of South America and one with so much biodiversity and tropical rainforest at stake. The United States would not even agree to a trade deal with Colombia.

This debate is about a lot more than just trade. It is about our values as a country. The government is asking us to go against our basic fundamental values as Canadians to uphold basic human rights and to conserve the planet's natural heritage for the sake of investment profits.

● (1310)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North has a bill on the table presently concerning the environment. I would like to know what this trade agreement with Colombia would do to the environment not only in Canada but especially in Colombia?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Madam Speaker, we must protect our forests around the world. We know that every acre, hectare, square kilometre or mile of forest is going to be increasingly precious and hanging on to the carbon sinks that most of us and most scientists would agree we need to do if we are to have any hope of preventing dangerous climate change.

Not only are there huge carbon sinks in this area in Colombia, they are also one of the richest storehouses of biodiversity on the planet. The losses will be priceless not just in terms of biodiversity but in the products and pharmaceuticals that we will need in future decades to help our sick and unhealthy stay alive.

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Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member dealt with the effects of this agreement on climate change in Colombia. However, I would like to expand that to include the effects of the agreement on farmers.

A great number of farmers have been displaced because of mining interests. They have been surviving for many years self-sufficiently and now they are being forced off the land into cities and they are entering a life of poverty because of agreements such as this.

Could the member comment on that?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Madam Speaker, before I had this career in the House of Commons one of my past careers was to be involved in agriculture and pesticides.

I have watched a disturbing trend over many decades. We are displacing aboriginal hunters and gatherers and aboriginal and mestizo farmers who have been using a Sweden kind of agriculture in these very sensitive soils and ecosystems throughout the tropical rain forests in the world. It is the only kind of agriculture which is sustainable in the long term. We cannot go to intensive agribusinesses as we have in other places and use those in tropical soils without disastrous results, not only on the short-term biodiversity but on the long-term productivity of those rain forest ecosystems.

• (1315)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, this free trade agreement of course sets out investment rights and investment protection, but there is nothing on the face of it that ensures the protection of human rights as such. I would like to hear some of the hon. member's thoughts on that. Is there not something altogether disturbing in all this when we see what the mining industry is doing in other countries, especially in South Africa, which also wants to exploit deposits in Colombia? I would like to hear some of his thoughts on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Madam Speaker, I have focused primarily on the ecosystems and the environment in my talk because many of my fellow NDP members have done a very effective job of talking about the human rights issue. I was struck by what one of the members of my colleague's party said about an hour ago. If I understood him correctly, he commented that we were initiating trade with a country that would not even come close to meeting the terms of our own Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It really resonated with me.

A simple criterion and one of our main criterion for how we deal with trade issues in other countries should be this. Does that country meet even close to the Canadian standard in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms that protects our rights? How can we be trading with countries that treat either the environment or humans less well than we do ourselves?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, let me say right off that I strongly agree with my colleagues in the Bloc who have spoken on this important matter since this morning and over a number of sitting days. We in the Bloc are strongly opposed to this bill to implement a free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

I listened earlier to the remarks of my colleague from Chambly—Borduas, who raised the whole question of human rights. I intend to get back to that, if time allows.

We know that the main motivation behind the government's desire to conclude this free trade agreement has nothing to do with trade. It has to do with investments, because this agreement contains a chapter on investment protection and aims to make life easier for Canadians investing in Colombia and especially in the mining sector.

If all the agreements protecting investment that Canada has signed over the years are anything to go on, the agreement between Canada and Colombia is ill planned. All of these agreements contain provisions allowing investors to take a foreign government to court when it adopts measures reducing the returns on their investment. Such provisions are especially dangerous in a country where laws governing labour and the protection of the environment are, at best, haphazard.

Such an agreement, by protecting a Canadian investor against any improvement in the living conditions in Colombia, increases the risk of delaying social and environmental progress in a country that we all agree is in great need of such progress. Colombia has one of the worst human rights records in the world and certainly in Latin America.

In order to promote human rights in the world, governments usually use the carrot and stick approach. They support efforts to improve respect for human rights and reserve the right to withdraw benefits should the situation worsen. With this free trade agreement, Canada would forego any ability to bring pressure to bear on the Government of Colombia. Heaven knows that this is not a government we can blindly put our faith in. Not only is the Canadian government giving up the carrot and the stick, but it is handing them over to the Colombian government.

The government keeps telling us that this agreement would come with a side agreement on labour and another on the environment. It has been shown time and time again that these agreements are notoriously ineffective. They are not part of the free trade agreement, which means that investors can with impunity destroy Colombia's rich environment, displace people to facilitate mine development and continue to murder trade unionists. My examples are not science fiction. There have been real and clear cases in various countries in the world and on various continents.

As for the free trade agreement itself, the Bloc Québécois is against trading away the Canadian government's ability to press for human rights to provide Canadian corporations with foreign investment opportunities.

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• (1320)

In December 2009, before prorogation, of course, this bill was debated at second reading. But after prorogation, the bill died on the order paper. The Conservatives were very critical of the fact that the debate was focused on human rights, when we were talking about a trade agreement. With all due respect, I must say that these two aspects go hand in hand. We cannot just look at money as a means to acquire goods and property. We are talking about a population, about the Colombian people.

A subamendment to express the strong opposition to this agreement by a number of human rights organizations was rejected by the Conservatives, with the support of the Liberals, on October 7, 2009. The free trade agreement between the United States and Colombia, signed in 2006, is also stalled because of the issue of human rights. This agreement will not be ratified by Congress before Colombia strengthens its legislation to protect minimum labour standards and union activities. This Conservative government, which likes to compare itself to the United States, should pay attention to how the Americans are approaching this situation. For once, it should pay attention.

I would like to consider this agreement in context. We will recall that in 2002 Canada held talks with the Andean countries, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia, about the possibility of signing a free trade agreement. Ultimately, Canada decided to negotiate bilateral agreements with Colombia and Peru, and possibly to resume negotiations with the two other missing countries later.

On June 7, 2007, Canada's Minister of International Trade officially announced that Canada was going to enter into negotiations with Colombia and Peru regarding a free trade agreement. There were four rounds of negotiations between the three countries, the last of which took place in Lima from November 26 to 30, 2007. On January 28, Canada and Peru announced that they had concluded their negotiations. On June 7, 2008, Canada and Colombia announced that their negotiations were finished. On November 21, the two countries signed the free trade agreement, and on March 24 of this year we learned that the government had put the bill to implement the free trade agreement with Colombia on the Order Paper.

To conclude, I would like to say that with these figures about trade between Canada and Quebec and Colombia, it is hard to understand why Canada would want to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia. When two countries sign free trade agreements, it is because they are major trading partners and the volume of trade between them makes lowering trade barriers attractive.

That being said, let us be candid. The Colombian market is not particularly attractive for Canada. Trade between the two countries is very limited. The main products that Canada sells there, like grain from western Canada, have no difficulty finding a buyer in any event, anywhere on the planet in these times of food crises. Exporters in Quebec and Canada would see limited benefits, at best, from signing this agreement. We imagine that some Canadian companies might be attracted, but we find it hard to see how the public in Quebec or Canada will benefit at all from this.

In fact, the government's primary motivation for signing this free trade agreement has nothing to do with trade, as I said when I first began speaking; it is about investment. And because the agreement contains an investment protection chapter, it will make life easier for Canadian investors who invest in Colombia, particularly in the mining sector.

For all these reasons, and particularly because of the silence about the absence of minimum labour and environmental protection standards, the Bloc Québécois cannot support this bill.

• (1325)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, I very much enjoyed the speech by the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, who has a great deal of experience in this House. He made his point about this agreement with a government that has blood on its hands.

Based on his experience in the House, I would like to know whether the member believes that the Conservatives and the Liberals are truly interested in human rights or if they are more interested in talking about them rather than really wanting to put in place agreements and elements that require other governments to respect human rights.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his kind words.

I have been an MP since 1993. It came to the fore when a prime minister went to China as part of a delegation. I remember that the opposition parties asked former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to raise the issue of human rights during his face-to-face meetings with Chinese leaders. That was the Liberal Party. We have had the opportunity to confirm this.

With regard to the Conservatives, it is evident that they are strictly interested in investments. All aspects of international co-operation, among other things, are not part of Conservative values. They are solely interested in making investments profitable and determining what the return on the investment will be without concerning themselves with the issues of human rights, minimum labour standards and the environmental conditions that prevail in those countries. At any rate, one need only examine the Conservatives' attitude on the environment here, in Quebec and Canada, to know that. They do not even wish to take responsibility for our environment. Do you believe that they will want to impose, in a free trade agreement, respect for the Colombia's environment? That is pure abstraction.

• (1330)

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Madam Speaker, along the same lines, the hon. member's answer is inspiring and I would like to know more. I am relatively new and his experience is helpful for us. I feel that it can be helpful for the people who are listening to us right now. We get the impression that we are increasingly faced with the phenomenon that is only too clear, that being Liberal or Conservative is one and the same thing. Could the hon. member provide me with additional information or clarification?

Government Orders

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, having seen Liberal and Conservative governments, we have come to realize that the approach of the two parties is the same in a number of ways. They are Tweedledum and Tweedledee. When they are in opposition, the Liberals champion certain areas. I will give you an example. Perhaps an hon. member will rise to question the relevance. The best example is the situation of unemployed and seasonal workers. As long as they are in opposition, the Liberals are the first to say that there should be real employment insurance reform. When they return to power, they do absolutely nothing. This is the end of my aside.

I will return specifically to this issue. The Liberals can say what they like. If they return to power, we will see how they behave. We saw what they did from 1993 to 2004. With the Conservatives it is more of the same thing. That is why Quebeckers have decided to be represented by the Bloc Québécois, the only party that stands up for the interests of Quebec.

[*English*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to start my speech by reading an email that all members of Parliament received, but more specifically it was addressed to the member for Kings—Hants. I cannot mention the member's name in the House of Commons, but I would like to read a letter that was addressed to him. The member has more or less been the spokesman for the Liberal Party in this debate. I know he is in favour of this trade agreement with Colombia.

Dear [member for Kings—Hants],

By means of this letter I would like to express my point of view concerning the legislation recently tabled in the Canadian House of Commons to implement Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA). As I am a citizen of both countries I am proud of my origins, but also of my immensely proud of belonging to my adoptive country, which you represent in the Canadian Parliament. Canada and Colombia have many differences in their cultural, social, political and economic aspects, and also very different in their systems of justice. I am not opposed to commercial exchanges between Canada and any other country in the world. But I wish for those relationships to be just and equitable. And I certainly object to unequal commercial relations which could help destabilize the Colombian economy and contribute to further to the deterioration of social climate in the country where, I trust you will well agree, there exists a grievous situation of generalized violence.

I urge you, [member for Kings—Hants] to consider the fact of the profound level of violence that afflicts the people of Colombia and which is a manifestation of extreme social inequality and of marked economic inequities. I am certain that if you were to direct all the necessary attention to the tragic situation presently endured by the people of Colombia, neither you nor any other deputy representing the Liberal Party of Canada would support the ratification of the CCFTA or would collaborate with the Conservative Party's will to push the implementation of this commercial accord by the Parliament of Canada.

I ask you to immediately consider the ethical stakes and the political responsibilities associated with international commerce. I am well aware that the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Accord has as its objectives to favour Canadian investments in Colombia, particularly in the mines and minerals sector. I have no doubt that Canadian mining companies are keenly interested in exploiting, to their advantage, the many mineral resources that are present in Colombia, natural resources that belong, by right, to the people of Colombia. Gold deposits, carbon and coal mines, and petroleum resources are of great value and are highly coveted, and access to these precious resources requires the cooperation and complicity of the government of Colombia.

I would like to stop right now. I will read the rest of this letter later on. However, because this paragraph speaks about Canadian mining companies, I would like to talk a little bit about a company from South America that is presently operating in my community of Nickel Belt. That company is Vale Inco.

Can members imagine if this company were allowed to invest in Colombia, this company that has absolutely no moral values, this company that is trying to suppress the workers of Nickel Belt and Sudbury, this company that is firing employees and trade unionists at will? They would not have to fire them in Colombia; they would just shoot them, as many others have done in the last few years in Colombia.

I just wanted to stop at that paragraph to talk a little bit about Vale Inco and what it is doing in my community and what it would do in Colombia.

I am going to carry on with this letter:

The regime presently in power in Colombia can, with little hesitation, be qualified as extremely unjust, immoral and corrupt. It has been alleged and proven that human rights are systematically violated by the regime and by paramilitary actors complicit with the country's government.

I am going to stop again here. Can members just imagine if Vale Inco had the backing of the Canadian army in Sudbury? Can members imagine what they are going to do in Colombia when the corrupt government is going to do everything it can to suppress the Colombians?

● (1335)

I will go back to the letter, which reads:

Please believe me that inequitable commercial exchanges will not help to improve the situation of the people of Colombia. The inequality in the distribution of wealth in Colombia is a glaring reality that no one can, in good conscience, ignore. The implementation of the CCFTA will only lead to Canadian complicity with the unjust economic and social policies upheld by the right-wing government of president Alvaro Uribe. This leader, now at the tail end of his mandate, has always backed the interests of a tiny minority of the Colombian population, always pushing policies that have favoured the meanest interests of rural and urban elites who favour their own interests above a real will for peace with social and economic justice.

Can we have trust and confidence in a government that has been widely seen as complicit in atrocities that have cost the lives of thousands of its citizens, and that have caused millions of Colombians to be forced to flee their homes for foreign or internal displacement?

Are you aware, [member for King—Hants] that hundreds of thousands of well-informed members of civil society, in Colombia and throughout Canada, are vigorously opposed to the Free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia? Have you and your colleagues in the Liberal Party of Canada listened to and heard our voices?

We are asking you and the Liberal Party of Canada to NOT support the implementation of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA). We are asking that you NOT conclude an agreement with a Colombian government whose hands are stained with the blood of many thousands of its citizens.

In Canada, we are millions of workers, farmers, Union members, students, and citizens who loudly and strongly raise our voices to oppose the ratification and implementation of the CCFTA. Do you hear us, [member for King—Hants]?

Yours sincerely,

Jorge Parra

Colombo-Canadian citizen

It is not only members of the NDP and the Bloc who are against this trade agreement. There are many others. I do not know how much time I have left, but I would like to read from another letter. It states:

Dear Members of Parliament

I was shocked to learn that after prorogation the first bill to be reintroduced after the budget was the Colombian free trade agreement, now this is one bill that was better left dead on the floor. Death and Colombia are two unfortunate words that seem to have disturbing history together whether it's the dozens of union organizers at such companies as Coca Cola who have been murdered in cold blood at the hands of hired guns just to keep the labour suppressed and the profit margins in place.

Government Orders

I will stop there because I will not have time to finish the letter but it just goes to prove that we are not the only ones who are against this free trade agreement.

I want to go back to this company from South America in my community that is firing employees at will and is refusing to negotiate with the workers. It wants to take away their pension rights and their bonuses. It wants to prevent them from transferring from plant to plant. Can anyone imagine what a company like this would do in Colombia? There would be so many murders in that country that we would not be able to keep up.

● (1340)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Kings—Hants must be starting to feel the heat on this issue.

The Council of Canadians, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the B.C. Teachers' Federation, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Auto Workers, the United Church, the Public Service Alliance and many more organizations have been paying attention to the debates in the House over the last few days and have been sending letters condemning the Liberal critic and the Liberal Party for supporting the Conservatives. They are resurrecting what essentially was dead legislation until two weeks ago and making an amendment to allow the Colombian government to essentially police itself and self-assess its human rights record on an annual basis.

I find the whole situation appalling. The fact that the Liberal members have been very quiet during this whole debate speaks volumes about where their party is going.

Would the member like to make any further comments about the role of the Liberal Party in resurrecting what was dead legislation only two weeks ago?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Madam Speaker, the Liberal Party is thinking along the same lines as the Conservative Party as far as Colombia is concerned and it is being led by the member for Kings—Hants who must be feeling the pressure right now.

I want to remind my colleague that the member for Kings—Hants used to sit on that side of the House but he was kicked over here. Perhaps the Liberal Party should consider punting him back because he is dragging the Liberal Party into an extreme right-wing party with an extreme right-wing agenda.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Nickel Belt spoke extremely well. He is part of the strongest representation northern Ontario has ever had in the House of Commons. I am thinking of the member for Nickel Belt, the member for Sudbury, the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North who spoke just a few minutes ago, and the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River. They join long-time parliamentarians, the member for Sault Ste. Marie and the member for Timmins—James Bay, as the by far strongest representation we have ever had from northern Ontario in the House.

Northern Ontario MPs are speaking out because they have seen some of the abuses that are taking place, as the member for Nickel Belt mentioned. In the Sudbury region are the kinds of abuses

magnified 100 times that could well arrive with this free trade blank cheque that would be given to multinational companies to work in Colombia.

Report after report of every human rights organization that is independent and impartial has said that there are strong concerns about the kind of corporate rights that this agreement would give to Canadian companies and that they may be complicit in human rights violations that are taking place now in Colombia. Three million people have been forcibly displaced and their land stolen by paramilitaries connected with the government.

Could the member for Nickel Belt tell the House why the Conservatives are trying to push this complicity with a government that has its hands stained with blood?

● (1345)

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Madam Speaker, the member asked me why the Conservatives are pushing this free trade deal but I would remind the member that without the help of the Liberals this free trade agreement would be dead. If memory serves me right, they initiated this free trade agreement.

The member also mentioned the MPs from across northern Ontario. I can assure my colleague that most of us from northern Ontario, at one time or another, belonged to a trade union. If we lived in Colombia, we would not be here today. We probably would be dead. This is the type of agenda that the Conservatives and the Liberals want to push on the people of Colombia.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is with a great deal of emotion that I rise today in the debate on Bill C-2. In all my political career, I did not believe that I would one day have to speak about this kind of agreement.

I feel the strong emotion because, in 1974 and 1976, 36 and 34 years ago, the World Confederation of Labour and the Latin-American Confederation of Workers, or the *Central Latinoamericana de Trabajadores* (CLAT), asked me to spend several months in Colombia to help to establish agricultural and food cooperatives.

At that time, we were closely watched for our own protection because we were trade unionists. In a way, we were protected by world opinion. If a foreign trade unionist was harassed, it made international headlines. But local unionists could suffer almost any kind of unimaginable atrocity. To keep us safe, the unions in Colombia at the time provided us with double protection. If one person lost sight of us, there always had to be a second person who could see us, so that, if we disappeared, it could be immediately made public.

People my age will remember Marcel Pépin, who was kidnapped in Argentina in 1976. I was in Colombia at the same time. What saved Marcel Pépin, who was president of the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux*, was precisely international opinion. I say that because, as soon as I became aware of this proposed agreement for the first time, and having watched how things have evolved in Latin America, and especially in Colombia, I said to myself that not much progress has been made on human rights or the basic rights of the people there.

Government Orders

I have watched the current situation very closely, and, in fact, very little has changed. Back then, paramilitaries committed murder with the complicity of the state. Paramilitaries still commit murder with the complicity of the state. International organizations are well aware that 30 people who are very close to the president of Colombia, members of the Congress of Colombia, are also very close to the paramilitaries. In the Congress, 60 people have close ties to the paramilitaries, and the crimes that they commit are well known.

In the past 20 years, 4,800 trade unionists have been killed and thousands have disappeared. In this country, killing unionists and those in charge of agricultural cooperatives and agrarian organizations has become a trivial matter. I know that for some people here in the House it is trivial, simply because it is happening elsewhere.

Turning a blind eye to these types of things, even from afar, also means that you are endangering your own values. The two major parties that are contending for power and government status here are not only suggesting that this is acceptable elsewhere, but also that we will sign a trade agreement with them. But today's assessment, recognized by international experts, is that this is a rogue state when it comes to human rights. Let me say that again: this is a rogue state when it comes to human rights. I am at a loss when I see how quickly they can get on board to support such a bill.

• (1350)

There are still child labourers in this country. There are still workers who have no rights in this country. They definitely do not have the right to unionize. It is no coincidence that only 5% of workers in this country are unionized. Those who choose to unionize risk their lives in doing so. The only recognized labour organizations are the ones that support the Colombian government's claim that there is a right to unionize, when, in reality, that does not exist.

I think that it is important to consider the following proverb: A man is known by the company he keeps.

I encourage our Conservative and Liberal colleagues to think about this proverb as well as what they are about to do. It is not just about a relationship. It is about an agreement, about associating ourselves with something, thereby approving it, even though it is at odds with our values regarding the development of natural resources.

When companies have the right to invest, when their investments are protected and when there are no measures to protect human rights, that creates a situation that is not worthy of what we claim to stand for. We claim to stand for a society that is not only democratic, but willing to fight for democracy to uphold human rights. This is what our Liberal and Conservative colleagues are giving up on.

It is easy to sit out the debate. Personally, I find it disconcerting that our Liberal and Conservative friends have been missing from the debate for a few hours. It is embarrassing. They support a bill that would implement a free trade deal with a country that tramples on human rights, yet they do not have the backbone to stand up, say why they support this agreement and argue against what we are saying in this House.

We are abdicating our responsibility when we claim that what we are proposing is good not only for our own people, but for the people we are going to trade with. Even our own people disagree. Even Canadians and particularly Quebecers do not support the idea that

this bill promotes investment and protects only investments by companies that often behave badly abroad. We are talking about mining companies, for one.

We know what happened to two writers who wrote about what mining companies were doing in African countries. They were sued for millions of dollars because they dared to describe what was happening.

I call on our colleagues to reconsider and think about what Mr. Fowler said on the weekend at the event organized by the Liberals. He said that they should not make so many compromises in order to achieve power. They are not trying to achieve power with compromises anymore, but with cowardice, and we will not stand for it. That is why we are going to vote against Bill C-2.

• (1355)

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Madam Speaker, this gives me the opportunity to note that the speech we just heard was inspired by experience, but at the same time, it was also very inspiring.

I do not believe it is because of a lack of understanding on their part. The Liberals, like the Conservatives, know very well what this is all about. The question I would like to ask is an extension of his speech.

Ultimately, when it comes to supporting this free trade agreement with Colombia, is that not simply encouraging and supporting the fact that there are people in that country who use their power to completely ignore human rights? That is the situation before us.

What my colleague from Chambly—Borduas experienced when he went to Colombia—I did not have the opportunity or privilege of going—is what allows him to dot the i's and cross the t's. He was there for several weeks, so he was able to see the situation first hand. That is very inspiring. I think our Liberal and Conservative colleagues should also draw inspiration from him when it comes time to vote on this.

I would like him to comment further on the fact that supporting such a treaty would be tantamount to encouraging the violation of human rights.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine for his question. He does magnificent work.

On a city block in Bogota, Colombia, there is a huge house with armed guards. Inside there are extraordinary works of art that the conquistadors collected, that is, stole from the Mayan people. When you enter this site, you are searched in every room to make sure you do not take anything.

While works of art are being so carefully protected, in the streets outside there are children and elderly people dying from disease. You see them. They are there. Children who are only three or four years old are often looking after smaller ones.

Statements by Members

That is the regime seeking our support. It is a regime that worships the golden calf and does not respect human rights.

To support Bill C-2, as the Liberals and Conservatives do, is to protect the golden calf at the expense of human existence.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member will have two minutes left for questions and comments after oral question period.

Statements by members. The hon. member for Crowfoot.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

RURAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadian families planning their vacation should know that rural Alberta offers all the best in summer vacations.

The Growing Rural Tourism Conference is an initiative of the Camrose Regional Exhibition, Alberta Tourism, Parks & Recreation, Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development and Travel Alberta. The 10th annual conference will be hosted by the Camrose Regional Exhibition, April 12 to 14.

Our communities understand the importance of our rural tourism industry, and the many and unique opportunities it offers. During the current economic times, our tourism industry boosts local economies and provides great attractions and experiences for Canadian families.

When one visits Alberta, it is not just for the beautiful mountains and sunshine; there is much more. We have great music, live theatre, historic sites, museums, golf, and rodeos everywhere.

I urge members to come visit the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller and see the hoodoos. There is the Big Valley Jamboree, country music at its best in Camrose; the historical Atlas Coal Mine; the Canadian Badlands Passion Play; and the world's largest lamp.

* * *

EPILEPSY AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, March is Epilepsy Awareness Month in Canada.

Epilepsy is not well understood despite afflicting 300,000 Canadians. The public's lack of knowledge creates fear, discrimination, and stigma surrounding those with this condition.

Each day 42 of our fellow Canadians learn they have epilepsy; 60% of them will be either young children or senior citizens. They face no formalized diagnosis system.

There is a need for an effective and improved means of control and a need for accurate diagnoses. They face the prospect of having behaviour and emotional issues simply from a condition that is so little understood. One-third of people with epilepsy do not yet have an effective treatment.

I invite my colleagues to join with my constituents Margaret Maye, Gary Neumann, and their son Thomas of Epilepsy Cure Initiative, to help give thousands of Canadians control back over their lives.

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[Translation]

JEAN LABONTÉ

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Madam Speaker, despite the Canadian sledge hockey team's heartbreaking defeat at the Vancouver Paralympic Games, I would like to congratulate all of the players, especially Gatineau citizen Jean Labonté, team captain and defenceman.

I would like to highlight Jean Labonté's courage, determination and indomitable will. Despite the team's defeat, he showed that he is a first-rate athlete and a great and passionate man. I cannot help but admire this accomplished player. As a hockey fan, I know that he and his team gave us the most exciting games of the whole event.

I do not know whether he will continue to play next year. I have heard rumours that he has played his last game. If that is true, then my Bloc Québécois colleagues and I would like to wish him the best of luck in his future endeavours.

Bravo, Jean Labonté.

* * *

[English]

NORMAN WELLS OIL FIELD

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Madam Speaker, recent news reports about the Conservative government's plans to sell off its share of the Norman Wells oil field as a way of balancing the books have my constituents greatly concerned.

In September 1988 Canada signed an enabling agreement with the Government of the Northwest Territories that all oil and gas resource revenues from the onshore NWT, except those committed to aboriginal claim settlements, shall be reserved for the NWT.

In 1999 the Federal Court ruled that payments to Canada from the Norman Wells oil field are resource revenues. Based on that decision, any revenues, including those from a sale of the oil field, belong to the NWT. This oil field is being held in trust for the people of the Northwest Territories and should be treated as such.

It is high time the Conservative government recognized its responsibility to its northern territories.

ACTS OF BRAVERY

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 4 of this year Tony Tingskou received the medal of bravery from the Governor General for his heroic rescue of two people from a burning car after a devastating accident.

In 2007 Mr. Tingskou came upon an accident scene in Abbotsford and chose to pull over to see if he could help. In spite of the fire and smoke, Tony and two other rescuers risked their own lives by smashing one of the car windows and pulling a 16-year-old girl and her father from the car and certain death.

I would like to ask all my colleagues in this House to join me in honouring Tony Tingskou for his heroic actions. A true hero is someone who puts his or her own life in jeopardy in order to save the lives of others and Tony did just that.

Congratulations Tony.

* * *

• (1405)

AUTISM

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April 2 is World Autism Awareness Day, a day when autism advocacy groups call on their governments to take necessary measures to raise awareness about this neural development disorder and to encourage early diagnosis and prevention.

As there is not yet a cure, autism spectrum disorder is treatable through many different therapies. Without a cure for this lifelong disability, early detection, diagnosis and interventions are key factors to help each individual affected by ASD to reach his or her unique potential.

Many Canadian researchers are playing lead roles in many global research initiatives to help determine the onsets, as well as to develop a cure. The government needs to support the initiative to develop a national strategy for autism in order to help continued research and provide better co-ordination of federal assistance.

I encourage all members of Parliament to learn more about autism spectrum disorder following question period today in room 238-S.

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CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year as we celebrate the 65th anniversary of the victory of Europe and the liberation of the Netherlands, it hearkens one back to the sacrifices of our greatest generation.

To me, it is names of heroes such as Olaf Storseth, Walter Thompson, Morris Melnyk and others of the 14th Canadian Hussars from my area who joined the 1.1 million Canadian men and women of their generation on the boot of Italy and the shores of Normandy and in the liberation of the Netherlands to fight for democracy and freedom. In many ways, they gave up their today so that the generations that followed could have their tomorrow.

As we take time to remember them and their victory, let us also remember our heroes of today. Our men and women of the Canadian armed forces still carry on this proud tradition of sacrifice and

Statements by Members

gallantry in action in Afghanistan, Haiti and other theatres around the world.

I ask all members of the House to join me in recognizing the tremendous past and present of the men and women of the Canadian armed forces.

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[Translation]

LA REVUE

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 20, *La Revue*, an independent newspaper, won the 2009 business of the year award at the Mascouche chamber of commerce's 2010 gala of excellence.

The weekly paper, headquartered in Terrebonne, won the award because it has been committed to and involved in the development of the RCM of Les Moulins for 50 years. In his acceptance speech, Gilles Bordonado, president and CEO of *La Revue*, emphasized the symbiotic relationship between his paper and the RCM of Les Moulins, each helping and promoting the other.

Mr. Bordonado dedicated the award to the paper's founder, Aimé Despatis, who passed away last year. The whole team at *La Revue* is passionately committed to the pursuit of excellence that enabled Mr. Despatis to make his paper a success.

I would like to congratulate the whole team at *La Revue* on this well-deserved award. Long live this independent newspaper.

* * *

[English]

REFUGEE SYSTEM

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has one of the most generous asylum systems in the world, but our system is broken. It is crippled by long delays and a cumbersome process that results in claims sometimes taking more than a decade to resolve. These delays encourage people not in need of protection to make an asylum claim and abuse the generosity of our system.

Today I am pleased to say that our government announced balanced reforms to improve Canada's asylum system and will allow us to provide faster protection to those fleeing persecution and will implement faster removals for those making bogus refugee claims. Additionally, these improvements to our system will also allow our government to help more refugees settle in Canada and increase our resettlement assistance program funding to \$54 million, the first increase in 10 years.

These new measures will strengthen Canada's asylum system while ensuring Canada continues to exceed its international domestic obligation. I encourage all opposition parties to support this important legislation.

*Statements by Members***PASSOVER**

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night and tonight Jewish families and their guests are celebrating Passover to commemorate the passage of the Jewish people from slavery to freedom.

It is a time of family celebration with Seders often shared with friends of many faiths and many backgrounds. The rituals and celebrations of Passover are, of course, cherished by Jews throughout the world, but the messages are universal: to recognize the strangers in our midst, to understand the importance of protecting the vulnerable, to celebrate those who have overcome injustice as we remember those whose oppression continues.

All Canadians can share in these messages as we express our profound solidarity with Jews throughout the world.

* * *

● (1410)

HONDA CANADA

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a great day for Alliston, for Simcoe County, for the Ontario economy and for the Canadian automotive industry as a whole.

Today, Honda Canada announced it will add a second shift to its facility in Alliston. Honda will create more than 400 new jobs, further signalling the recovery of the automotive industry and it is indeed gaining momentum.

This signals confidence in highly skilled Canadian workers and confirms that Canada has the right conditions to attract business investments and create jobs.

While the leader of the Liberals continues to spend his time thinking up new ways to raise our taxes, our Conservative government has been hard at work creating this vibrant economic environment for companies like Honda to flourish and to contribute to this great country.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I announced the tabling of Bill C-501 which will put pension plans at the front of the line when a company enters bankruptcy protection or undertakes restructuring.

Workers at AbitibiBowater and other forestry companies across Canada have waited too long for the government to assist their struggling sector or failing that, at least protect their pensions.

Now, we know the Conservative government can move quickly when it chooses to do so. After all, it banded together with the Liberal caucus in December to pass its federal HST bill, Bill C-62, in just four days.

I hope all members of this place will recognize the urgency of securing the pensions of hard-working Canadians and will commit to not just supporting, but fast-tracking the passage of Bill C-501 in the interests of all our constituents.

[Translation]

PAT BURNS

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday the entire country was there in spirit with our Prime Minister, to pay tribute in Stanstead to a great Canadian who had an outstanding career in the National Hockey League.

“...maybe there's a Wayne Gretzky or a Mario Lemieux or a Sidney Crosby sitting here, but what is most important, I think, is that kids will have a safe place to play.” Those are the words of Pat Burns, winner of three Jack Adams trophies, the award given every year to the best coach in the NHL. He is the only person ever to win with three different teams.

Mr. Burns—a Stanley Cup winner and coach for 14 years with the Canadiens, the Maple Leafs, the Bruins and the Devils—will have an arena named in his honour in the heart of Stanstead, a community where he has been so actively involved.

For the confidence and respect he inspires, I invite all members of this House to join me in celebrating a great Canadian, Pat Burns.

* * *

CONSERVATIVE PARTY PLATFORM

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the cat is out of the bag and we now know where the Prime Minister is getting his policies from. The Prime Minister is working for the religious right lobbies.

It comes as no surprise that many aspects of the Conservatives' regressive, reformist agenda are based on the ideology of the religious right. There are many recent examples where this government's position falls into line with the positions of these groups: refusing to fund a maternal health program abroad that would include every family planning option including abortion as a last resort; removing from the immigrants' handbook the passage stating that homosexuals have rights; cutting funding to KAIROS, an agency that does work in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It is shameful that the Conservatives choose to promote the regressive agenda of the religious right, even if that—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Wascana.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last weekend the 17th National Aboriginal Achievement Awards were held in Regina. Every year these awards celebrate the outstanding accomplishments of Canada's first nations, Inuit and Métis people.

The 14 recipients this year are: 96-year-old William Commanda for lifetime achievement; Skawennio Barnes, an outstanding youth; Kananginak Pootoogook; Ellen Melcosky; Tom Crane Bear; Raoul McKay; Danny Beaton; Madeleine Dion Stout; Donald Worme; Kenneth Atsenhainton Deer; Eric Robinson; Edith Cloutier; Monica Pinette; and Doug Henry.

From the Parliament of Canada to each one of these achievers, we say congratulations. To Roberta Jamieson and her colleagues at the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, we say thanks and well done.

Canadians can watch the whole awards show on Global TV and APTN on May 1, hosted by the fantastic Andrea Menard.

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•(1415)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's economic action plan is working to protect jobs today and create the jobs of tomorrow. A large part of our recession-fighting plan is lower taxes for Canadians.

The proof is in the numbers. Canada's economy has seen job gains in five of the last seven months, and since last July, almost 160,000 new jobs have been created.

Just today Honda announced that more than 400 new jobs will be added to its workforce in Alliston, Ontario. Just last week in my hometown of Oshawa, 600 workers were informed of a new third shift to start in October.

Yet the Liberal leader wants to stop the recovery in its tracks by raising the GST, bringing back his carbon tax on everything and hiking job-killing business taxes. All Liberals talk about is what they will tax. Higher taxes and reckless spending do not create jobs and they do not encourage economic growth.

With his talk of higher taxes, the Liberal leader shows he just does not get it and that Canada just cannot afford him.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Foreign Affairs told the House that there would be no request from the Americans to extend Canada's mission in Afghanistan. However, yesterday Hillary Clinton came to town and blew the government's cover. It is perfectly obvious the request had either been made or was just about to be made. It is perfectly obvious the government knew the request had either been made or was coming.

Why did the Conservatives mislead Canadians last week?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really do not know what the Leader of the Opposition is talking about. The government's position could not be clearer. Whether we get asked about it this week, or last week or next week,

Oral Questions

we passed a motion in Parliament in 2008, and Canada's military mission in Afghanistan will end in 2011.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, this very day, the Government of Canada signed a G8 pledge to "support Afghanistan on its road to peace and stability". What, in precise terms, does that commit Canada to do after 2011?

Why will the Prime Minister not level with the Canadian people and with the House about the plans the government has for the Canadian mission in Afghanistan after 2011?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not all of the G8 members have a military mission in Afghanistan.

We have been very clear that Canada's military mission in Afghanistan will end in 2011, but we will continue with a mission on governance, on development and on humanitarian assistance. We welcome the input of the opposition into those deliberations.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are more likely to hear the truth from Hillary Clinton than from this government.

The Prime Minister said it was the end of the combat mission, fine, but we do not know what, exactly, the government's plans are for the mission after 2011.

Will the Prime Minister commit to sharing his plans with Canadians and allowing a full debate and vote in this House?

•(1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the same answer that I had last week, and it will be the same next week: Canada's military mission in Afghanistan will end in 2011, in accordance with a resolution adopted by Parliament.

We plan on remaining involved in Afghanistan in terms of development, governance and humanitarian assistance. We invite the opposition to share its ideas on the future of this mission.

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[English]

ARCTIC SUMMIT

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 17, Liberals warned the government to include Arctic aboriginal peoples in its Arctic summit. It ignored the warning and now Canada is being embarrassed by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Great Inuit leaders, such as former circumpolar ambassador Mary Simon and Nobel Peace Prize nominee Sheila Watt-Cloutier, have complained about the government's lack of engagement with Canada's Arctic peoples.

Why has the Conservative government again embarrassed us on the world stage and left us in the bizarre position of Hillary Clinton having to defend Canada's aboriginal people?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I told the House yesterday, this meeting was called for those states that share a coastline on the Arctic Ocean. The Arctic Council chair, Denmark's foreign minister, will brief other members of the Arctic Council. The Minister of Foreign Affairs briefed Canada's indigenous people before the meeting and will be talking to them afterwards.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the parliamentary secretary convinced Canada's Inuit Athabaskan and Gwich'in people with that answer. They also live on the coastline.

The conference results get worse. Sweden, Finland and Iceland have all publicly rebuked the government about their exclusion. The Norwegian foreign minister has been openly critical of what he implies is the Conservative cold war mentality.

Why this disarray and embarrassment on the international stage?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition's hand-wringing is completely unnecessary. Northerners play a very important role in determining the future of our Arctic waters. As I already explained, the Arctic Council chair, the foreign minister of Denmark, will brief other members of the council in due course.

* * *

[Translation]

TAX HARMONIZATION

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from a letter sent on March 18 to the Quebec finance minister, we learn that the Conservative government is refusing to compensate Quebec for harmonizing its sales tax. Under the 1992 agreement to harmonize the GST, Quebec collects and administers the tax, and that works very well.

Why is the Prime Minister intent on scuttling an agreement that has been in place since 1992 and refusing to pay Quebec \$2.2 billion in compensation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government respects the agreement signed in 1992. It indicates that there are still two taxes in Quebec. These taxes are collected by the Quebec government and every year we pay the Quebec government for that.

The Quebec government has expressed interest in true harmonization of sales taxes, like that agreed to by a number of other provinces. We are prepared to continue our negotiations to reach such an agreement.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the 1992 harmonization is not fake; it is true harmonization. It has been cited as an example by all federal governments since 1992.

The government's stubbornness is depriving Quebec of \$2.2 billion that it really needs.

Why is the Prime Minister insisting on putting federal shackles on the Quebec nation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): What the Bloc leader has said is not true. Quebec has not harmonized its taxes

the way other provinces have. Quebec collects two taxes for two governments.

In the other provinces there is a harmonization agreement and only one tax. We are seeking a similar agreement with the Quebec government. It is in the interest of all Quebecers and Quebec industries.

• (1425)

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on page 68 of his 2006 budget, the minister mentioned that five provinces had not harmonized their sales tax, and Quebec was not among them. This means that our tax has been harmonized since 1992. Now, the Minister of Finance is contradicting himself.

Is this just an excuse not to give the Quebec nation its due, while the Quebec Conservatives look on approvingly? Billions of dollars for Ontario, zilch for Quebec.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the discussions with Quebec's finance minister will continue. We have made some progress, but we still face challenges to true harmonization, as it exists in Ontario, British Columbia and the Maritimes. Talks between the two governments are ongoing.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, until the Conservatives were elected, the loss of more than 5% of the tax base was one of the conditions for compensation when a province harmonized its sales tax.

But the Minister of Finance, who was formerly the Ontario finance minister, dropped this condition in order to accommodate his own province to the tune of \$4.3 billion.

Why can't the Minister of Finance be open-minded enough to let Quebec keep on collecting both taxes?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, governments that have harmonized their tax have only one tax, not two. We are facing this sort of challenge in our talks with the Government of Quebec. There must be one tax, not two, for there to be true tax harmonization in Quebec.

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[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just weeks before a parliamentary review of the Environmental Assessment Act is to get under way where members of the House can review that legislation and strengthen it, the government has tabled a budget implementation bill. Buried right in the heart of that bill is the removal of a key trigger for federal environmental assessment, namely, whether there is federal money involved in the project.

Why is the Prime Minister gutting environmental assessment at a time when Canadians' awareness of the importance of the environment is at an all-time high?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker. The changes in question were actually made by regulation last year, in agreement with the provinces, to simplify and remove duplication from the environmental assessment system in the country. It has been very effective and welcomed by all our provincial partners, including some NDP provincial partners.

In terms of delivering the economic stimulus, it makes sense to make these measures permanent because they work for the environment and for the economy and they are supported by all levels of government.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Parliament is to conduct a planned seven-year review the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act in June. This is an opportunity for members to study the issue and for the public to get involved and testify about what is working and what is not, but the government has decided to pre-empt the consultations.

Why is the government trying to ram weaker environmental protections down our throats without consultation or debate?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the government made these changes last year in the economic action plan. The provinces and municipalities supported all these changes to benefit the environment and the economy. We do not want duplication in environmental protection in this country.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, these are not going to be just short-term changes to the environmental protection legislation. They are going to be permanent. They are essentially going to say that for programs like the building Canada, green infrastructure and rural infrastructure programs, there are not going have to be any federal environmental assessments in the future. That means bridges, highways and so on. As long as they have federal funds, they will be exempted from environmental assessment. This is a major step backwards. It could be seen as a plan to exempt Tory slush fund projects, but I am sure we will be told no.

Why are the Conservatives gutting the environmental—

• (1430)

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the leader of the NDP is completely out to lunch on this.

The fact is other levels of government across the country have been insisting that we not duplicate environmental assessment, that we work with them. That is what we have done. The NDP government in Manitoba demanded it, along with all kinds of other governments. We have done it. It works well, and we should continue it.

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening, Finance officials confirmed that employment insurance premiums will increase by 35% over the next four years. They also confirmed that the minister has the power to set the premium rates he deems reasonable.

Will the minister finally admit that the Conservative government itself is responsible for this huge hike, or will he contend that his own officials lied?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, actually that was a decision by Parliament. In the implementation of the 2008 budget, Parliament approved the creation of the EI Financing Board, which will set the premiums.

What we have done is freeze the premiums for two years, as part of the economic action plan to provide a stimulus to Canadian economy. That we have done. However, at the end of the stimulus time, which as members know is next March, then we will go back to Parliament's wish that we go ahead and have the EI Financing Board, which will set the premiums and move toward balance.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the Conservative minister, the cat is truly out of the bag. His own officials have confirmed that the budget raises EI premiums by 35% and the cabinet does control the rate.

Now that the minister has nowhere to hide, will he finally admit that it is the Conservative government, and not some outside agency, that is imposing this punishing tax hike?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, following the will of Parliament, we will be moving toward balance through the board.

We will not do what the previous Liberal government did in the mid-1990s, and that is, syphon off somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$58 billion to \$60 billion to use to balance the budget at that time.

Who said that? It was Professor Courchesne, from Queen's University, who said:

Martin's offloading did not stop there: he siphoned off somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$5 [billion] to \$6 billion annually.... The cumulative EI surplus that the Liberals brought into the consolidated revenue fund reached a staggering \$60 billion.

* * *

[Translation]

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the budget bill will take away any assurance that Atomic Energy of Canada Limited will not be sold to foreign interests.

Indeed, this bill eliminates the need for an act of Parliament to approve the sale and gives Cabinet a free hand to allow foreign interests to take it over.

Are they trying to hide the fact that the Prime Minister has already made up his mind to sell the CANDU technology?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker. Indeed the hon. member raises a question about the application, perhaps, of the Investment Canada Act. What I can say is, based on our considerations, even if the Investment Canada Act is not applicable in this case, this government would review that situation, which is a speculative situation, certainly with the best interests of Canada and Canadians.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not mention the Investment Canada Act.

The degree of government incompetence is unprecedented. It is rushing ahead with the outright sale of our nuclear industry to foreign interests at a time when there is a global renaissance in this sector.

It will be a fire sale, after it has succeeded in diminishing AECL's value by announcing its privatization policy in the midst of a bid to build new reactors in Ontario.

Why are the Conservatives hollowing out another key segment of our economy? Did they learn nothing from the Avro Arrow fiasco?

• (1435)

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our goals are clear. We want to ensure energy security in Canada, while at the same time taking into account the taxpayers' ability to pay.

In the process, it is also important to always seek to ensure a viable future for Canada's nuclear industry. That is what we are doing; that is all. They should stop their scare tactics and fearmongering. We are doing the responsible thing in restructuring that company.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRES

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Hillary Clinton was right to condemn the fact that the first nations and three members of the Arctic Council were not present at the summit organized by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. She spoke about how important it is that all coastal nations work closely together, particularly because Arctic sovereignty is a source of conflict.

How can the minister justify the fact that Finland, Iceland, Sweden and indigenous peoples were not invited?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been through this several times this week, but for my colleague's information, this meeting was convened for nations that have coastlines along the Arctic Ocean.

The Arctic Council chair, Denmark's foreign minister, will brief those members, and of course, our Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke with our territorial premiers and the indigenous leaders and will debrief them after this meeting.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, do we really need a reminder that indigenous peoples live on the Arctic coastline? It is interesting to note that the countries that have not signed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples were in the majority at the Arctic summit. It is hard to not see the Conservative government's intentions with that.

How can the Minister of Foreign Affairs seriously discuss the future of the Arctic in the absence of the member countries of the Arctic Council as well as indigenous peoples?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer remains the same.

[English]

Northerners do indeed play a fundamental role in Canada's Arctic sovereignty strategy. This includes indigenous peoples and all others who live in the Arctic.

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*[Translation]***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, because of the new reform announced by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, refugee claimants from countries deemed to be safe will not have access to the appeal division. Yet, even in several democratic countries, minority groups are often persecuted. Think, for example, about women who are abused and about homosexuals.

Could the minister explain why these refugees will not have access to the same protection as others?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the balanced reform announced today, all refugee claimants will have access to a fair process consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and with our international and national legal obligations.

Even the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said that it is legitimate for countries to have an accelerated process for countries deemed safe, such as France, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. They all have the same accelerated process as we do for claimants from safe countries of origin.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by creating a refugee appeal division, the government acknowledges that its officials can make mistakes in the first instance. But the same errors can also occur with nationals from so-called safe countries who will not have access to an appeal mechanism.

How can the minister find it acceptable that refugees receive justice according to their country of origin?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will quote Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

• (1440)

[English]

[T]here are indeed safe countries of origin. There are indeed countries in which there is a presumption that refugee claims will probably be not as strong as in other countries.

[Translation]

In his view, everyone should always have access to a hearing. That is what the balanced reform will make possible.

Last year, we received 2,500 claims from the country with the highest number of refugee claims and the acceptance rate was less than 1%.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN COUNCIL ON LEARNING

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Council on Learning is an organization that has lost all of its federal funding. That is a national embarrassment. Don Drummond has said that the CCL is a valuable service, and an official at the University of Alberta said that this is a terrible, short-sighted action. Even the Secretary-General of the OECD pledged his personal support for the CCL.

The CCL provides research on learning. It is independent, factual and evidence-based: all the things the government hates. Why is it reducing corporate taxes, which we cannot afford, and gutting the funding to the CCL, which we cannot afford to do without?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was always very clear that the funding to the CCL was for a fixed term. That term has now expired. We do recognize the importance of acquiring good learning information. That is why we are working with the provinces to develop it beyond what StatsCan and our own data provides.

The results are evident. The results of our unprecedented investments in learning information are demonstrated in the most recent Conference Board of Canada report, which gives Canada an A when it comes to education and skills training.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the facts are that the CCL is recognized for its excellent work on serious issues: the need for serious early learning and child care, the need for a real strategy on post-secondary education, the lack of government action to address literacy levels, and the need for more robust workforce training. The government can stand for corporate tax cuts. Canadians want to stand for education. We will stand with Canadians.

The CCL is an evidence-based organization that would be a key resource to any government that was serious about education. Why did the Conservatives attack the CCL? Is it that when it comes to education, they cannot handle the truth?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about the truth when it comes to education. The truth is that his Liberal Party, when the Liberals were in government, cut \$25 billion out of education and child care. That is the truth.

Oral Questions

Here is the greater threat to learning and education: If the Liberals get their way and bring in corporate tax hikes, their carbon tax, and an increase in the GST, they will kill Canadian jobs so that the students who we will be educating will not have jobs to graduate into.

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PENSIONS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week an Ontario court ruling was made that could eliminate long-term disability benefits for 400 Nortel employees, in effect, throwing hundreds of critically ill Canadians onto the street.

The clock is ticking, and people such as Josée Marin and Peter Burns are running out of options. They could be faced with having to decide between food, shelter or medicine.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing today and ask his newly minted senators to pass Bill S-216, amending the bankruptcy act?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we do welcome the input on these very important issues.

As has already been mentioned, my colleague, the Minister of Finance, has launched a Canada-wide consultation on our pension system and on other acts, including the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act in this very question. I encourage all Canadians to give their input.

I would mention that this is the government that implemented the wage earner protection program and amended the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act by creating a limited super-priority of up to \$2,000 for unpaid wages.

We are acting and certainly we will take the hon. member's comments into account.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are hiding behind procedures that they set up to justify the fact that there is no supplementary pension plan. That is unacceptable.

It would be easy for the government to change the law to protect long-term disability plans. That would protect sick people from having to declare bankruptcy through no fault of their own.

Why should we let these people declare bankruptcy when a simple solution is available? How can the Conservative government allow such an injustice?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have implemented a number of solutions. If the opposition wants to suggest ways to improve the process, we will listen.

Oral Questions

The Minister of Finance announced a new mechanism to help all Canadians in that respect. Naturally, we can make more changes if they are in the best interests of Canadians.

* * *

• (1445)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as part of Canada's economic action plan, our government has implemented economic policy designed to increase job growth in the midst of the worst global recession since the 1930s.

Under the leadership of our Prime Minister, our government has lowered corporate taxes, encouraged investment, and most important, created jobs.

With this in mind, could the Minister of Industry please inform us of the wonderful news that we heard today out of Alliston, Ontario?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed I am pleased to rise in the House today and announce that Honda Canada is expanding production at its plant in Alliston, Ontario, creating more than 400 new jobs.

This, of course, is testament to Honda's strong commitment to Canada and confirms that our government is on the right track. While the opposition ponders how to raise taxes on businesses like Honda, this government has successfully created a low-tax environment that is creating jobs in this country.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what does the government have against consulting with aboriginal people? Yesterday, a meeting of select foreign ministers from the Arctic Council ended in disaster with Hillary Clinton basically walking out. Why? Because this government failed to invite all stakeholders, including the six permanent indigenous organizations on the council.

Climate change, resource extraction and other looming issues will have a direct impact on the Arctic's indigenous population. Is there a reason that indigenous people were excluded from taking their seats at the conference?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question, but I fear she exaggerates. The question has been completely explained, but I will add that building a strong Canadian north is an essential part of building our nation. The government clearly understands the potential of the north more than any other government before it.

While the previous government talked an awful lot about the Arctic, we are taking action.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the old colonial attitude of this government toward first nations is disturbing.

Buried on the INAC web page yesterday was an announcement that the government had signed a memorandum of understanding with the United States on how to deal with indigenous peoples. This came as a surprise to many aboriginal people here in Canada.

Can the minister tell us what consultations were undertaken with the indigenous peoples of Canada who would be affected by this memorandum of understanding, and what impact will it have on their lives?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was a very good day. I met with Secretary Salazar here.

We have had discussions since I was down in Washington last year, talking about ways his government and ours can share best practices on things that we have learned on both sides of the border and errors that have been made on both sides of the border, so that we can make sure we design programs and work with aboriginal people. We have talked about everything from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to the apology that was made here in the House of Commons and many other things.

It was the first time ever that the United States government and the Canadian government came to such an agreement. It was a great moment for aboriginals.

* * *

[Translation]

HAITI

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 26, 2010, the Quebec Forest Industry Council and its partners proposed to the Prime Minister that Canada should build 2,000 houses for Haiti. Since then, the industry has been calling on the government to promote this project at the conference on the reconstruction of Haiti, which begins Wednesday in New York. The forestry industry has yet to receive any response to its proposal.

Can the government tell us if it plans to promote that project at the conference in New York on the reconstruction of Haiti?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right that, on Wednesday, the countries of the international community that have been working in Haiti will be meeting. We will be reviewing, along with the government of Haiti, the next steps forward. We will be renewing our commitment to Haiti and to the Haitian people.

We will be coming back with advice and decisions that Canada will make as to the best contribution it can make.

Oral Questions

•(1450)

*[Translation]***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government promised to fast-track family class applications in order to help the people of Haiti. The minister has said that he still has not received the 3,000 new applications from Quebec. But I am talking about the 1,600 applications that are already on his desk, waiting to be processed.

When will the minister issue clear directives to expedite the reunification of Haitian families?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

I share her concerns about families of Haitian origin that want to be reunited with relatives from Haiti. That is why we put in place measures to expedite family sponsorship applications. I am happy to announce that we have already processed several hundred such cases and that our officials have added resources to process these sponsorship applications much more quickly.

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*[English]***SOFTWOOD LUMBER INDUSTRY**

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's budget bill finally saw the results of the government's flawed deal on softwood lumber: a punitive \$68 million tax on softwood for producers from Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec.

We were falsely told that the softwood lumber deal would end litigation and penalties and hardship for Canadian companies. Litigation is up, and we are now losing lawsuits instead of winning them.

Why is our lumber industry forced to pay for the government's incompetence through yet another tax increase in budget 2010?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber agreement continues to provide tremendous benefits for Canada. As a result of the softwood lumber agreement, \$5 billion in taxes that had been collected by the Americans were repatriated to Canadian businesses.

There is a reason the softwood lumber agreement continues to have the strong support of all the provinces and the industry, and that is it is a good agreement that works in the best interests of Canadian softwood lumber companies and workers.

[Translation]

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber industry has been devastated by the recession. Tens of thousands of jobs have been lost since the industry peaked in 2007. Companies have closed. Some communities have lost their biggest source of jobs. And what is this government doing? It is forcing producers in four provinces to pay for its \$60 million mistake.

Once again, why is the government making the forestry sector pay for its mistakes, when this sector cannot afford to do so?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber agreement has been working well for over three years. It provided access to the U.S. market, gave the industry the certainty it needed and enabled Canadian softwood lumber producers to recover more than \$5 billion in duties.

The provinces and the industry support the agreement because it is working well for companies and for workers.

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

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats have long pushed for fast and fair refugee reform, but fairness means that all refugees should have the right to appeal.

Instead, the minister is asking this House to give him total and absolute power to deny refugee claimants equal rights. That is dangerous and arrogant.

Does the minister honestly believe he has the right to pick and choose which groups should become second-class refugees?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no, I do not and nor do the balanced reforms suggest that.

What we have done is to deliver a new refugee appeal division, faster protection for bona fide refugees. They will not have to wait for a year and a half; they will be getting protection within 60 days. There will be faster removal of false claimants. There will no longer be five years of gaming the system; they will be out within a year. There will be public service decision makers, a significant backlog reduction, more resettled refugees from abroad, more support for those refugees to get integrated.

The NDP asked for all of those things. Can the NDP not take yes, for once, as an answer?

•(1455)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all people who face persecution should be treated equally, no matter which country they come from.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said people do flee persecution from democratic countries. The consequences for this flawed and unfair refugee reform could be imprisonment, torture and even death.

How can the minister ask this House to support a bill that can result in such tragic consequences?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us make sure we do not get carried away with the kind of demagoguery we are hearing here.

Oral Questions

The reality is that we are adding a full complete appeal division. This balanced reform will exceed Canada's legal obligations under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the relevant UN conventions, and it includes a tool to deal with spikes in unfounded claims from democratic countries. According to the UN high commissioner, there are indeed safe countries of origin.

There are indeed countries in which there is a presumption that refugee claims will probably not be as strong as in other countries, which is the reason that modern western liberal democracies like Denmark, Finland, Sweden, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands have all adopted—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking action to avoid a two-tiered immigration system, one for immigrants who wait in line, often for years, to come to Canada and another for those who abuse the asylum system not for protection but to try to get into Canada through the back door.

Could the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism tell the House how these new reforms will fix the two-tiered immigration system and provide better protection for legitimate asylum seekers?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for too long Canada's asylum system has been broken with huge backlogs, enormous waiting times, a year and a half to get a hearing.

What we are doing is finally bringing about balanced reforms that will give protection to bona fide refugees in just a few weeks and that will remove false refugee claimants in less than a year rather than taking several years to game our system.

This is a reform that will allow more UN refugees who are in camps abroad to come to Canada and provide them with additional support. It adds more process to protect their rights, the new refugee appeal division.

This is in the best tradition of our humanitarian—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Malpeque.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it never ends with the Minister of State for the Status of Women.

Today we learned that a series of fawning letters to the editor about the minister, sent to newspapers in Simcoe—Grey under the name Jessica Morgan, were actually written by the minister's executive assistant, Jessica Craven. Talk about craven promotion. We have not seen this kind of impersonation since Rahim Jaffer's executive assistant tried to do his boss' radio interviews.

How much more embarrassment can the government take before it fires this minister?

Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the staffer in question, she called me today. She advised me of the situation. We discussed it. We did discuss that it was inappropriate. She apologized and assured me that it will not happen again.

[Translation]

MEDICAL ISOTOPES

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to jeopardizing the health of patients, the isotope crisis is impacting the budgets of Quebec and the provinces. Dr. François Lamoureux, president of the Association des médecins spécialistes en médecine nucléaire du Québec, is still seething: “The government...has acted like amateurs...it has created a crisis throughout the world. This matter has been so badly mishandled—”

The reactor's restart has been announced six times. How can we believe that it will happen this time?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. This is a global problem that requires a global solution. The government has shown leadership by establishing a high level group to deal with the problem. A group of international medical experts is improving coordination of the strategy.

This is unprecedented because, previously, the reactors were competing against one another and there were no discussions. Our budget allocates \$35 million to research in order to identify alternatives, plus \$13 million to clinical trials. Once again, the Bloc does not support the budget.

* * *

● (1500)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business recently conducted a study that indicated that 82% of Canada's entrepreneurs would like the federal government to defer future increases in employment insurance premiums until the \$57 billion surplus has been fully repaid.

If the Minister of Finance truly opposes the Liberals' plundering of the EI fund, why is he using yesterday's Conservative budget bill to finish the job started by the Liberals?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the plain fact is that the previous Liberal government, in the middle of the 1990s, siphoned off the \$58 billion to \$60 billion from the EI fund and put it into the consolidated revenue fund. People do not have to take my word for it. Read what professors—

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Tell Sheila Fraser that.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Wascana does not want to hear this, but read what the professors say, read what the economists say. I will share it with the House. The Liberals took the money. The money is gone. They siphoned it off. When are they going to put it back?

*Government Orders***DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have long desired a more accountable Senate and support term limits for senators. Our Conservative government agrees with Canadians.

Can the Minister of State for Democratic Reform tell the House what he is doing to make this a reality?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed, yesterday this government introduced legislation to limit the terms of senators to eight years. This legislation will ensure that senators gain the experience necessary to fulfill their important role as second sober thought while also allowing the Senate to refresh and renew itself.

I welcome the members opposite to support our efforts to make the Senate more accountable, effective and democratic.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, during the debate tonight pursuant to Standing Order 52, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

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)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1505)

[*Translation*]

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: When Bill C-2 was debated in the House, before oral question period, the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas had the floor. There are two minutes left for questions and comments regarding his speech.

The hon. member for Mississauga South has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in debating this bill, much of the debate has been based on whether there is an implication of trade with regard to improving the human rights situation in Colombia. I wonder if the member has any evidence or information regarding the experience of other countries where human rights questions were brought to bear and whether improvement in trade relations had some impact on the human rights situation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for that very fundamental question.

In the past, when it came to signing agreements with other countries, we took into account their human rights track record, with respect to both labour and the rights of men, women and children. Those are things we considered in the past.

This time, we are going about it differently. We are trivializing the human rights situation. In the comments I made earlier, before oral question period, I said that Colombia could be classified as a rogue state on the human rights front. The proximity between the government and paramilitaries who engage in violence and commit murders is so obvious that it is shocking and despicable to want to conclude an agreement with a state that behaves in such a manner.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the members of the House who have taken a principled stand against the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, in particular the member for Burnaby—New Westminster for his consistent efforts to challenge the ethics of this free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

I have been aware of the situation in Colombia for a number of years and have had the privilege to speak directly to Colombians from all walks of life in regard to the situation they face in their homeland under the Uribe government. In fact, I have many constituents who have fled to Canada because they no longer felt safe in their home country.

In the last session of Parliament, I spoke about the CCFTA and undertook to talk about the lack of environmental protection and labour rights in the agreement, violations of labour rights, violence committed against unionized workers and the anti-trade union atmosphere of Colombia, as well as the murders of trade unionists. These are the norms.

At that time, my colleagues and I took note of the fact that Colombia was the most dangerous place in the world for trade unionists. More than 2,700 Colombian trade unionists have been murdered since 1986 and, tragically, they have been murdered with impunity. There is only a 3% conviction rate for those who murder and, even worse, the agreement that Canada proposes to sign with Colombia has a system of fines for companies that murder their workers.

How can we be party to any agreement that has a provision for killing a trade unionist and paying a fine? It is unspeakable and I believe that once Canadians understand what the proposed Canada-Colombia free trade agreement contains they will reject it.

Government Orders

Today I would like to speak about crimes currently being committed by the Uribe government against indigenous Colombians.

In a recent report released on February 23, Amnesty International called for immediate international action to ensure the survival of indigenous peoples in Colombia. The organization says that guerrilla groups, state security forces and paramilitaries are responsible for grave human rights abuses against indigenous peoples. These abuses include killings, enforced disappearances and kidnappings, sexual abuse of women, recruitment of child soldiers, persecution of indigenous leaders and forced displacement of communities from land that is rich in economic potential. People are forced from their land because these areas are valued for natural resources, including oil and minerals.

Amnesty International has stated that the situation of indigenous peoples in Colombia is nothing short of an emergency. Until countries like Canada recognize the gravity of the situation and exert much needed pressure on the Colombian government, there is a real risk that entire indigenous cultures may be eradicated.

According to the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia, ONIC, the survival of 32 different indigenous peoples in Colombia are at risk as a result of the armed conflict, the impacts of large-scale economic projects and a lack of state support. According to ONIC, at least 114 indigenous women, men and children were killed, many others threatened and thousands driven from their land in 2009 alone.

In its latest report, Amnesty International says that the threats facing indigenous peoples are intensifying and is calling upon guerrilla groups and state security forces to respect the rights of indigenous people not to be dragged into hostilities, and equally important, the right of indigenous peoples to own and control the lands upon which they depend for their cultures and livelihoods. Tragically, indigenous leaders and communities who try to defend their land rights, commonly experience threats, killings and mass displacement.

Colombia's ongoing armed conflict has affected millions across the country and left tens of thousands dead, tortured and forcibly disappeared. The vast majority of victims are civilians. In the last seven years, more than 1,595 indigenous people were killed or forcibly disappeared as a result of the armed conflict, and 4,700 collective threats were reported. In the vast majority of cases, these crimes have not been properly investigated, nor have the perpetrators ever been brought to justice.

Just as with trade unionists, the death toll is rising and still the Conservative government is determined to pursue a trade agreement with a highly questionable regime.

As Amnesty International testified to the House of Commons committee on international trade in November 2009, one of the most worrying trends is a dramatic increase in the number of Colombians forced to flee from their homes. As many as 380,000 in 2008. That brings the total number of internally displaced people in Colombia to between three and four million, among the highest in the world, and growing.

●(1510)

Forced displacement has paved the way for misappropriation of lands, mostly by paramilitaries but also by guerrilla groups. It is estimated that more than four million hectares of land may have been stolen by paramilitaries in this way.

Displacement is one of the greatest threats facing indigenous communities, as in the case of Colombia. I do not believe that it is a coincidence that this happens in areas where oil, rich minerals and remarkable biodiversity is in evidence. International mining, agribusiness and the extractors of oil have a vested interest in these territories, all at the expense of the people who have a right to live on these lands.

We know that multinationals, including Canadian business interests, are in Colombia and are participating in the exploitation of resources.

According to the Colombian director of the UN High Commission for Human Rights, when this displacement to urban centres occurs it becomes very complicated since most of the indigenous women do not know Spanish very well. The immensity of the city frightens them with its anonymity and the lack of solidarity among residents. The women face new problems in raising their children and relating to their partners because the city is not a customary environment. In addition to this uncomfortable environment is the anguish of leaving their homes, running with what little they had or could carry in order to outrun death and desolation.

Accepting new, unfamiliar realities and activities not traditional to indigenous cultures, results in culture shock and disorientation. People experience a way of life and language radically different from their own. This fracturing can result in a breakdown of cultural continuity as young people find themselves in alien environments and deprived of the social and cultural networks and practices necessary for the survival of their communities.

Displaced people are at a heightened risk of destitution, sexual violence, exploitation by criminal gangs, armed groups and discrimination. Even in places in which they seek refuge, they may face further intimidation or violence and have to flee again. The inadequate state response to the needs of internally displaced communities means that some people return to the dangerous situations they fled, and without support or safeguards that should be provided by the state.

The right to traditional lands is crucial to indigenous peoples in Colombia, as elsewhere. It is a vital element in their sense of identity, livelihood and way of life and is crucial for their future.

This of course brings me to the motion put forward by the Liberal Party that it claims would protect human rights in Colombia. This motion would allow Colombia to monitor its own human rights and report on this monitoring if the Colombian government chooses to do that. This is completely inadequate. When one considers the murders, torture and displacement of people, this motion is a sham.

Government Orders

It is clear that the official opposition wants nothing more than to sign onto the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement despite the human, environmental and ethical cost.

I wonder what Canadians would say if they knew that in this month's legislative elections, independent observers were there and reported vote-buying and fraud that allowed narco-paramilitary candidates to maintain influence over the Colombian congress, or about the plea to the Canadian Council for International Co-operation from the Colombian Methodist Church bishop, Juan Alberto Cardona, during his visit to Canada in 2007. The Bishop said, "we know from other places, like Mexico, that these agreements might create more wealth for wealthy people but they make inequities worse. Whatever wealth is created, it does not reach poor people".

The Colombia-Canada free trade agreement was signed behind the backs of the Colombian people, without any real participation from civil society and without any study on its impact. This is something that must be made clear to this Parliament and the people of Canada. The stage is set for further and increased human rights violations.

Colombians have asked Canadian society and this Parliament to demonstrate solidarity with the Colombian people by mobilizing against and refusing to sign the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

For the sake of humanity, we need to listen. When will the current government and the official opposition finally listen?

• (1515)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the questions raised had to do with other jurisdictions and what they were doing. The U.K., Australia, the U.S. and the EU have all had some discussions and activity with regard to trade arrangements with Colombia.

However, I do understand that there has been disagreement. President Obama is very ambitious to improve foreign exports but in his last speech did not mention Colombia as being one of the sources. It would appear that the Congress has one view and the president has another. I wonder if the member has any information on the current status of the trade discussion in the United States.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I am not at all surprised that there is confusion. As we look around this Parliament, all we see is mass confusion. One of the things I did want to touch on, apart from saying that the Belgian government is absolutely against this trade agreement, is the reality that multinationals have interests in Colombia. There are all kinds of important resources there, including oil and gold.

I do not think that it is at all a coincidence that when the Americans built their military bases in Colombia, they built them over oil fields. I wonder who they were protecting and exactly what they were protecting. In the case of Canadian mineral companies, I know that Canadians were involved in the extraction of gold. If one knows anything about the extraction of gold in Colombia, one would know that it used to be done by villagers and the community. They would extract the gold and sell it.

Some years ago, at the insistence of multinationals, the Colombian government nationalized these gold fields and cut them away from

the villagers. When the villagers tried to reclaim their homes and their way of life, they were faced with paramilitaries and slaughter. It would seem to me that, in light of this kind of reality, we should be questioning what any government supporting a free trade agreement with Colombia has as its motive.

• (1520)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech has certainly had the effect of stirring up some Liberal reaction. At least the Liberals are now asking questions about the deal. Groups across Canada such as the Council of Canadians, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the B.C. teachers, the CLC and many other groups have been sending letters and reacting to what the Liberal Party and its critic are doing in terms of propping up and promoting this particular piece of legislation.

The amendment by the member for Kings—Hants and accepted by the government, which resurrects this basically dead agreement, allows Colombian authorities to self-assess their human rights record on an annual basis. This is not a good sign.

What effect does the member think this amendment is going to have on the overall agreement and the implementation of the agreement as far as Canada and Colombia are concerned? How does she think the Liberals believe this amendment is going to help solve this problem?

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, this amendment is just too cozy by half. We know that a Liberal government brought forward the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement initially and was desperate to see it go through the House of Commons and become law. Now, the Conservative government has taken up its clarion call.

I would be very suspicious of any kind of so-called amendment that allows the government of Colombia to monitor things like human rights violations and the deprivation of indigenous people based on its record. It has allowed state-sponsored terror. It is the state that has failed to protect the trade unionists and indigenous people. As often as not, we have seen the state as perpetrator and coordinator of the nationalization of resources that deprives the people of the country their due.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to make some comments with regard to Bill C-2 concerning a free trade deal with Colombia.

I spoke to the bill when it was before us in the last session. Listening to the debate, it is quite clear that there are sincere concerns regarding human rights impacts and the free trade deal with Colombia. The history certainly has been put on the table and the impacts on labour and other matters. There also have been numerous references to other countries that have considered trade deals with the country of Colombia.

I want to simply put on the record that I will be supporting the bill at second reading to go to committee because quite frankly there has been a lot of contradiction in the debate, although the issues that are being addressed are very relevant. For some the issue of human rights priorities and trade priorities are incompatible in terms of considering them at one point.

Government Orders

There are some very interesting statistics. In looking at the web today I noted that the number of convictions, those who were tried for murder, has gone up dramatically in the last three years. The number of incidences of attacks on people related to business related activity, in fact, has done down, but it is not zero, and it would not be zero in any country I am sure.

However, it would appear, at least from the statistical information coming out that it is better today than it was 10 years ago, but the point still remains that there are huge concerns. If I look at the Brussels press, March 24, the headline says that in Colombia there is a gulf between human rights rhetoric and reality.

Therefore, there is some question. In fact, the Belgian chamber of representatives, representing trade unionists and Amnesty International heard denunciations of human rights violations, especially the murder of trade unionists and indigenous people, forced displacement and extrajudicial executions, as well as DAS's surveillance of Belgian NGOs. Belgian politicians currently oppose a trade agreement with Colombia over violations of human and labour rights.

Therefore, there is certainly one country that has taken this to a level of concern where it is not supporting a trade deal with Colombia.

In *The Washington Times* of March 4, 2010, interestingly I found that President Obama has been very aggressive in terms of promoting new export trade as part of his economic action plan, if I could borrow the words from across the way. One thing is what the president wishes, the other thing is what Congress is going to do. In this article of March 4, *The Washington Times*, entitled "Kirk gets pressure on trade deals" the policy makers indicate that they are facing political timing issues. The article states:

Unless Congress considers one of the agreements before the Memorial Day break, he doesn't expect any to come into play until after the November elections.

Therefore, technically I suppose it is fair to say that most of the work in terms of trade deals in the United States may not be dealt with until 2011 or later. So, we have time to consider this. It also says:

Mr. Obama's first major trade initiative in his own right will focus on his proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement. Negotiators from the United States, New Zealand, Australia, Peru, Vietnam, Chile, Singapore and Brunei will convene in Melbourne, Australia.

But there is no talk of Colombia.

In the *The Washington Times* of Friday, March 12, the headline states, "Trade deficit dips; exports, imports fall". It states at the end:

On Thursday, the president issued an executive order formalizing the National Export Initiative to further his goal of doubling U.S. exports over the next five years in part "by working to remove trade barriers abroad". The executive order did not mention the pending free-trade agreements with South Korea, Panama and Colombia—

• (1525)

It would appear that the U.S. government is not considering a Colombia trade deal to be a priority at this time. In *The Washington Times* of March 11, it stated:

President Obama on Thursday ordered an all-out effort by the U.S. government to increase exports—

Again, this confirms that Democrats are opposed to free trade deals in part because of South Korea's imposition of restrictions on U.S. imports and the attacks on Colombian labour leaders. This is in the United States. It has been raised in this place, as well.

It is not irrelevant to talk about the impact of trade on human rights and vice versa the impact of human rights on viable trade. These are very valid questions.

I raise these because we are at second reading, and the members are scouring some of the latest media and some of the things we received while we were dealing with this at second reading in the last session. There are some messages here from Colombian legislators who say that trade is going to be an important element of improving the human rights conditions of the people. This is the scenario.

Is this a wish and a hope, or is this a reality? That is a very important question. It is a very important question for us to consider, whether or not there is clear evidence that improved trade relations with other countries and having that ability to have that dialogue with them is going to have some benefit to countries where human rights issues have become a problem.

Last week when the debate commenced, the member for Kings—Hants spoke very eloquently about some of the issues. Also, in recognition of the concerns regarding human rights, he indicated to the House, in fact, in a question to the minister, that an arrangement had been reached with Colombia with regard to a reciprocal or bilateral approach to dealing with reports on the impact of this free trade agreement on the human rights situation.

I would like to read into the record and remind members of the points that the government has accepted in terms of amendments to the bill that are related, to try to address this. This is from *Hansard* of March 24, page 887, where the member for Kings—Hants said:

First, there must be a prior written agreement between the governments of Canada and Colombia, where each country provides annual reports to their respective parliaments on the impact of this FTA on human rights in both Canada and Colombia.

Second, Bill C-2 must be amended at committee by adding, "The Minister shall cause to be laid before each House of Parliament by March 31 of each year or, if that House is not then sitting, on any of the thirty days next thereafter that it is sitting, a report of operations for the previous calendar year, containing a general summary of all actions taken under the authority of this Act, and an analysis of the impact of these actions on human rights in Canada and Colombia".

It would appear that there is some openness to considering the merits of entering into a trade relationship, a free trade deal, with Colombia, and that there is this understanding that there will be an annual assessment of the impacts on human rights of the trade deal that is taking place.

Members will know that bilateral trade between our two countries is not very large. It is in the range of about \$1 billion. I am very hopeful that the committee will be open to having any and all expert witnesses to advise it on the facts because there have been some contradictions in debate.

I think it is extremely important that if hon. members are to make an informed decision, they will have to receive those facts and it will have to happen at committee.

Government Orders

• (1530)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I feel sorry for the member for Mississauga South. He has been literally whipsawed by his caucus over the last year on this very issue.

Last year, at the Standing Committee on International Trade, his party supported an independent human rights assessment, and that honestly was the correct position to take. In the meantime, that party changed leaders and critics, and now the new critic is headed off in a different direction.

The member for Kings—Hants knows what the American position is because we were in Washington recently, meeting with congressional representatives. We were told by republicans that regardless of what Obama said in the State of the Union Address, Congress in no way would deal with this issue. While all this was happening, the member for Kings—Hants was making arrangements with the Colombian government to introduce this amendment.

As the member has rightly pointed out, the amendment talks about allowing the Colombians to self-assess. This is in no way on any sort of scale with the idea of having an independent human rights assessment. I do not think anybody would disagree with that.

I do not understand why the member is now willing to compromise and accept this amendment when he should support the Liberal Party's previous position at committee.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking to this bill, as I have in the past, because constituents in my riding have raised the matter with me and I want to let them know I am taking an interest in trying to inform myself. I certainly reject the member's suggestion that somehow I am doing something. I am here representing my constituents.

Let me conclude simply by referring to this quote:

Much of Canadian investment will be in the extractive industry; it is in regions of the country where the extractive industry operates where 75% of human rights violations and displacements occur. There are no guarantees that...companies will not be indirectly affecting the well-being of local communities in such an environment.

I agree with that. Canadians deserve some assurances that all appropriate steps will be taken to ensure there are no unintended negative consequences with regard to entering into this deal.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Liberal member.

First, let us review the facts. When the committee report was tabled, it had a specific recommendation. I will not quote it, but I hope to get the idea across. It recommended that we not sign this free trade agreement until someone had examined the human rights situation, this situation had improved, and the improvements were maintained.

In committee, the opposition, or the NDP and the Bloc Québécois, needed the support of the Liberals. At the time, the Liberals agreed. They are now saying they would be happy with a yearly study or analysis. But what will that change if there are no changes made to human rights? The agreement will be signed and there will be no

way to encourage Colombia to improve its human and environmental rights.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I understand the committee reported back to the House and recommended that there be an independent human rights assessment done. I did not just take it at face value. I wanted to find out who would do this. Therefore, I spoke with Amnesty International and asked if it would conduct an independent human rights assessment for Colombia, and the answer was no.

That is a problem. It is one thing to ask for something; it is another thing to deliver it. It would appear that no one has come forward to say that there would be any benefit in trying to do some sort of an assessment.

I believe the question the member has raised has to be brought up at committee to find out whether there is a credible independent organization that even would be prepared to do such a study.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I take my turn in joining the hon. members of the Bloc Québécois who have spoken in large numbers today regarding BillC-2 on the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

This debate has been going on for nearly two years in the House of Commons. So many things have been said. We know that the Bloc Québécois will resolutely oppose this agreement so long as it contains no guarantees on the protection of human rights. But we are seeing more and more examples. Every day we learn that, in many situations in Colombia, workers' rights are not respected. The failure to respect the rights of individuals is also decried.

What we know is that the Canadian government wants to conclude a free trade agreement which is basically more about investment than trade. It is thought that this agreement, as drafted, will make life easier for Canadian investors, and in particular, it must be said, those who want to invest in mining in Colombia.

If we look closely at this agreement, we see that it contains provisions allowing investors to take a foreign government to court when that government adopts measures that reduce the returns on their investments. Such provisions are especially dangerous in a country where laws governing labour and the protection of the environment are, at best, haphazard.

The Bloc Québécois feels that by protecting a Canadian investor against any improvement in the living conditions in Colombia, such an agreement increases the risk of delaying social and environmental progress in that country, even though it is in great need of such progress.

We know—and I think there is no lack of evidence—that Colombia has one of the worst human rights records in the world, and certainly in Latin America. With the signing of this free trade agreement, Canada would forego any ability to bring pressure to bear on this country to get things changed and bring about more respect for human rights.

Government Orders

The government repeats that the agreement comes with a side agreement on labour and another on the environment. However we believe that these agreements are completely ineffective. As I was saying earlier, the Bloc is against trading away the government's ability to press for human rights to provide Canadian corporations with foreign investment opportunities.

The members of the Bloc and the NDP have spoken out loud and clear against this bill. It is sad to hear the Liberals so easily abandoning their tradition of human rights advocacy. They are prepared to drop their opposition to this bill for an amendment which, in our view, is not acceptable either. Numerous groups and associations are critical of this agreement. I will name a few of them. These are not small organizations: they are large organizations representing many members.

I listened to the Liberal member who spoke before me saying that he listens to the people in his riding. It is true, that is important. The people in my riding are loud and clear in asking me to oppose this agreement as well as the amendment, or the idea that one Liberal member came up with to try and see if it were possible to get this agreement adopted.

The person advising me is someone very much committed to the defence of human rights, who works with a major labour confederation in Quebec and the FTQ, which represents over 800,000 workers. I was saying earlier that our thinking and our decisions are supported by the people we represent in Quebec. I can say that certain pressures are coming from them as well.

• (1540)

We are also talking with the following organizations: the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, Amnesty International, the FTQ, Development & Peace, KAIROS, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Lawyers Without Borders Canada, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the CSN and the National Union of Public and General Employees.

These groups, associations and unions are begging the Bloc Québécois to stay the course and to oppose this bill. This is about respecting human rights, but it is also about protecting trade unionists. Since 2006, more than 2,400 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia, and the murders continue. The Liberals may say that the situation has improved, but they will have to show me concrete examples that prove that the change is substantial and not merely a minor adjustment. If that were the case, the Bloc could change its position on the bill, as the Liberals have done.

A newspaper article caught my eye and I think it is worthwhile to quote some passages from it, because it affected me greatly. *Le Figaro* of last March 20, contained the following article:

A veteran Colombian journalist, Clodomiro Castillo, was murdered by a hired killer in Montería, a city in the department of Córdoba, in the north of Colombia...

Clodomiro Castillo, who ran the magazine *El Pulso del Tiempo* and the radio station *La Voz*, was shot yesterday by a man on a motorcycle...the journalist had focused on exposing corruption...and had received threats that led authorities to provide him with special protection, which was recently withdrawn.

The journalist had also testified for the prosecution in a number of cases that exposed links between politicians, local businessmen and ultra-right paramilitary

groups, said Ivan Cepeda, director of the NGO National Movement of Victims of State Crimes.

"His death is an attack on those in the department of Córdoba who have demanded an investigation into the links between the paramilitary and factions in political and economic life," said Ivan Cepeda, speaking on the private radio station *Caracol*.

The situation shows no sign of improving. Even with the amendment that could be introduced, and even with an agreement to report annually on the human rights record, by signing this agreement, Canada will lose its leverage and its ability to exert pressure on Colombia to end its unacceptable human rights practices.

As I have already mentioned, there are many examples. The Conservatives have taken their position and will not change their minds. But I hope that the Liberals will do the right thing by refusing to support this bill.

In its June 2008 report, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development refused to approve the bill without an independent assessment of the impact of the agreement on human rights. I hope that the Liberals will review their position and will oppose Bill C-2.

• (1545)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly understand the member's position. I can assure her that in my riding I have not heard anyone say that he or she is in favour of the free trade agreement with Colombia. I want to reflect in this place that the people who have communicated with me are more concerned about human rights than they are about incremental trade with Colombia.

I want to ask the member if she is aware that the U.S. Department of State on September 8, 2009 certified to Congress that the Colombian government and armed forces were meeting statutory criteria to human rights and paramilitary groups. It also indicated, "There is no question that improvement must be made in certain areas; however, the Colombian government has made significant efforts to increase the security of its people and to promote respect for human rights".

It would appear that the United States is not blindly going into this. I wonder if the member is aware of any other information about the considerations that other jurisdictions are making prior to entering into a free trade agreement with Colombia.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. Actually, we have to get to the bottom of things. The hon. member is very experienced. He is a veteran parliamentarian with a lot of experience, and he knows we must also look at what is behind this bill.

It is hard to understand why Canada would want to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia. In fact, the purpose of signing a free trade agreement is trade. But we do not see the attraction that this trade would provide. How is it worth the trouble when the people and the workers of Colombia have to be abandoned?

So I have a hard time understanding why the Liberals are still supporting Bill C-2.

Government Orders

• (1550)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a follow-up to what the member for Mississauga South said.

It is very clear to me that he is one of the members of the Liberal caucus who does not support this agreement. He really does not like it at all. As a matter of fact, he is practically the only caucus member who has shown up in the House to make a speech on this bill, but he does not have a lot of good ground to work with.

He indicated that he had tried to find an independent human rights impact assessment group that would actually carry out this independent assessment. He said that Amnesty International would not do it. He left it there and said that now the member for Kings—Hants has proposed an amendment and the solution is that we are going to let the Colombians do it themselves.

If he is not really sure about where he was before, clearly he does not agree with the member for Kings—Hants that it is acceptable to allow Colombians to do their own human rights assessment.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the NDP member.

I hope to be able to influence the Liberals on this side and explain to them that, basically, for trade to be mutually beneficial, it must first be fair. That is where everything starts.

A trading system that results in the exploitation of the poorest countries and dumping in the richest countries is not viable. The Bloc Québécois cannot trade viability for an agreement that allows exploitation in Colombia.

So we should look at what is behind this agreement, and see in whose interest it is that the agreement be signed and who will benefit from it.

When we engage in trade, it must be fair, but that is not the case with this agreement, which is completely unacceptable to the Bloc Québécois.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that it is a pleasure to join in this debate, but it seems an unfortunate circumstance that again we have to engage the government and its very loyal official opposition in respect to trade deals. The bill we are speaking to today, Bill C-2, was Bill C-23 in the previous Parliament before the government undemocratically shut down the House, thereby killing its own legislation. That is an ironic way to run government. For a government that claims to be in such a hurry to open up trade deals like this, the question is whether this trade deal meets the standard of morality and ethics that most Canadians hold.

Let us quickly go through aspects of the bill. There are two central concerns.

One is if we believe the press releases from the member for Kings—Hants, the bill was first negotiated on a dance floor over a couple of rum and Cokes in Colombia with a foreign trade minister. If this story is true, and we have to take it with a grain of salt when it comes

to the member for Kings—Hants and how he enters into the media, this is a strange way for the government to have trade relations with a foreign government. An opposition member goes dancing with the other country's trade minister and at the end of the night they decide why not have a trade deal together but they will not put in any uncomfortable conditions as to how to treat the environment or how to deal with human rights complaints because that would be cumbersome for trade.

When we boil this down, the question before the House and before Canadians is, will the Government of Canada finally take the evolutionary step of moving from blanket *carte blanche* free trade deals to fair trade deals? Will it move to deals between this country and its democratically elected representatives and foreign nations that lift up both countries and in particular address aspects of trade, such as the environment, human rights and labour codes? Clearly in Bill C-2, formerly Bill C-23, there is little or no mention of these important concerns. These are concerns that everyday Canadians have.

A second aspect is the net benefit, the true benefit to Canada. All of us were elected to this place and came here seeking to make lives better for those whom we represent. We would want any trade deal put forward by the government to enhance the quality of life not just in the other country, but also in Canada. We have seen time and time again that when regulations and the values of this country are not placed in those trade deals, they go awry.

My riding in northwestern British Columbia has been an unfortunate victim of trade deals signed by previous Liberal and Conservative governments. We know all too well what happens when a trade deal is signed. So-called foreign investment comes in, but it is simply a foreign takeover. The jobs go away. The investment is not investment; it is simply a robbing of Canadians' greatest crown jewels, and corporate entities that used to provide jobs in this country now provide them somewhere else and the interests of Canadians are no longer represented.

For members who have not spent time in Latin America this can be difficult to understand. Democratically elected governments in places like Colombia, Peru or Ecuador will institute what are called paramilitary death squads or groups that go out and simply take care of any opposition to the sitting government. This is an abhorrent practice which unfortunately is all too common in some of the countries in the south; not all and not all the time, but it exists. To ignore the existence of such practices is either naive or outright ignorant. Particularly with the Uribe government in Colombia it is well documented, and all members in this place should be concerned, that it is a government that presents itself to the world as diplomatic and democratic, yet at home treats trade union officials and groups that dare to raise dissent to the sitting government with the utmost of severe and punishing violence.

Government Orders

The proposals the New Democrats have put forward in order to encourage this Parliament along, in order to entice the government toward fair trade, have been rather precise and simple. A review of human rights abuses in the trading country, in the partner that we seek to sign this agreement with, should be done independently by a group not associated with the said government.

• (1555)

We are saying that if this trade deal were to go ahead, there should be an independent commission to look at the complaints raised against Colombia, identify them and report to both elected houses. That commission would tell us what happened in the last year, the allegations, the ones it thinks are true, and the concerns that we should be raising.

The suggestion that we have an independent human rights council, which already exists by the way, able to report to both houses of each country, seems to us to be a most reasonable suggestion, a push toward something that all Canadians would agree with. We want trade to enhance the quality of life of our trading partners. We do not want our trade to facilitate the opposite effect.

This addresses an ideology within some members of the House that trade automatically equals democratic improvement, that anywhere there has been a notion of a free trade agreement or a new, enhanced trading practice, a sweeping wave, the invisible hand of the market will step in and lift up the voices of the independents in that country, allowing people independent thought and expression in the political sphere.

Some of the strongest trading partnerships we have are with countries like China, Saudi Arabia, and the list goes on. We have been trading with Saudi Arabia for 70 or 80 years. Has there been the democratic improvement that is always promised with these trade negotiations? Has the plight of women in Saudi Arabia improved because we continue to buy its oil and services?

It is not implicit. There is nothing implicit in trade that says democratic reforms will come to that place, that human rights conditions will improve. There is nothing in trading with another country that says that as soon as we start to trade with them, things will automatically get better with respect to the environment, labour laws, and the basic reforms of social democracy.

There is nothing in this agreement that enables that either. That is the concern New Democrats have put forward to the government. We have pleaded with the government and the Liberals at committee and in the House. We are not standing against the notion of trade with Colombia, but if we are going to trade with Colombia, we should do it in such a way that Canadians will be proud. We should do it in such a way that will enhance the lives of the Colombians who will be affected by our trade relationship.

Is that unreasonable? No. Yet time and time again we run into this brick wall of ideology that says to trade at all costs with no conditions. We see what the practices lead to. Undemocratic countries around the world that we have traded with for generations have not improved any of these things. Why? Because we do not ask for it. We have never asked to evolve our trade practices. We have never said let us seek to define and understand what fair trade would

be like, so at the end of the day we would see those improvements. That seems reasonable to us.

I mentioned Skeena—Bulkley Valley earlier because the place that I represent has seen two distinct so-called instances of foreign investment, which the government somewhat rightly will laud whenever it has an increase in foreign investment numbers, money coming into the country, theoretically investing in Canada, to make our economy stronger.

Skeena Cellulose Inc., a multi-tiered forestry firm in northwestern British Columbia with some 3,500 employees, went through a bankruptcy. The foreign protection laws were erased by a previous Conservative government. A Chinese firm owned wholly by the Chinese government, not a subsidiary, not a subcontractor, with no record and no compunction whatsoever, came in and shut down the mill. It made promises to the people of Prince Rupert where the main mill had been situated and six years later nothing has been done. It has not opened a thing, and the 3,500 workers have had to find other work.

Rio Tinto Alcan, formerly Alcan, formerly a crown gem in Canada's industrial sector, was taken over by a firm from outside, again with no conditions from the government. In Kitimat, one of the communities where Alcan used to operate but now it is Rio Tinto, a promise of a future mill expansion has not come and it is killing the community. This is a story that unfortunately exists across this country.

All we are asking for is a reasonable trade policy. All we are asking for is a fair trade policy from the government, one that we can all stand behind and support, one that Colombians will congratulate us for, one that will truly lift up the lives of all those concerned, not one as has been presented by the government with false promises and no hope for renewal.

• (1600)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a large number of members have made representations during this debate about the number of unionist homicides. For the public information, they should know what the facts are as reported by the ministry of social protection and the attorney general in Colombia.

Between 1986 and 1990, there were 336 homicides, no sentences proffered.

Between 1991 to 1994, there were 509 homicides, no sentences, no prosecutions.

Between 1995 to 1998, there were 720 homicides, no prosecutions.

Between 1999 to 2001, there were 603 homicides, 7 prosecutions.

Between 2002 to 2006, there were 315 homicides, 47 prosecutions.

Between 2007 to December 20, 2009, there were 109 homicides, 185 sentences proffered.

I think the figures speak for themselves. This is a very serious problem. The members who have raised the issue are warranted to raise these concerns. I simply offer this as a comment. This matter has to be dealt with thoroughly at committee.

Government Orders

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the tragic listing of numbers that mean so much. We can list so many hundreds and no prosecutions. We can list another so many hundreds and no prosecutions.

However, the implication is twofold, not only to the lives of those lost through persecution, sometimes at the hands of their own government, as in the case of Colombia, not only to their families that have lost those people who dared raise their voices, in many cases, to provide criticism to government, something that we try to honour every day in the House, and fought and died for, but it speaks to the effects of people in the future who seek to raise their voices, who seek to express concerns for their families or their communities for something that the government has done to them, for something that outside companies, which do not obey the laws and rules of the land, do to them.

If the people do not have their government on their side, how can we possibly sign a deal with such a government? How can we possibly sign a deal with false hope of any protection for those very families, communities and workers? It is abhorrent. We need to take a step back, look at this and make it better.

• (1605)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know farmers have been dispossessed by mining companies in Colombia and in other countries for many years and that the environment has been degraded by those same companies for many years. Our free trade agreements should allow us to improve on these conditions with those countries.

How is the negotiation of this agreement and the amendment that the member for Kings—Hants has cooked up with the president and minister from Colombia, in any way, shape or form, going to improve the lives of the displaced farmers in Colombia and how is going to improve on the environmental conditions in that country?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the amendment put forward by the Liberal member is more than an insult. It pretends to do something it knows it will not. It pretends to provide some sort of security with respect to human rights in Colombia, yet the amendment asks the Colombia government to do that. It proposes that the Colombian government review its own human rights record, decide whether it is good enough and then tell Canadians and Colombians about it.

I do not want to be cynical, but my suspicion is this. If the Colombian government continues to break human rights, continues to assassinate trade union leaders, it will not report on it. That is just a guess.

The fact that the Liberal member proposes this as some sort of fix or cure is an insult to everyone's intelligence in this place. Worse, it has the tragic consequence of continuing a practice that simply must not be allowed to continue.

It seems to me that in order to facilitate the things that Canada wishes, which is a better world for all, to raise all ships to better environmental standards, the first thing we should do is practise that type of integrity in this place. The amendment is a waste of time and paper. We should move to a real fair trade deal with Colombia and Canada. That would be true progress.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to the NDP member's speech, I remembered that it might be useful to do a run through of the debates we have had in the House on this bill. I am not necessarily referring to the bill before us today, because there was prorogation, but I am referring to the similar bill introduced in the previous session regarding a Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

In September 2009, debates were underway in the House. The NDP member for Nanaimo—Cowichan urged the government to refuse to adopt Bill C-23—as it was called at the time—and to take into account the strong opposition of human rights organizations.

Speaking of human rights, my NDP colleague reminded me that last fall, the human rights situation was an important issue for the NDP members and for my colleagues from Sherbrooke and Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, who also sat on the Standing Committee on International Trade.

The NDP's subamendment was defeated on October 7, 2009, by the Liberals and the Conservatives. We might have expected that from the Conservatives, but not from the Liberals. The Liberals, who rant and rave about how Canada has lost its lustre, that it is nothing but a pale imitation of itself on the international scene, decided to ignore the strong criticisms or concerns expressed by a number of witnesses. They decided to move forward, like a bulldozer, and to blindly follow the Conservatives.

The Bloc Québécois has taken to referring to the Conservatives and Liberals as two faces with one vision. And here is even more concrete proof.

During debate on the subamendment, the Conservative members were saying that we were shifting the debate to human rights issues when it was about a trade agreement. Today, we do not hear them say that because they are literally absent from the debate. All afternoon I have been listening to hon. members from the Bloc Québécois, the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party, but the Conservatives have made themselves scarce.

At the time, they were adamant that this made no sense and that we should not be shifting the focus of the debate. It is completely unacceptable for a parliamentarian to say that we should study only one aspect of a bill and not study it more globally and assess all its repercussions. According to Conservative logic, when we study a bill, we should close our eyes to some aspects, but keep them wide open for others.

In my opinion, that is not the right approach. We have to study a bill seriously and assess all its consequences before determining whether we are in favour of it or not.

In this case, we must not consider the bill before us in isolation, independently of some of our concerns or the impact it might have. In fact, it is important to get clarifications and assurances, especially when it comes to human rights issues.

Government Orders

•(1610)

These same Conservatives told us that we have to do this because the Americans, our neighbours the south, are as well, but, in fact, the Americans were also a bit reluctant to move forward with their free trade plans with Colombia. What is more, they were reluctant for the same reasons we are. Their bill will not become law until Congress receives some assurances.

I think everyone here in this House should call for such assurances so that this agreement is consistent with the values we uphold, values that Quebeckers stand for, as do, I imagine, a good number of Canadians as well.

Let me continue my chronology. After the New Democrat subamendment was defeated on October 7, 2009, we debated the bill on the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement in this House and we studied an amendment introduced by the hon. member for Sherbrooke, who, at the time, sat on the Standing Committee on International Trade. He has also become an expert on the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. He pointed out to members of the House that it was not at all appropriate to support the bill because the government had decided to force it down the throats of hon. members while the Standing Committee on International Trade was still in the process of studying it. The hon. member for Sherbrooke pointed out at that time that the government was doing so in contempt of our democratic institutions.

Can we be surprised that this government, in some respects, is in contempt of our democratic institutions?

I always like to remind the House that, when all opposition members vote with one voice in favour of motions or bills, the government always gives thought to its own preferences before implementing measures that have been supported by a majority of hon. members of this House. The democracy that the government practices operates on a sliding scale. If the Conservatives are in favour, things move forward; if the Conservatives are not in favour, even though the majority of hon. members of this House are, things are set aside, things are forgotten and they act as if nothing had happened and as if the democratically held vote in the House was worth nothing.

Despite that very legitimate appeal by the hon. member for Sherbrooke, nothing was done. Hon. members know, as I do, that the session was then prorogued and we were unable to continue the debate. We are resuming it today with Bill C-2, a bill, let us not forget, that puts much more stock on protecting investors than on trade agreements.

For example, how can we allow companies to sue governments simply because those governments decide to implement measures designed to foster the development of their people?

That is the question I ask as I conclude my remarks.

•(1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member summarized some of the key elements that have come forward in this debate with regard to why we should not proceed

with a FTA with Colombia. It raises a question, though, and maybe the member has some comments.

Could he imagine what the scenario would have to be in order for all hon. members to support a FTA with Colombia? What do the numbers have to show? What is the position? Is it a total absence of any violence whatsoever in Colombia as it relates to the trade activity? It is an important question from this standpoint. What is the threshold of tolerance? Maybe the member has some comments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, the question raised by the hon. member for Mississauga South is of great importance since, in fact, we are always asking ourselves that question. Is there a threshold of tolerance? Is there a magic number? My answer to him would be that, first and foremost, we must ensure that there are mechanisms, that there is also a degree of security, that everyone is comfortable, that they are not silenced and that bad practices can be talked about, put on the table and analyzed. I feel that, beyond the numbers, we must consider the climate and the context.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member neglected to point out that no Liberal who has spoken on this bill has actually supported what the Liberals are doing, neither the amendment nor the bill itself. There are people in the Liberal caucus who actually do not like this agreement. The question is whether they are going to miss the vote or change their position on the issue.

Clearly, based on what he has said so far, the member for Mississauga South is not comfortable with this agreement. The question is whether the Liberal Party will continue to support the Conservatives through its presentation of this amendment or whether enough of its members will not vote for it and therefore defeat this bill.

•(1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I listened to what the hon. member just said, and I believe he expressed a point of view, or made a comment. I did not really hear a question.

I will simply return to what I was saying a little earlier. He said he noticed that the hon. member for Mississauga South was not comfortable, and he was probably right. In fact, the Liberal Party surely wants to show Canada's actions abroad in a positive light. But, in its current form, the bill likely does not allow Canada to shine that positive light abroad. It is clear that the hon. member for Mississauga South, by supporting Bill C-2, goes against his party's natural stance, even though, on a number of issues, we see that the Conservatives and the Liberals share the same vision.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to participate in this debate on Bill C-2, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

Government Orders

We have been here before, as is evident to anybody watching. We in this corner, sharing with folks in the Bloc, are doing our best to put up the strongest fight possible against this very objectionable legislation. When I have been listening to the debate, a phrase has come to me a number of times. That phrase is, “selling our soul for a mess of pottage”. It is a phrase and idiom that has been in common usage for hundreds of years in the English language.

I think that phrase has its roots in the Biblical story of Esau, who sold his birthright for a bowl of stew, essentially, a bowl of soup. He sold his connection to the patriarchy in his day for something very ordinary. I think the expression means giving up something very fundamental to our humanity for something very ordinary. Some people describe it as giving up something important for a questionable benefit. That phrase, that idiom, has been going over and over in my head as we talk about this agreement with Colombia, selling our soul for a mess of pottage.

It seems to me in this case that we are talking about making a deal with Colombia and that this phrase perfectly describes the situation. This deal with Colombia, which has a very questionable history and current situation, is in conflict with things Canadians hold very dearly. I believe that, in entering into this agreement and negotiating this agreement, we are giving up on important Canadian values for something much less.

We are giving up on important Canadian values such as clear commitments to human rights, labour rights, the environment, land rights, the rights of indigenous people and democratic rights. What are we getting in exchange? We are getting the possibility of new economic opportunities with Colombia, primarily it seems for Canadian multinational mining corporations.

Is that a reasonable trade-off? Is compromising Canadian values when it comes to important rights worth the possibilities, not even the sure thing, of increased investment for Canadian multinational mining corporations? I think a lot of Canadians would have real trouble with that. Hence, I think it is apt to say that we are considering selling our soul for a mess of pottage.

We have heard a lot about what the serious issues are in Colombia. I am going to repeat a few of them because they certainly bear repeating, given the gravity of what we are entering. The whole situation with regard to labour rights in Colombia is absolutely disastrous. I think the Canadian Labour Congress was absolutely correct and clear when it said Colombia was the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist.

We know that, since 1986, 2,700 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia and 45 in 2009 alone. We have a list of those 45 Colombian trade unionists who were killed in 2009. Those people were trying to make the lives of their fellow workers better and were murdered for those efforts. How do we explain to their families that Canada would enter into an agreement with a regime that allows that to happen?

It does allow it to happen. Not only has this gone on year after year but the conviction rate for these murders is incredibly small. It is a 3% conviction rate for those who murder trade unionists. That means that 97% of the murderers of trade unionists go with impunity.

People are never charged, let alone convicted or sentenced for those crimes.

It is a very serious issue for us in a country where we respect labour rights and where we have a very active trade union movement. I think it is hard to understand how we could sell out on the issue of labour rights in making a deal with a regime like the Uribe regime in Colombia.

• (1625)

It does not make sense to me. I think we are giving up on something incredibly important, something that has served our country well, something that could serve Colombia well, in return for a possibility. We are not even sure what possibilities.

Also, it is very clear that, in terms of the rights of indigenous people and the related question of land rights, there are very serious issues in Colombia. We know that 32 aboriginal groups are in grave danger from the policies of the current government and from the way economic development is happening in Colombia. We know that 114 aboriginal people have also been murdered recently in the conflict that is going on in Colombia.

We know that millions of people have been internally displaced in Colombia. Some say four million people have been internally displaced, largely members of the Afro-Colombian communities. These are people who have been moved off their land in rural areas and forced into shanty towns in the larger cities and larger communities in an incredible internal displacement that I think is probably unmatched around the world. It is an incredibly serious issue.

To what end are we entering into an agreement with a regime, with a country, that allows this kind of internal displacement, this kind of lack of respect for its own people, to continue?

We know that democratic rights are often challenged in Colombia. We have seen electoral observation teams come away very critical of the electoral process in Colombia. We know, for instance, that the Colombian government has spied on members of the Colombian supreme court. All these are issues that should raise very serious concerns and do raise very serious concerns from Canadians who want us to be encouraging democratic rights around the world, not encouraging bad practice. That is probably putting it mildly in terms of what is going on in Colombia.

Canadians are also very concerned about environmental issues. Putting the environmental questions in a side agreement to the main trade agreement in this case just is not good practice either. It does not give those issues the kind of prominence they deserve and Canadians would expect them to have.

I think these are all clear examples that we are selling our soul. We are selling our soul on very crucial issues that Canadians want us to address here in Canada and around the world. We should say that confessionally, because on many of these issues we have had problems in our past. We continue to have issues around our treatment of first nations, Inuit and Métis people in Canada and the incredible rate of poverty.

Government Orders

There are places where we too can be criticized in these areas, but I do not think any Canadian would want us not to see these issues addressed in Colombia and would not believe they are the most serious and grave issues that should be addressed and should limit our ability to enter into a new and closer relationship with the Republic of Colombia.

On the whole question of what new possibilities will be opened up, there has been some talk of new economic opportunities for our multinational mining interests, but it also leads to the question about corporate social responsibility and just how Canadian multinational corporations behave in Colombia. There is a lot of concern about the practices of the corporations doing mining and natural resource development in Colombia. I am sure Canadian corporations are part of that concern.

Again, the whole question of selling our soul for appropriate development policies and development policies where the local people have some say in the development of those resources in their communities and in their country is a very important issue and does not seem to be addressed in this agreement.

We know there was discussion at one point at the standing committee that said there should be an independent human rights assessment of Colombia before we enter into this agreement. We have seen the Liberals back away completely from their former support for that. Now we see this special agreement they have proposed, their side deal with the Colombian government, and now their deal with the Conservative government that allows Colombia to examine its own human rights record and report on that. It is just not acceptable.

Again, I think we are selling our soul for a mess of pottage, and we do not even know what is in that stew we are buying. There are many problems with this deal, and I am glad I sit with a group of people who are doing everything they can to see it defeated.

• (1630)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of my constituents expressed the sentiments of a number of the people who have written to me when he stated, "There is no evidence suggesting that Canadian investments in Colombia will contribute to improving human rights". This assumption, this hope, this belief seems to be permeating the discussion about whether there is any evidence that the existence of a trade agreement necessarily would have some improvements in terms of the human rights situation.

I share the member's concern about the amendment that is being proposed from the standpoint that I am not quite sure whether a report of both governments to their own parliaments on the trade deal's impact on human rights will be substantive or significant enough to sway the history and the facts of what the current situation is in Colombia, or would exist.

The marginal effects of a trade deal may have some impact, but the real question, to me, and I wonder if the member would comment, seems to be what is the current and ongoing position of human rights abuses in Colombia.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to the member for Mississauga South just by quoting Colombian Methodist Church Bishop Juan Alberto Cardona, who was one of the first Colombians

to visit Canada after this agreement was proposed. That was back in November 2007. He talked about what he considered would be the possible effects on the people of Colombia in signing this agreement. This is a direct quote from him:

Your Prime Minister and our President say that free trade will help us, but we know from other places like Mexico that these agreements might create more wealth for wealthy people, but they make inequalities worse. Whatever new wealth is created does not reach the poor people.

He really goes contrary to the whole notion that somehow signing these agreements helps the ordinary people of the country we sign the agreement with. I think he brings a significant witness to this situation.

He went on to describe the situation in Colombia, saying:

After four decades, a civil war goes on. In the past 20 years, the conflict has taken the lives of 70,000 people. Since 2002, when Alvaro Uribe became president, more than a million additional people have become internally displaced

So there are very, very serious consequences, and I do not think there is any evidence that signing this kind of agreement will help the people of Colombia.

• (1635)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a comment and ask a question, but as far as the comment is concerned, the member for Mississauga South and the member for Kings—Hants clearly have different ideas. The member for Kings—Hants has said many times that trade deals actually help to improve human rights, and that is the whole basis of his amendment, whereas the member for Mississauga South is saying that this trade deal will not have any effect on human rights.

In terms of the question for the member as to what will happen if we do not sign and approve this deal, the government member today indicated that \$1.3 billion in trade already exists but is planned to increase 4% in the next year. There are 50 Canadian mining companies and oil exploration companies active, and this is all without a free trade agreement.

Does the member think that trade will be affected in any way if we do not sign this agreement?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, often in this corner we have more faith in the entrepreneurial ability of capitalists than the capitalist-supporting members of the House do. We know that people will seek opportunities to make money, and they will do that in any circumstances presented to them. It is clear that even without a free trade agreement with Colombia, Canadian corporations are making money there and will intend to continue that.

We need to ask them serious questions about corporate social responsibility. Are they doing that in a way that does not sell our souls down the river and is an acceptable way of doing business internationally for Canadians?

I think there are very serious questions to be raised there. We know that is a very serious issue and we want to make sure that is the way Canada behaves when it works internationally, whether that be through our economic interests or our diplomatic or other relations with other countries.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-2 today, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. No one will be surprised to hear that the Bloc Québécois is not in favour of this bill.

In the next few minutes, I plan on talking about the absurdity of this agreement, which is not a free trade agreement or a trade agreement. As we read through it, it becomes clear that this is an investment agreement. We can understand to a certain extent that it is important to protect investments abroad.

When governments decide to nationalize a business, Canadian investors and others who invested in these countries must be fairly compensated. We understand that. However, we do not agree with going so far as to allow for investors to sue the Colombian government if its social decisions affect the investors' profits. This kind of country completely disregards human rights and labour relations by intimidating or killing union activists. We cannot agree with taking things that far.

As members of Parliament, we must be open-minded and not focus solely on the sacrosanct monetary and trade approach. When Parliament or the government signs an agreement, we must consider our social responsibility. We must ensure that a trade agreement or investment agreement will not have a negative impact.

The agreement before us now will set Colombian society back significantly. As members of Parliament, we must live up to our social and international responsibilities.

Bloc members feel that to vote in favour of this agreement is to repudiate our social responsibility and to let important matters go by the wayside. We must reaffirm our stand, not only on labour relations, but also on the environment.

Day after day, we are confronted by everything that is happening on the planet. With global warming and with the effect of greenhouse gas emissions, we must not move too quickly. We must even make the same kinds of decisions locally, in our constituencies.

In my view, the constituency of Saint-Jean would want nothing to do with a company that completely pillaged the environment in order to make money hand over fist and that paid no heed to labour conditions or labour relations. That is the point we have reached. In the past, everything was accepted. Now that is no longer possible because of the new problem confronting us: climate change. We must face up to our responsibilities.

Of course, we are told that there will be side agreements. But everyone understands that side agreements are not part of the real agreement. If side agreements were signed on the environment, on human rights and on labour relations before the agreement itself is signed, perhaps we would be more open. But there is no chance of that happening. The agreement will be signed and the side agreements will be negotiated afterwards. But it will be too late because we can no longer go back on our original signature.

For the Bloc, it is important for the agreement to show respect for the environment and to protect labour relations, but that is not the case here. This is why the Bloc has been opposed to this bill for so

long. With the prorogation of the House, the bill has come back at second reading, and we are still opposed to it.

When the government signs an agreement, it has a responsibility. It knows that it is able to put significant pressure on the other government before reaching an agreement with it.

● (1640)

It can refuse to sign if the other country does not meet international standards in terms of the environment or labour relations. That is important. Some people call this the carrot and the stick strategy. Perhaps that is what it is, but if we want to live up to our responsibilities, we must tell the Colombian government that we cannot accept what it is doing and that it must change. We cannot accept the deaths of unionists and the degradation or complete destruction of the environment. We cannot.

It is important to say this and oppose it now. We have to say that we cannot agree to this kind of deal. We are not the only ones. Everyone knows how open the American Congress is to finance, trade and investments. Everyone knows that the American Congress is relatively liberal and acts quickly on these kinds of issues. Yet it is blocking an agreement with Colombia because it wants to ensure that minimum labour standards are met. It wants to protect the union movement.

Is this agreement a trade deal or not? It is very simple. A trade agreement means that we want to exchange things, that the economies are more or less equal and that the products are of interest to us. That is not the case. I have statistics and economic data here.

In 2007, Colombia's GDP was \$256 billion and Canada's GDP was \$1,610 billion. That is not comparable at all. Colombia's per capita GDP was \$5,314, while Canada's was \$48,427. Colombia's inflation rate was 7%, while Canada's was 2.3%. Unemployment was at 11.8% in Colombia, 6% in Canada.

Thus, our situations are not exactly equal. What do we have to gain from this, in terms of trade? Not much. One of our research documents shows that it is more or less equal in terms of trade balance. Signing this will not make us rich. Why would some have us believe that Canada will make a fortune by signing this? The Canadian government, in other words Canada, is opening its markets to South America, which means that the direct impact on Colombia might not be significant. The repercussions will be felt across all of South and Central America. So this is more of an investment agreement.

In fact, I have the numbers right here. In 2008, foreign investors from Colombia invested \$1 million in Canada, while Canada invested \$1.158 billion in Colombia. That is what is very dangerous. There is a clear imbalance and this agreement protects investments a lot more than an agreement meant to foster trade. The government must be careful. We do not want this bill to pass at this time, because we want to live up to our responsibilities, as I said earlier.

Government Orders

We can also talk about the paramilitary groups accused of killing thousands of people there, not to mention the 30 or so members of the Colombian congress in prison and 60 or so who are under investigation, which suggests collusion between paramilitary forces and the government. Last but not least, Colombia is a narco-state. Everyone knows what goes on in Colombia.

I could go on much longer, for instance, about how workers are targeted by violence. We could talk about the meetings the Bloc Québécois has had with representatives of civil society and social organizations from Colombia.

We think this agreement is completely unacceptable. That is why it should come as no surprise that the Bloc Québécois will vote against this bill at second reading.

• (1645)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member explained things rather well when said that this was all about an investment agreement.

The fact is that we already have \$1.3 billion worth of trade with Colombia and it is projected to increase 4% in the coming years. This whole exercise is about 50 Canadian mining and oil exploration companies that are doing quite well and will be doing quite well in the future.

I remember last year asking the government if it could give us a projection as to what would happen with trade in the short term and the long term, four or five years and longer, if we were to sign this agreement. It indicated at the time that it had no figures and that no studies had been done. What sort of preparation do the Conservatives engage in when they bring in a measure like this? Do they just simply write it up on the back of their hands?

Clearly, in the case of the member for Kings—Hants, that is exactly how the Liberal Party does business, where the member negotiates amendments with the president of Colombia at a dance club and then brings it into the House here, gets immediate agreement from the government and we are off to the races in making this the number one initiative of the government in this new session.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right. If we do not sign this agreement, will trade between Canada and Colombia disappear? No. Will it continue to expand? Yes.

The problem lies with investment. We spoke about Colombia's natural resources, including mines, and the oil companies that will invest there. If we look to the recent and more distant past of our own country, Canada—as well as Quebec—we see that the mining and oil companies, with their oil sands, are not the most responsible companies in terms of environmental issues.

Here, in Canada, we nevertheless can access remedies to rein them in. However, in Colombia, there are no remedies. If measures are implemented in an attempt to protect the environment or if legislation is introduced to improve labour relations, investors can sue the Colombian government on the grounds that their profit has been affected.

• (1650)

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my hon. colleague about some of the material that has been coming from Colombia about all the praise that has been going through this. The thrust of the praise has been that this will open up opportunities for many of the people down there. In the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights:

The Supreme Court and the Attorney General's Office are incredibly brave in investigating and bringing to trial public officials linked to mafias and drug trafficking in the so-called "Para-politics".

I would like the member to comment on that particular submission by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Also, would this particular agreement not open up a better way for labour opportunities, meaning better laws regarding labour in the nation of Colombia?

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I must say to my colleague that, according to our assessment, the opposite is true. We have to look at the underlying reasons.

When Canadian shareholders invest in a Colombian mine or when Canadian or American oil companies invest in Colombia, and their profits decline, they can sue the government.

The Colombian government will say that it cannot improve the lives of workers because that would increase costs for companies and decrease their profits. In addition, if the Colombian government realizes that these companies are degrading the environment, it will leave them alone because it does not want to be sued.

Therefore, the complete opposite will happen. That is the issue in this debate: the negative impact of this agreement on working conditions and the environment.

It is for this reason that we oppose this bill.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I resume debate, I want to clarify an issue with questions and comments in the House. When members are giving 10-minute speeches, 5 minutes are allocated for questions and comments. In order to get two questions and two answers in, it is about a minute and fifteen seconds per person. I give people a signal around the one minute mark to wrap up. When they get to a minute and fifteen seconds, I usually give another signal to wrap up.

When members get to a minute and a half, I will start cutting people off because you either leave little time for the second question and answer or you leave very little time for the speaker to respond to you. I would ask for the co-operation of all hon. members so that we can get two questions and two answers in that period of time.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Government Orders

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak today to Bill C-2, which has to do with free trade with Colombia.

Needless to say, I will be voting against this bill. I would like to share some figures about Colombia. Since 1986, 2,690 union activists have been killed. In 2008 alone, murders increased 18% over the previous year, and since November 2009, 34 union activists have been killed, with no government protection. If someone kills a worker, all they face in the way of punishment is a fine from the government.

I just cannot believe that our government is prepared to sign a free trade agreement with a country like that and that the Liberals support the deal.

I was a union representative in a former life. I worked in the mines, and I know what goes on down there in terms of safety. In 1996, in the Brunswick mine in New Brunswick, six people were killed. The union worked very hard to have the law changed in Canada. The right to refuse to work began in New Brunswick.

Yet our country, which now has laws that allow workers to refuse unsafe work, is going to sign an agreement with a country where workers are hunted. It is open season on workers who disagree with the company or want to join a union.

This is totally unacceptable. Colombia deserves no praise for its human rights practices and laws.

How can our country, in good conscience, sign an agreement with a country that is not willing to give workers rights? Why sign an agreement and say that human rights will follow? If Colombia is willing to respect workers' rights, then why not include that in the agreement and in the laws as well? Why does Colombia not pass a law immediately and disclose what it contains? The agreement says that if any social changes are legislated, companies can sue the government.

This is outrageous. It is shameful and unacceptable for this government to introduce this bill to implement a free trade agreement with Colombia.

How can we rise in the House and vote for a bill on free trade with a country incapable of respecting human rights? How can we conclude an agreement with a country that does not respect workers, the men and women who get up in the morning, go to work and build a country, the same way Canada was built?

Worse yet, how can we draft a document, an agreement, when the Colombian government is turning a blind eye to this? How can we sign an agreement like this and have a conscience? This is unconscionable.

It is despicable that the Liberals are supporting this. I am asking the Liberals to change their minds, especially since this is a minority government. They know what is going on in Colombia and they think that by signing an agreement, everything will fall into place. Get real. When companies think they can make even more money they laugh all the way to the bank. That is where their money goes. It does not go toward improving working conditions. Even here in Canada, without unions, labour relations would not be what they are

today. The only reason there are a number of companies out there that have good labour relations without a union is that these companies do not want to be unionized and they know that unions are always ready to move in.

Imagine Canada without unions. We see that things can happen even with unions around.

● (1655)

Take, for example, what is going on in Sudbury, where the strike has been going on for a record amount of time in Ontario. Foreign companies set up shop here, buy the company and want to do things the same way it is done in their own country. They say that we are the ones who need to adapt. That is what they said in Sudbury. Foreign company Vale SA purchased Inco and is now telling workers to get used to the way it does things. That is going on here, in Canada. The government supports these kinds of companies and wants to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia, despite everything that is going on.

Since 1986, 2,690 unionists have been killed in Colombia because of their union involvement. That is atrocious and shameful. What is even more atrocious and shameful is that our government is prepared to sign a free trade agreement with such a country. That is completely unacceptable.

In the United States, the free trade agreement between Colombia and the United States was supported by George Bush when he was in power. Now that he is no longer in power, the United States—led by Barack Obama—is trying to back out of the agreement. They do not want to sign it. This shows the similarities between the Conservatives and the former American president George Bush, who was prepared to sign an agreement with Colombia. Now that he is no longer in power, they should be proud that his replacement is saying no to an agreement with Colombia.

Canada should do the same thing. If we do not, we are saying that we do not respect workers or human rights. Colombia in no way respects workers' rights.

What do Colombians have to say? Workers are asking us not to sign this agreement. They do not want it because it will not improve their lives. People make a bigger deal about the way seals are killed than about Colombian workers. People care more about protecting seals than they do about protecting Colombian workers. That is unbelievable.

For all of these reasons, we cannot support such an agreement. Before the House was prorogued, the NDP and the Bloc fought hard against Bill C-23, which is back as Bill C-2. This is the same bill.

The government wants to listen to companies seeking to profit from free trade, but it does not care about workers. Do human beings in Colombia not get a say in this? Do people speaking on behalf of those who have lost their lives not get a say?

Government Orders

The Conservatives opposite think this agreement is something to smile about. Personally, I find that sad because I would not be able to sleep at night if I signed such an agreement. We know that Colombia does not respect human rights or workers' rights. The government knows that too. It should be ashamed. This agreement will do nothing to make workers' lives any better. Quite the opposite, as Colombian workers have warned us, and I agree with them.

● (1700)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a newspaper article out of Colombia on March 4 had the headline "Colombia to investigate 100 judges for corruption". It states:

Colombian Inspector General...announced Thursday that corruption has infiltrated the government's judicial branch, with over 100 Colombian judges to be investigated for corrupt practices.

For me, that has raised the question of not just whether there are human rights abuses because some people there are murdering labour leaders and others, but whether the system has been very slow to respond. This report is from this month, indicating corruption within the judiciary exists. The prospect of any improvements cannot happen unless the government and the judiciary themselves are shown to be onside and working in the right direction.

Would the member agree that this is not only a matter of whether people are committing homicides against labour unionists, but whether the government has demonstrated that it cares?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, if I understood the member's question, I believe he asked me if I thought the government was on the right track. I do not believe it is on the right track. Why would Liberal Party members vote for a free trade agreement when they already know the Conservative government allowed this to happen?

The Conservative government should tell Colombia to clean up its act and it will see after that whether it will sign the agreement. If the government of Colombia makes a law providing social protection for its people, a company could bring it to court saying that affects the company.

How can we vote for an agreement like that? I cannot believe we would promote that in our country.

● (1705)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy hearing the member for Acadie—Bathurst. He is phenomenal in both official languages.

With a president who rose to power supported by the cocaine cartels, who is involved in a government crime spree, who is involved with the Medellín cocaine cartel and linked to paramilitary thugs who brutalize women and children, labour activists and who runs a military that systematically massacres aboriginal people and Afro-Colombians in rural Colombia, why are the Conservatives so soft on crime once it goes beyond Canadian borders? They talk a game in Canada, but once there is a right-winger in power anywhere, that right-winger can commit whatever crimes with impunity.

Why does the member think the Conservatives are so willing to forgive regimes that have their hands soaked with blood, once they are outside the boundaries of Canada?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I blame the Conservatives for their attitude with criminals. They would like to build quite a few jails in Canada. The budget will increase by 43%. Maybe they have found a way to build jails in Colombia too, not just for murderers but for everybody because they really believe in throwing everybody in jail. They believe it is the way to fix the problems we have with criminals instead of investing in rehabilitation.

The government is looking at signing an agreement with the president of Colombia who has been involved in those kinds of things. The government should tell him to change his law, change his attitude, change the way he deals with workers and change the way he deals with human beings, then it will see after that.

I am worried about signing an agreement before that. We are telling the president of Colombia that he is on the right track and to continue.

My colleague said that the Conservative government was strict on crime. Why does it not tell the Colombian government that it will never sign an agreement with a government that is involved in crimes like those in Colombia?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-2, even though this is the third time I have debated it in the House.

This is the bill to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia, the former Bill C-23, which has come back to the House again.

We really do not understand the Conservative government's determination to make this a priority bill. This agreement with Colombia contains a number of flaws and raises a number of serious problems. Implementing it would be a serious mistake.

The Conservative government's motivation for signing a free trade agreement really has nothing to do with trade, it has to do with investment. The agreement contains an investment protection chapter, which would make life easier for Canadian investors who want to invest in the mining sector in Colombia in particular.

Even that is negative, and I will say why in a moment. There is nothing positive about this free trade agreement and we will gain nothing from it. It is therefore incomprehensible that they would want to sign it.

Colombia has one of the worst records in the world and probably in Latin America when it comes to human rights. Thousands of trade unionists have been killed. Since 1968, 2,690 trade unionists have been killed because of their union work, 46 of them in 2008.

Trade unionists are the target of violence, among other things. There have been many population displacements, and this is not because the people are not sedentary or like to move around. These displacements show that Colombia is a country that has no regard for fundamental rights. There are numerous examples of human rights abuses.

It is mainly small farmers and small miners who are displaced, who have to leave their land to accommodate the huge agri-food or mining corporations, probably the ones the Conservative government wants to help. There are various ways of displacing farmers and people who have a small mine.

You can make death threats against an individual or his children. Most of us would have cleared out long ago. There is also murder, which is even worse. As well, people's land is flooded so they are no longer able to earn a living, and this forces them to leave. After that, the land is dried out so it can be used.

A fundamental principle of free trade agreements is not being respected. Normally a free trade agreement is signed by two countries with similar economies. I will not go so far as to say that nothing could be more dissimilar than the economies of Colombia and Canada, but that is pretty close to the reality.

Colombia has immense poverty: 47% of the population lives below the poverty line and 12% lives in absolute poverty. One fifth of the population lives on less than \$1 a day. I did not invent this statistic; it comes from the UN.

The crime statistics also point to a very sinister side of Colombia. Before I begin quoting the Department of Foreign Affairs, I would like to say that in 2008, the crimes committed by paramilitary groups increased by 41%, in comparison with 14% the previous year.

I do not think there is a legitimate reason for signing this free trade agreement. Even this government's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade is discouraging people from travelling to Colombia. On the Foreign Affairs website, the warnings and recommendations for the public advise against going. In addition, no one wants to go as part of a mining project.

• (1710)

The advice is very clear when it comes to those who work for or in the mines.

This government makes some general recommendations about Colombia. On one hand, it is saying that we will sign a free trade agreement with the country. On the other hand, it is saying that no one should go there:

Exercise a high degree of caution

Presidential elections will take place in Colombia on May 30, 2010... Public gatherings and areas where demonstrations may occur should be avoided.

Canadians should exercise a high degree of caution due to the unpredictable security situation. Although there is no specific information about future terrorist activities or threats against Canadian citizens in Colombia, Canadians should be vigilant and avoid any unattended packages or parcels and bring them to the attention of security personnel.

It does not seem so bad up to that point, but here is the next part.

Possible terrorist targets include military and police vehicles and installations, restaurants, underground garages, nightclubs, hotels, banks, shopping centres, public transportation vehicles, government buildings, and airports.

How can we go to Colombia and sign a free trade agreement when our government is specifically telling us not to go there because government buildings and airports are considered dangerous? It is completely incomprehensible.

Regional Warning

Avoid non-essential travel

Government Orders

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada advises against non-essential travel to the city of Cali and most rural areas of Colombia, because of the constantly changing security situation and the difficulty for the Colombian authorities of securing all of the country's territory.

Another regional warning reads:

Avoid all travel

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada advises against all travel...located along the border with Ecuador...The presence of armed drug traffickers, guerrilla and paramilitary organizations, including the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army), poses a major risk to travellers. These groups continue to perpetrate attacks, extortion, kidnappings, car bombings, and damage to infrastructure in these areas. Landmines are used by guerrilla groups, especially in rural areas.

How can we sign a free trade agreement with a country like that? How can we travel there to tour around and see the sights?

Civil Unrest

National parks, wildlife refuges, and city outskirts are often convenient hideouts for illegal groups and should be avoided, as armed clashes are frequent in such areas.

How can we travel in this country with which we have signed a free trade agreement?

Crime

For security reasons, it is preferable to arrive at Medellín's José María Córdova International Airport during the day to avoid the road from the airport to the city after dark.

It makes no sense.

Avoid going to bars alone.

Some will say this should always be avoided. In any case, it continues:

Never leave your drink or food unattended. There have been numerous incidents of drugs being used (including scopolamine) to incapacitate travellers in order to rob them. Scopolamine can be administered through aerosols, cigarettes, gum, or in powder form. Typically, travellers are approached by someone asking for directions; the drug is concealed in a piece of paper and is blown into the victim's face. Exercise extreme caution, as scopolamine can cause prolonged unconsciousness and serious medical problems.

And we are going to sign a free trade agreement in this context? I left one of the best excerpts for last.

Colombia has one of the highest kidnapping rates in the world.

As we all know, Ingrid Betancourt was held in captivity for six years.

While kidnapping is primarily aimed at Colombians, foreigners can be targeted by guerrilla groups in all parts of the country, especially persons working for (or perceived to be working for) oil and mining companies.

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly, Canadians are rallying against this bill and the Liberal amendment. We have received letters from the Council of Canadians, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the B.C. teachers group, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Auto Workers, the United Church of Canada and the Public Service Alliance. Many other organizations have rallied to oppose this legislation and particularly the Liberal amendment that facilitates it, which until two weeks ago was totally dead in the House. It had been stopped for the last year.

Government Orders

The Liberals have rescued the legislation by making the amendment possible in this deal with the minister and the president of Colombia at some dance club a couple of months ago. The question is whether the amendment makes the agreement worthy of support in the House. Clearly, for some Liberals, it does. For others, I am not so sure.

Does the member think the amendment the Liberals have produced is enough to bring all Liberals onside to support the bill?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, it is rather obvious that the Liberal amendment is not enough to make this free trade agreement palatable. One cannot revise the terms of an agreement after it has been signed. We must bring forward our requirements before signing the agreement.

In this case, the fundamental requirements would be that there is respect for human rights and that public safety is re-established in Colombia. These two fundamental requirements must be met before signing the free trade agreement. The fact that our economies are dissimilar poses a real problem. Colombia may be a poor choice.

My colleague stated that many Canadians and Quebeckers are against this agreement. This is what the Council of Canadians had to say:

Our first-hand experience contradicts claims the free trade deal will strengthen Colombia's democracy...We found widespread evidence of human rights violations, corruption, resurgent paramilitary groups, and drug violence.

● (1720)

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in regard to what the Liberal member from Mississauga South said and in reply to the question from the New Democratic Party member, I would say this. According to the recommendations in the report of the Standing Committee on International Trade, which was supported by the Liberals, this agreement should not be signed so long as an independent study has not confirmed that the situation is improving and has stabilized. But the Liberals are prepared to sign the agreement first and do the study second.

In answer to the question I asked him earlier, the Liberal member said he tried to find an independent group to do the human rights study, but was not successful.

I want to ask my colleague in the Bloc the following: how can the Liberal member say such a thing in light of all the independent groups that are opposed to this agreement?

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, in all honesty, I do not know how so much credibility can be attached to the Liberal member's answer. I do not know how people could search the world over for a credible organization that could do a human rights evaluation in various countries and not be able to find one. It is so obvious that there are credible organizations that I will not even bother to name any.

Maybe they could not find a credible-looking organization that would say what they want to hear. If they want to hear that there is no human rights problem in Colombia, no credible organization in the whole world would say something like that.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak on this issue, but with some despair because, as the House has heard from my party, clearly there is a lot wrong with the free trade agreement with Colombia.

We saw the government attempt to bring this bill forward before prorogation and now after prorogation. It claims to have improved it with a proposed amendment by the Liberals.

If I might comment on that to start, at the inception of this talk on free trade with Colombia there did not seem to be a concern about human rights. The government responded by having the side agreement. Having a side agreement on human rights pretty much says it all. It is like having voluntary human rights, something off to the side and not embedded. When the government clearly could not sell that, it had Liberals come to its rescue with this notion that there would be a review.

I have to say that as the foreign affairs critic, the fact of the matter is that our embassy does reviews on human rights in countries around the world, including Colombia. One of the jobs of diplomats in embassies, wherever they are stationed, is to do an evaluation of human rights within the respective countries they are situated in. I would point to some of those reports and some from other organizations to show that having yet another review of human rights is just that. It is a review and does not actually deal with the issue.

With regard to this trade agreement and others, some have made the argument that just having a free trade agreement will automatically change the human rights profile in the long-term. There is just not clear evidence for that. There is hypothesis for that. We can have a hypothesis and that is fine, but we should not mistake that for evidence. When entering into a free trade agreement, we need actual evidence that it will change the human rights situation.

There are people in Colombia who have suffered repeated retrograde governance that has abused their human rights. We have gone through the list on this side of the House of people who are in the trade union movement and speaking up for their communities. They are being targeted by paramilitary forces and people associated with the government. It is cold comfort to go to them with a hypothesis and say we think that free trade is going to change their situation. That hypothesis does not help them.

If anything, the weakest argument the government, and those who support it on the Liberal side, has put forward is that free trade frees people. The nomenclature might sound good, but the evidence is counter to that. There is no evidence of that. It is hyperbole. It does not have any credence when we look at trade agreements around the world.

We can show that there is a shift in capital and investment, and that there is money changing hands, but where there is no evidence and where the government, and those who support it, has no credible argument is that this will actually change the human rights profile. We have to look at that.

Let us look at one piece of evidence that was brought to the House of Commons recently through the foreign affairs committee by the Special Rapporteur for Refugees from the UN. The committee had prepared for that meeting and looked at the issue of internally displaced persons. It was shocking to learn that the number one country in the entire world with the highest number of internally displaced persons was Colombia.

• (1725)

Guess who was second? It was Iraq. Then we get to Sudan and Afghanistan. There is no surprise for those countries. The fact that Iraq has one of the highest numbers of internally displaced persons is probably not a surprise. Afghanistan is probably not a surprise. It is probably not a surprise that the situation in Sudan is not great and that it has a very high level of internally displaced persons, but did members of the government know and did members of the Liberal Party know and others that Colombia ranks number one for internally displaced persons? That is who we are signing on with.

I think that is evidence. It is not a hypothesis; it is not hyperbole. It is a fact that Colombia has the highest number of internally displaced persons. Why? We have talked about it in this House. People have been pushed out of their communities at gunpoint. People have been forced out of their homelands because paramilitary forces are aligned, by the way, with the government. Why? It is because there is a scramble for power and resources, and everyday people are paying the price. They are being pushed out of their communities.

If a person had to pack up everything tomorrow and move somewhere else in the province of Ontario or elsewhere in the country to keep their family safe, that person would not be fleeing the country. They would be fleeing within their country.

Colombia has the highest percentage of people who are refugees within their own country. I think that matters when we look at who we are doing business with.

This trade deal will not help them. We need to have further changes in justice. We need to have reconciliation. We need to have the leadership that is responsible for that, who will finally acknowledge that there have been crimes against humanity in that country. Until that time, those people who have unfortunately shared the experience, and too many people within their country have been internally displaced, are going to ask us as Canadian parliamentarians and decision makers, "What's in it for me?"

That is a critical question when we are negotiating trade agreements. If we cannot answer how we are going to help people who are suffering the most and provide facts, not hyperbole, not theory, not suggestion, then I think it is not a deal worth signing on to.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. When we return to this matter, the member for Ottawa Centre will have two minutes remaining.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

Private Members' Business

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

ITALIAN-CANADIAN RECOGNITION AND RESTITUTION ACT

The House proceeded to consideration of Bill C-302, An Act to recognize the injustice that was done to persons of Italian origin through their "enemy alien" designation and internment during the Second World War, and to provide for restitution and promote education on Italian-Canadian history, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There being no amendment motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.) moved that Bill C-302, An Act to recognize the injustice that was done to persons of Italian origin through their "enemy alien" designation and internment during the Second World War, and to provide for restitution and promote education on Italian-Canadian history, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as you said, this bill seeks to recognize the injustice that was done to persons of Italian origin through their enemy alien designation and internment during the second world war, and to provide for restitution and promote education on Italian-Canadian history.

[*English*]

It is a pleasure for me to rise on this bill. This is the first hour of the third reading.

[*Translation*]

It is a parliamentary tradition that debates in the House tend to be repetitive, but today I will try not to repeat what I said during my speech to Parliament at second reading. That will be difficult.

The summary does a good job of explaining the bill:

The purpose of this enactment is to recognize and apologize for the treatment that persons of Italian origin received in Canada during the Second World War in spite of the contribution that they have made and continue to make to the building of Canada.

The enactment also provides for restitution to be made in respect of this treatment. The restitution payment is to be applied to the development and production of educational materials relating to Italian-Canadian history and promoting ethnic and racial harmony, and to other projects agreed to by the Minister of Canadian Heritage and an educational foundation established for this purpose.

[*English*]

I want to begin by saying that this apology is long overdue.

[*Translation*]

Here it is a question of the injustice that was done to Canadians of Italian origin through their enemy alien designation during the second world war.

Private Members' Business

[English]

There is no question about the internment actually happening. There are some questions as to the actual number of Italians who were interned. If we do some research and a bit of reading, not all the documents are in order. So there are different numbers that have been thrown out there. There are numbers of up to 6,000 people who were arrested after the internment happened.

[Translation]

No one was ever charged.

[English]

Not one person was ever charged. Some people were arrested and were simply held overnight, and some were held up to three or even four years in prison camps. So there are extremes from one end of the spectrum to the other. Some people were fingerprinted and then had to report to the police station on a weekly basis. Some of these registers were lost. That is why we cannot have an accurate account of how many were actually affected. The only count that we actually have is of the ones who were held in Petawawa. They were taken as young as 16 years of age and as old as 70.

• (1735)

[Translation]

Most of the people arrested were men, but there were also some women.

[English]

In some cases, some were picked up in the middle of the night and taken 3,000 miles away. Imagine that. Of course, not all were Italians. Some were arrested simply because they had a name ending in a vowel.

The exact number of people held in internment camps is unknown, but we know that roughly 700 were held in Petawawa alone. Others were detained in three other camps. There was one on Saint Helen's Island near the island of Montreal, and there were two other camps in Atlantic Canada. My understanding is there was one in Fredericton and one in Nova Scotia.

Just to put the whole item in context, Canada versus the States, the war happened and Canada reacted in the fashion it did, but in the U.S., only 228 were interned out of a possible 300,000 U.S. citizens of Italian origin. In Canada, those of Italian origin were estimated to number about 112,000, roughly 40,000 of whom were born in Canada, and as many as 30,000 were on an undesirable list.

We are talking about 40-odd years ago. We can imagine the impact the internment would have had on people's lives. We have to understand Italian culture and how they would have taken something like this.

I have something to read, right out of a magazine or newspaper article in *Il Postino*, in English, from May 2007. I will read an excerpt, which says:

But my grandmother didn't speak with her daughter about the internment until the 1950s, and then only briefly. "There was no reason to discuss it," my grandmother, [a]...citizen of English descent, says unquestioningly. "We put it out of our minds and behind us. I didn't tell any of the children until they were grown. We were so ashamed."

Imagine. There are families out there who do not even know that this happened to them. It is probably explained best as the article goes on to say:

When my grandfather died in 1957, the story of precisely what he was thinking [at the prison camps] died with him, as he wanted. My grandmother will say only that he was terribly depressed during his weeks there, that he feared the ruin of his career, that his health declined.

It goes on and on, talking about how this single family just kept it secret from the rest of the family. Many who were interned were just sons of Italian parents. Of course, the Italians who came to this country were not the most educated. Many were illiterate, and they were accused of being spies. Imagine a spy not being able to read.

Families were receiving mail that was marked "POW". Imagine people going down the street to pick up their mail and receiving a big envelope marked "POW". They could just imagine what their next door neighbours thought of them.

Think again: 40 or 50 years ago, the people who were arrested were primarily males, which meant they were the breadwinners. In those times, people did not necessarily have money put aside but were just living day to day, if not week to week. If they did not have a paycheque, the family could not pay the rent or for groceries. The families had to go and live with another family. Families were directly impacted.

Some were fairly well off. The males were arrested and their family businesses were lost. There are tons of stories about that. If people go on the Internet, there is actually a film by the National Film Board on the internment that shows well-to-do Italian families that lost their businesses.

Even if they were just arrested for a week or a month, rumours and stories continued after they were released. This destroyed families. It destroyed people's character. More importantly what it destroyed was the community, a community of people, some of whom, because of their embarrassment, came home and decided to change their name, to get rid of that vowel at the end of their name, and they decided not to be associated with anybody in the Italian community.

This was 50 years ago, and we can imagine how many of these individuals would have been professionals today, whether it be accountants, my favourite type of profession, or lawyers, doctors, dentists, and so forth. There may have been even a few politicians along the way.

Simply put, their liberty was taken away.

This is a private member's bill. It is very simply drafted with the limited amount of resources we have. I am hoping that we can work together to get this bill passed, as it is supported by members of every party in this House.

What we are doing, very simply, is requesting an apology in the House of Commons. Some people thought this would be a problem. It would be on the record. The bill is asking the Parliament of Canada to hereby acknowledge the unjust treatment received by persons of Italian origin. Obviously that apology would be given by the Prime Minister.

Private Members' Business

●(1740)

In fact, I do have to be up front here and say that there had been an apology to the Italian community about what happened 45 years earlier, by the then prime minister, Brian Mulroney. It was at an Italian dinner. He did call the event legally wrong and immoral, but the problem was that he never officially apologized in the House of Commons. It is on the record that he was going to apologize in the House of Commons.

[Translation]

Nonetheless, he never did.

The purpose of this bill is to recognize the injustice that was done to Canadians of Italian origin. It is not complicated. This is not a precedent setting measure. This has already been done in the House. This was done during the Brian Mulroney years for the Japanese community. And a few years ago, the current Prime Minister made an apology to the Chinese community.

[English]

I also have some of the bills and they are on the record, so this is not something that is made up. The Library of Parliament prepared a report, a research paper. So there were official apologies. We could even include the official apology that was made to the residential schoolchildren.

The other thing that the bill is asking for is compensation. The compensation is not the important part. The compensation is mainly to educate Canadians, and I am not just talking about Canadians of Italian origin, as to what happened in the past, because it is a way to correct the mistakes of the past. We need to keep those, I will not say memories, alive, but we need to find a way to educate our young people. That is what I am getting these days in my office, Italians of third and fourth generation asking me about the internment. They understand that I have a private member's bill. A couple of students have actually won awards across Canada for doing a project on the internment, and they are astounded that most people my age are not even aware of what happened with the internment. Older Italians just want to forget about it. Here we are, as I said before, having lost a couple of generations and not being able to understand what happened to us before.

In terms of the compensation, basically I will just read from the bill what we are asking for:

[Translation]

Restitution

The Minister of Canadian Heritage, in cooperation with the Minister of Finance, shall negotiate with the National Congress of Italian Canadians an agreement for a suitable payment to be made in restitution for the unjust treatment described in section 3, which agreement shall be proposed to Parliament for approval.

The proposed agreement is more or less the same as the one that was reached with the Italian community in another parliament.

[English]

I do not think there is any controversy here. We have people from all parties supporting it. I want to put on the record that I thank the Liberals. Pretty well everybody from the Liberal Party supported it, although I think there were a few missing. The NDP, of course, and the Bloc Québécois were very supportive of the bill, not only

through their voting but also in committee and through issuing press releases trying to force the government to get its act together and get this bill through so that we can send it to the Senate and move on with history.

I did attend a couple of meetings when this particular bill was studied in committee. We heard from different Italian associations or organizations. There was the Canadian Italian Business and Professional Association, the national chapter and some local chapters. We had la Fondation communautaire canadienne-italienne du Québec. We had the Orders Sons of Italy of Canada. We had the National Congress of Italian Canadians, the national and the Quebec chapters. Those were the four organizations that actually signed an agreement with the Government of Canada three or four years ago for some type of restitution in the ballpark of around \$12.5 million, but the Minister of Canadian Heritage can negotiate that part of the deal.

Not only do we have full support from these four national organizations, we added another one, Casa d'Italia, which was the first community centre in Montreal where the Italians congregated and they were probably the most affected during the time of the internment.

Oddly enough, we also had a partisan organization, the Italian Canadian advisory committee on this new program that the Conservatives decided they would have. There were three Conservatives on that advisory committee and they were all for the bill.

There is no question that the bill should be put forward. We also had the immigration minister come forward. I am not sure why he came forward. I asked for the heritage minister. I think the immigration minister, no disrespect to him, does not understand the file, and I do not think he should be in charge of the bill. I would like to see the heritage minister pick up the file and push it along so we can get this bill through the Senate.

Again I would like to thank all the MPs who spoke in favour of the bill during the second reading. I look forward to questions and comments from the members.

●(1745)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows quite well that, as an Italian-Canadian, I voted against this bill and I will vote against it again. As I mentioned before, this bill does not seek to unify Italian Canadians. It seeks to divide the Italian Canadian community.

The last time this bill came before this House I asked why the member felt that no less than seven Liberal prime ministers turned their backs on the Italian Canadian community. Under those different prime ministers, a number of Liberal majority governments never felt it important enough to reach out to the Italian Canadian community at that time and bring forward an apology bill.

As the member mentioned in his speech, we also know that an apology did come from former Conservative prime minister, Brian Mulroney, when he came to the Italian community and apologized for the internment.

Private Members' Business

I have two questions. First, why does the member think the Liberal Party, for so many years, so many prime ministers and so many majority governments, turned its back on the Italian Canadian community?

Second, why did he choose a minority Parliament to bring forward such a divisive bill that he knows would divide the Italian Canadian community and that does nothing to recognize all of the hard work that the Italian Canadian community has done to build this country?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, I did not address that before because I knew the member would ask that question. It is only about the 100th time that he has asked me the question on and off the record.

Basically, the Liberals have never apologized, and I am not so sure I agree with that philosophy that previous Liberal governments never decided to apologize. With consistency, the Conservatives have decided to just pick and choose who they will apologize to. They have chosen to apologize to the Japanese and the Chinese community but not the Italians. Therefore, if anybody is going to be divisive, it will be the Conservative government.

With the help of the hon. member across the aisle, we can make this bill bigger and better. We can do it with or without his help. I understand that he may not want to participate and that he had a lot to say during committee, but he was one of the few who did not present any amendments to make this bill better.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members know, I spoke in favour of this bill basically on principle, which is something some of the other members opposite may not appreciate. However, we have a circumstance that is purely Canadian. It involves Canadian citizens who were at the time known as British subjects and who were subjected to an indignity and some duress by a Government of Canada. When charges were not laid, nobody's record was expunged. People have asked for a recognition that there was a tort committed against Canadian citizens.

We have put a label on some of those Canadian citizens. They are called Italian Canadians. What this bill really asks for is a recognition that this indignity was put forward and there is a solution proposed, a solution that was negotiated by all the stakeholder organizations in the Italian community, not only on behalf of the people who had suffered those torts, but by extension, on the community that has dedicated itself to building this country.

There is nothing more that is being asked other than simply to recognize those events, to move forward on a negotiated agreement and to implement that negotiated agreement.

• (1750)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Eglinton—Lawrence has been a great defender of this bill, so I do not know if I can put it any better, but the bill is not about Italians. The bill is about Canadians apologizing to Canadians. Two wrongs do not make a right and in this case we have an opportunity to make a right a right. Let us do it and let us move on.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, the reason I did not bring any amendments forward is because I cannot amend what is an incredibly flawed bill from the beginning to the end.

The member again fails to answer the specific question of why it is that the Liberals have turned their backs on the Italian Canadian community for so long, why he has chosen a minority Parliament to bring forward a very divisive bill, and why he has chosen to ignore the current—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel has about 20 seconds left.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, I did not think he would have a second go-around but typical again where I have answered his question. Since I have been a member, I have tabled this bill on repeated occasions. The member chooses to ignore it and the government may choose to ignore it. The bill is very similar and almost a complete copy of other apologies that were given in the House of Commons. Therefore, if the bill is flawed, the Conservative apologies to the Chinese community and the Japanese community were also flawed.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the bill, a bill that, when it was before committee, certainly stirred up strong emotions on all sides. When the bill was up for second reading I rose from my seat and voted against the bill because, while the bill has good intent, it is actually a very poor bill.

I am pleased to speak to an issue that concerns one of Canada's largest cultural groups. The last census indicated that there were about 1.4 million Canadians of Italian descent. I do not have an English name but I have never looked at myself as anything but a Canadian. I suppose I am a Canadian of Italian descent but I always object to the title "Italian Canadian".

Italians were among the earliest Europeans to migrate to this continent. They have unquestionably contributed significantly to Canada and to North America if we look to our partners to the south in the United States. Americans of Italian descent have contributed significantly to that country. We can go back as far as 1881 when there were literally cascades of Italians immigrating to Canada and they were contributing toward massive construction projects, like the Canadian Pacific Railway.

This year will mark the 70th anniversary of the Italian internment in Canada. I would like to take members back to when Italy declared war on the Allies in 1940. The prime minister of the day ordered the internment of hundreds of Italian Canadians identified as enemy aliens. The prime minister invoked the War Measures Act known as the Defence of Canada Regulations. Today we look at the War Measures Act, which was repealed, by the way, by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in 1988, the same Brian Mulroney who apologized to Canadians of Italian descent in 1990. I will get into that in a little while.

However, we look at that time and we look at the prime minister and Parliament invoking the War Measures Act at that time and wonder how they could do that. How could they have done that to Canadian citizens? The government also passed an order in council calling for the registration of all persons of Italian birth and for the confiscation of enemy aliens' property.

Private Members' Business

Despite the financial hardship and the shame suffered by some of their countrymen, hundreds of Italian Canadians enlisted in the Canadian armed forces because they felt the war against Fascism and Nazism was justified. The most decorated veteran from my city was a Canadian of Italian descent. He actually went to war serving in Italy on a battlefield where he met family members on the other side, but felt passionately enough about the cause to fight for Canada. It is an incredible story. There can be no doubt that Canadians of Italian descent have made enormous contributions to our nation and these historical facts constitute one of the saddest and most dramatic chapters in the annals of Canadian history.

As I said, the hon. member who brought forward Bill C-302, Italian-Canadian Recognition and Restitution Act, in relation to this dark chapter in our nation's history, has done so I believe with good intent, but it does not change the fact that it is a very bad bill and divides Canadians of Italian descent. In fact it looks backward at a time in Canadian history, but not backward enough to see that the apology that was offered some 20 years ago had a very profound effect on the Italian community.

• (1755)

I just want to reference something from a friend of mine, Annamarie Castrilli, who was the president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians. She was instrumental in obtaining the courageous admission of an apology by the then prime minister, Brian Mulroney. She wrote to me and said, "As you know, this year marks the 70th anniversary of the internment. To commemorate this, I have been asked to write a book which deals with what led up to the apology and the circumstances that existed in 1940. I am one of only two commissioners left who actually talked and corresponded with internees. There is only one left to my knowledge. The book is an analysis of the situation in Canada during World War II and the noble act of one prime minister where all else had failed. Whatever else may be said of Brian Mulroney, this was a significant achievement that set the record straight and profoundly changed the life of a community".

She goes on to include a copy of the speech given by the then prime minister, Brian Mulroney.

This bill calls for an apology on behalf of Parliament, the Government of Canada and the Canadian people. The problem is that it suggests that there was an injustice, that the government acted illegally. We can look back at that time and ask how they could have done this. How could we actually have a law like the War Measures Act in place in a country like Canada that believes in rights and freedoms? We have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It was a Conservative prime minister in 1958, I believe, who brought in the bill of rights protecting the rights of all Canadians.

We look back and wonder how that was possible but, unfortunately, it was not illegal. The then Liberal government acted within the law in enacting the War Measures Act. Bill C-302 calls for restitution to Italian Canadians in the form of educational projects that provide information on Italian Canadian history and promote ethnic and racial harmony. However, it also opens the door for unlimited liability from the Crown to persons who would seek damages from the Crown.

The member referenced other apologies. I acknowledge that we did have an apology for the Chinese head tax. I know that an injustice is an injustice and a crime is a crime, but the scale of what happened to Chinese Canadians or Canadians from the Chinese community occurred over decades of discrimination by the Crown. It was profound. It was unquestionably a sad time in our history. I know that we as Canadians are proud that we have moved beyond that but the scale of it was much larger. However, an agreement was arrived at.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: I am pleased to hear that the member for Eglinton—Lawrence is interested in what I have to say.

This government has moved forward where other governments have failed. We have moved forward where every Liberal government, including the one in which the member for Eglinton—Lawrence served, failed.

They had opportunities. While the community was celebrating, healing, coming together, moving forward and celebrating the fact that they were Canadian citizens of equal standing after the prime minister of the day had apologized, then Liberal MP Sergio Marchi came out and berated that apology. He said that it did not matter. He said that there had to be an apology in the House of Commons. Successive Liberal governments, including the one in which the member for Eglinton—Lawrence served, did nothing about it.

Once I was older and knew about this, I often talked to my grandfather about coming to Canada. He grew up in a place called Carpino and he came to Canada in 1927. He arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax after a very difficult trip. He lived through this. He was in Canada for it and was proud to be Canadian.

• (1800)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: What kind of nonsense is that? Everybody here is proud to be a Canadian.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We have a long night ahead of us. I would appreciate a bit of order right now.

The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I understand the Liberal members taking offence at the comments by the hon. member for Peterborough. He is often more partisan than anything else.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of the bill of the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

Bill C-302 asks three things of the Conservative government: to recognize the injustice that was done to persons of Italian origin through their "enemy alien" designation and internment during the second world war; to provide for restitution; and to promote education on Italian-Canadian history.

I am not the one who chose the term "Italian-Canadian". I do not really see the difference between Canadian of Italian origin and Italian-Canadian.

Private Members' Business

If Bill C-302 is passed, Parliament would recognize this injustice. And I emphasize “Parliament” because that is what was discussed in committee.

It is important to mention that it is Parliament. Former Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney has already made public apologies, but that was at a gathering held outside Parliament. It was not as solemn as it might be if the current Prime Minister rose in the House and apologized on behalf of the Canadian government.

In committee an attempt was made to study the bill. At least three groups came to testify. First there were three Canadians of Italian origin or Quebecers of Italian origin, who are members of a committee created by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and who were hand-picked by the minister and who represented only themselves. These persons came to tell us that all this was unnecessary and that Italians did not want these apologies. I was quite surprised at this, but three persons who seemed to me quite credible came to tell us that.

At the following meeting of the committee on November 24, a great many Quebecers and Canadians of Italian origin testified: the National Congress of Italian Canadians, Casa D'Italia, the Order Sons of Italy of Canada, and the Italian-Canadian Community Foundation of Quebec. All of these people told us that Brian Mulroney's apologies were not enough and that they absolutely wanted to make known the history of Canadians of Italian origin. So be it.

Also in committee, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism said that it would be undignified for the government to apologize too often. I do not recall if I had time to tell him, but I certainly remember this. I am pleased to have the opportunity to say this now. I wanted to respond to the minister that I do not believe it is undignified for a government to apologize too often. Instead, I think it is always dignified to recognize one's mistakes and apologize until our victims are satisfied. Whether in the case of a government or an individual, this shows dignity.

Of course, this bill is not perfect. We would have liked to amend it in committee, adding a suggestion to Canada Post Corporation to issue a postage stamp, rather than instructing it to do so. It seems that that corporation does not take instructions from anyone, especially not the Minister of National Revenue, as set out in the bill. It seems this is not within the powers of the Minister of National Revenue.

To accurately translate the wishes of the people who appeared before us and the sponsor of the bill, perhaps we should have insisted that it be amended in order to make it very clear that any apologies should come from Parliament, through the Prime Minister here in this House.

In the end, however, we ran out of time, because the Conservatives obstructed the committee's work for partisan reasons, forcing us to wrap up our work before we were done.

Despite these imperfections, the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of the bill introduced by the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, because it is a way for us to pay tribute to all Quebecers of Italian heritage and thank them for their support over the decades, particularly in Montreal, and for enriching our culture.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all Quebecers of Italian ancestry in my riding, especially the Italian senior's club in Saint-Hubert and its energetic and brilliant president, Guiseffina Vetri. In closing, I say *grazie!*

• (1805)

[*English*]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity once again to speak in support of Bill C-302, An Act to recognize the injustice that was done to persons of Italian origin through their “enemy alien” designation and internment during the Second World War, and to provide for restitution and promote education on Italian-Canadian history. The New Democrats are pleased to support this bill and to assist with its movement through Parliament.

Our great nation has a history as colourful and as varied as its people. Like many countries, however, Canada has experienced some dark points in its 143 year history or, as Canadian author Kenneth Bagnell would say, this chapter in Italian Canadian history is known as the days of darkness or the days of despair. These dark days took place during the second world war.

The entry of Italy into the second world war brought considerable disruption to the Italian Canadian community. While these communities were able to withstand a number of economic challenges due in large part to their strong family networks, there was one challenge they could not overcome.

In 1935 the actions on the other side of the ocean began to be felt by thousands of Italian Canadians and all Canadians who had settled in Canada, and that year Canadian hostility toward fascism had reached its climax. With Italy joining Germany in the war, Canadians became increasingly antagonistic toward Italian Canadians.

As a consequence of Italy's alliance with Germany in World War II, Italian Canadians were designated as enemy aliens and, as such, were the victims of widespread prejudice and discrimination. Canadian authorities believed that these strong family ties among the Italian community posed a serious potential threat to national security. Men lost their jobs. Shops were vandalized. Civil liberties were suspended under the War Measures Act. Hundreds were interned at Camp Petawawa in northern Ontario.

One of the Italian Canadians who would later be interned at Camp Petawawa was Italian-born Sudburian Dr. Luigi Pancaro. Dr. Pancaro was born on July 8, 1897 in Cosenza, Italy. After graduating with his medical degree from the University of Rome at the age of 28, he made his way to Canada where he became the first Italian-born medical doctor in Canada's north.

During the early 1930s Dr. Pancaro and his wife settled in Sudbury with the large Italian community and became a member of the staff at St. Joseph's Hospital and at the Sudbury Regional Hospital. In addition to joining the hospital staff, Dr. Pancaro also opened a private practice and became the family doctor for many members of the Italian community.

Private Members' Business

Dr. Pancaro's life dramatically changed on June 11, 1940. That day, Dr. Pancaro was suddenly pulled away from the patient he was seeing, placed in the back of a police van and transported to the Sudbury jail. In his cell, Dr. Pancaro met other Italian-born men, most of them his patients. Dr. Pancaro's abduction happened one day after Italy entered the second world war.

The evening before Dr. Pancaro was taken away in a police van, Prime Minister Mackenzie King ordered the internment of hundreds of Italian Canadians identified by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as enemy aliens. The roundup of Italian Canadians continued until October 1940.

Camp Petawawa was made up of 12 large barracks which housed 60 or more people in each. The entire camp was surrounded by two large barbed-wire fences. Those interned there were boys as young as 16 to men in their 70s. The internees were made to wear jackets adorned with a large red circle on their backs, a target for guards to shoot at if any tried to escape.

While at the camp, none of the internees saw their families. Letters from their loved ones were censored. Some men would stay for months, while others would remain for years. Dr. Pancaro remained at the camp for two years.

After that bitter experience, Dr. Pancaro returned to Italy. He ultimately returned to Sudbury in 1956, where he continued his successful medical practice until 1981.

● (1810)

These men, like Dr. Pancaro, as well as their families, who were denied relief bore the brunt of hostilities during this dark time in Canadian history. As a result, many Italians later anglicized their names and denied their Italian background. It is because of this hostile and hurtful treatment that many second generation Italian Canadians do not know nor fully understand their history.

The fact that this dark chapter in Italian Canadian history has led many to deny their Italian background makes it imperative that the government take the steps outlined in this bill; that is, provide for restitution and promote education on Italian Canadian history.

While our communities wait for governments to do the right thing, many in my riding of Sudbury have proudly carried forth and shared their Italian heritage and achieved success. In fact, despite being one of the city's hardest hit by these days of despair, Sudbury's Italian community has continued to make significant steps toward preserving and passing on its Italian culture and traditions to its future generations.

Nowhere are these Italian traditions of hard work and dedication to family and community more visible than in the vibrant Italian community in Sudbury. Sudbury is home to the Caruso Club, one of the largest Italian associations in all of Ontario. I had the distinct honour of being a guest at the club's membership meeting this past Saturday. Formed in 1947, the club is a not-for-profit organization that promotes, enhances and preserves Italian culture and heritage within the Canadian multicultural mosaic.

For those who are in the Sudbury area in the first week of July, I encourage them to come to the Italian festival and have a fantastic porchetta sandwich.

Something which is very important is that the club also renders assistance to persons of Italian nationality in need. It also maintains a library and archives of Italian heritage.

I would once again offer my thanks to the current board of directors of the Caruso Club, Sav Doni, John Santagapita, my cousin Egidio Manoni, Linda Zanatta-Beaudoin, Danilo Monticelli, Lina Sanchioni, Bob Armiento, Ugo Rocca, and board president Tony Nero, for the club's continued contributions to and support for the local community.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the Caruso Club's umbrella groups, which also make significant contributions to the Sudbury Italian community and to the overall community: Associazione Marchigiana di Sudbury, whose president is Ezio Campanelli; Associazione Veneta, whose president is Leo Silvestri; and the Calabria Social Club, whose president is Sav Doni. There are many others organizations, such as the Caruso Club Choir, the Caruso Club Children's Choir and the Caruso Club Ladies Auxiliary, to name a few.

We have a vibrant Italian community in Sudbury, and that is something I am very proud of.

For documenting and preserving this rich local history and sharing it with me, I would like to thank Diana Iuele-Colilli, who kindly supplied me with her book, *Italian Faces: Images of the Italian Community of Sudbury*.

Given that official apologies in the House of Commons have been offered for past actions of the Canadian government, I urge all members to join me in voting in favour of sending Bill C-302 to committee.

We will stand again in support of this bill so that the wrongs committed against Italian Canadians in the past can be made right.

● (1815)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I welcome the member's interventions. However, on three separate occasions, he said this is a dark chapter in Italian Canadian history. I am sure that what he meant was that this is a dark chapter in Canadian history, because there is not yet a recognition that there was an Italian Canadian history. This all happened in the context of Canadian history, where some members of Italian origin were victims of the War Measures Act.

The Deputy Speaker: That is not quite a point of order. We will continue with the debate. The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in favour of the bill. I want to thank my colleague for putting forward the bill.

I do not want to go into too much detail, as my hon. colleague and others who have spoken in favour of the bill have gone into great depth as to the impact on the individuals and the community at the time.

I myself became involved with this particular issue when I was the president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians. In fact, I lobbied and held this file for quite some time, trying to get it approved by the government at the time and by the Conservative government as well.

Private Members' Business

Many things have been said about what happened. We all know that these were innocent people who were interned, put into military camps, called prisoners of war. Imagine that. The whole community at that time was also fingerprinted, which I think is important, and declared enemy aliens. In other words, in essence they were called enemies of the state. Imagine being a child growing up in that environment, in that community, at that time and how difficult that was.

Many of the people were not only interned, but sometimes after about a year or so, depending on how long, they would come out and be sent to the front to fight in the Canadian military. They would go off to the front lines with a uniform for Canada. So they were good enough to go and get killed serving the country, but at the same time they were not good enough to maintain their freedom, which is rather strange.

Nonetheless, that also happened. It is another element of what went on at the time.

The most important thing is that these were Canadian citizens, all of them. They were never charged with anything. Some of them were born here.

The Conservatives have apologized to the Japanese Canadians a decade ago and the Chinese Canadians with respect to the head tax more recently, and then they have worked out arrangements with the Ukrainian Canadians and so on, but not for the Italian Canadian community.

Here they have a problem, and later I will identify what their problem is. It seems the Italian Canadians only deserve an apology in a ballroom somewhere, and maybe that was a mistake because they are not prepared to repeat it in the House of Commons.

That is the apology part, and I think it is high time it happened for that community, given all that has happened.

However in terms of the other aspect, which is the financial settlement issue, the community representatives from the Italian community negotiated on November 12, 2005, with the Government of Canada. The agreement was a settlement of \$12.5 million at the time to be administered by a foundation of the community represented by the National Congress of Italian Canadians and other organizations, which I will mention in a moment.

However the government did not think that was good enough. It gave the Ukrainian community a fund and it could administer its own funds, but not the Italians. Italian Canadians somehow are just not good enough or at least are not capable. Therefore the government then set up, according to the minister, what it called a community historical recognition program, which is to be administered by a committee of three, chosen by the government with no consultation with the community at all.

Think of the insult. The Ukrainian community and other communities can administer their own funds, but not the Italian Canadians. No, that is not possible.

I am going to read excerpts from a letter from the National Congress of Italian Canadians. It is important to put this on the record.

The National Congress of Italian Canadians (NCIC) deplores the manner in which the minister of immigration, citizenship and multiculturalism...has chosen to bypass

the legitimate community organizations who have been negotiating with the Government in good faith to arrive at a fair and equitable resolution on the issue of redress for the internment of Italian Canadians during World War II.

It goes on to say:

That agreement, reached within the parameters of the ACE program, provided a settlement in the sum of \$12.5 million to be administered by the community through the NCIC Foundation. This would be in keeping with the administrative process, which has been put in place for the Ukrainian-Canadian community. Unfortunately, the current Canadian Government unilaterally breached the Agreement without notice nor consultation and introduced a new program which is totally unacceptable to our community.

● (1820)

This program clearly indicates the lack of trust by the current minister towards the Italian-Canadian community and its legitimate representatives. Is there any other reason why the Ukrainian Canadian community can be trusted to administer its own program funds while a government administration, with the advice of an appointed committee, is required for the Italian Canadians? The establishment of an advisory committee made up of people who do not represent the community and who cannot pretend to give advice on behalf of our community is an insult. We question the motives of the minister and find his approach to this very sensitive issue repugnant, divisive and insulting.

That is the reaction of the Italian Canadian community leadership with respect to the government's actions thus far on this issue.

I should say that in addition to the National Congress of Italian Canadians, which is an umbrella organization of Italian Canadian organizations across Canada, Casa d'Italia was also involved in supporting this and was a witness at committee. Order Sons of Italy of Canada, the Italian-Canadian Community Foundation, and all of the regional chapters of the National Congress of Italian Canadians right across Canada were the community that was totally bypassed by this government.

However the insult does not stop there. There was no consultation on the so-called committee that the government set up in the community to advise on the use of these funds. At committee, when I asked the minister who he asked, who he consulted to get these people appointed, there was no real answer because obviously no one was consulted.

I will tell members who they are, however. One of them is the president of the Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel riding for the Conservative Party, so I see why he was appointed. Another one works in the Italian Canadian community but has never been involved with this issue, and I believe he is a Conservative as well. Again I see why he was appointed, but the kicker, the real insult, is the third person. This is where it comes right down to where it really is. I do not even know how to say it.

One of our colleagues read to the minister what this man has written with respect to the issue of internment. This is what this gentleman, this third appointee, has written:

We have watched with concern the campaign of Canadian redress. Its leaders are guided by simplified versions of events, drawing on selective evidence, ignoring contrary views and glossing over the fascist history of the Italian communities.

This is what the third gentleman wrote, and when the minister was asked if that was his position, he said, "Well, I think as much as possible we should take the politics out of redress..."

Excuse me, politics out of redress? They appoint a man who actually believes this was a fair thing, this should have happened? This is what he is saying. Does that mean that is what the minister believes? I have to ask the government. I do not know. The minister never gave me an answer at committee.

Is this what the government truly believes? Is that why this man is on that committee? This guy is Mr. Perin. Is that why he is on the committee? I know what the guy might have written, but why does the government choose him? It totally ignored the elected people from the Canadian community right across this country and arbitrarily appointed three people, one of whom in fact believes maybe there was some truth or some reason why these people were interned, and this is a way to justify, without evidence of course. None of them was ever charged or convicted of anything, but one never knows. Therefore, there is no apology, no funds, no respect, and the final insult is maybe we have this committee.

I would ask this House to make it right. I have to ask the House, because it is not going to be done by the government, to make it right, to support this bill and put this behind us once and for all, and to show respect to a community that has done a great deal to build this country.

• (1825)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish I could say I am happy to be rising today to speak to this bill that I mentioned earlier is flawed in so many different ways. But it is actually quite nice to follow the member for Beaches—East York because her comments identified just how divisive this bill is.

The member opposite had an opportunity to approach government members of Italian Canadian descent before drafting this bill, but he chose not to do so.

Let us talk about what we have here. The member for Beaches—East York actually mentioned that on November 12, 2005, a mere two weeks before an election was called, after a number of Liberal majority governments between 1993 and 2005, the Liberals magically came to realize that there needed to be some recognition for the Italian Canadian community and some funds needed to be

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apportioned to it. On the back of a napkin, they showed the ultimate disrespect to the Italian Canadian community. They put forward this election goody to the Italian Canadian community after ignoring it for some 70 years.

The member who sponsored this bill has asked why I keep bringing up the seven Liberal prime ministers who completely ignored the Italian Canadian community for so long. I bring them up because of the 70 years that the Liberals ignored the Italian Canadian community. The fact is that no Italian Canadians who were put in these camps are alive. By ignoring them for 70 years, the Liberal government has ensured there is nobody around to accept this apology that they want. Thankfully, Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney took the apology right to the Italian people. He apologized to them for the injustices of the internment.

Our Prime Minister brought in the community historical recognition program. We took our time with the community. We came to realize that some funds were required to remember what Italian Canadians suffered. I was extraordinarily pleased when the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism announced a \$5 million program to recognize everything the Italian Canadian community has gone through and also all the good things Italian Canadians have brought to Canada.

It is interesting to hear so many Italian Canadian Liberal parliamentarians get up and speak to this bill. They alone carry the burden of the fact that they have been here for many years and have failed the Italian community over and over again, to the point where they are now bringing forward a divisive bill in a minority government at a time when there are no Italian Canadians who were interned alive today. They alone shoulder that blame.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham will have seven minutes left to conclude his speech the next time this bill is before the House.

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.

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 30, 2010
(Part B)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 30, 2010

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

EMERGENCY DEBATE

[English]

ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

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

• (1830)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP) moved:

That this House do now adjourn.

She said: Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to note that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing.

I am honoured to stand here in this Parliament on behalf of the people of Northern Manitoba and across Canada. I am honoured to carry our message, their message, a plea to the Prime Minister and the government to save the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation is not just an organization. It is not just 134 community projects. It is not just 1,000 community workers. It is not just thousands of survivors, their families and their communities. It is a symbol, a symbol of Canada's commitment to residential school survivors, their families and their communities. It is a symbol of the commitment of first nations, Métis and Inuit toward healing. It is a symbol of the hope that day by day and year by year, the peoples and communities that were subjected to despicable abuse and hardship can move ahead and piece together identities, lives, families and communities.

That is why this debate is about a test. It is a test of Canada's true commitment to first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. It is a test of Canada's historic national apology made in 2008 in this very chamber. It is a test of Canada's commitment to the journey toward truth and reconciliation.

There are many stories of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. There is the report released by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada that indicates the success of the program and the identified need for it to keep going. There are the countless

positive evaluations received over the years since its inception 10 years ago.

However, there are also the stories of South Indian Lake, St. Theresa Point, Prince Albert, Edmonton, Clyde River, Charlottetown, Yellowknife, Halifax, Pikogan, Saskatoon, Pangnirtung, Vancouver, Watson Lake and Winnipeg. There is the story of Denise Packo, who spoke of the key language programming offered by the AHF that was crucial for a young person who said that she did not feel Indian because she did not know the language that was stamped out generations ago because of residential schools.

There is the story of Louis Knott and Louisa Monias who told of the value of the camps organized by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in reconnecting with the land and becoming healthy. There is the story of Mrs. Moose who shared the need for survivors to come together in sharing circles.

There are the communities where the AHF program is the only program that gives young people somewhere to go and provides reconciliation and rehabilitation when they leave the criminal justice system. There are the AHF programs that are in women's shelters, where women can seek shelter from violence and domestic abuse often related to the pain and legacy of abuse from the residential schools.

There is the work of Amanda Lathlin, Jennifer Wood, Brian Cook, Qajaq Robinson, Okalik Ejesiak and Alvin Dixon. Their work has broken the silence of residential school experiences across the country and their impact on future generations.

That is what the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is about: first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples guiding their healing processes in their own communities. To lose that ability to make these decisions is a step back, way back.

As we sit in this chamber, we call on the Prime Minister and the government to think back to the apology of 2008, an apology that took place only less than two years ago. It was an apology that started our country on a journey. It started a new chapter for first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples who suffered through the residential schools. It began a journey of hope that Canada would change its step and work with aboriginal peoples toward healing and reconciliation.

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● (1835)

We then saw the commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a historic initiative, bringing aboriginal and non-aboriginal people together. However, the reality is that without the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, that apology and the commitment to reconciliation lose their foundation.

As Ed Azure Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation said, “By cutting off the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, you are cutting off the arms and legs of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”.

As Jimmy D. Spence, a respected elder, said, “The cut of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation for me makes the National Apology empty”.

Let there be no doubt that the need for healing is not restricted to a focused experience at residential schools. Residential schools caused an impact that we cannot even imagine: the loss of a sense of family; the loss of skills that are related to parenting, raising children; the loss of skills that children who were ripped away from their families into schools where their language, their culture, their identity was beaten out of them; the stamping out of language, something that is so central to the identity of anyone and central for the identity of first nations, Inuit and Métis people; the emergence of violence, violence that has taken over families and communities, violence that in many cases hides the pain, a pain felt by survivors, by their children, by generations that have come after, violence that comes out in the gangs and the criminal activities in communities across the country, violence that comes out in violence toward oneself and the high rate of suicide in first nations, Inuit and Métis communities across the country.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation seeks to heal from that violence, seeks to engage first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples who face that pain, that violence, that history.

Let us fast-forward to today's generation. I come from a generation that came after residential schools, a generation that has seen the evolution of aboriginal rights, that has seen the results of the fights and the battles fought by aboriginal leaders who are here today, aboriginal peoples who have fought for control over their schools boards, for control over their education, for the creation of their own schools. There are challenges, immense challenges facing the generations that have followed, the underfunding, the inadequate infrastructure, the overcrowding of first nations, Métis and Inuit schools, like we do not see in other places in Canada.

Yet working to overcome these challenges, survivors and the next generation say that they want to move forward. That is why it is not too late for the Prime Minister and his government to stand up for their commitment of the past year and save the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

This is a debate about the future, a generation of people looking toward us and how we will move forward, how first nations, Inuit and Métis people will move forward.

I have appealed directly to the Prime Minister because I watched that apology. I believed him. Many believed him. That apology crossed partisan lines and brought Canadians together. Were those words about the past or were they about the future?

I now want to make it clear that if the Aboriginal Healing Foundation were to be cancelled, if the government does not listen, we will ensure that the message is clear. We will ensure that it is wrong that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was cut.

● (1840)

Given that commitment, that the initiative by the government, can we not recreate that spirit of the apology? Can we not recreate that spirit that drove the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Can we not do it by committing to save the Aboriginal Healing Foundation?

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, after all, is more than 134 projects. It is more than hundreds of communities, thousands of community workers, thousands of elders, survivors and young people. It is a symbol of hope, the hope that the Prime Minister and the government will save the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will give a presentation shortly and I will talk about the good work the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has done, and it has done a lot of good work. No one will dispute that. However, she has painted a picture that when this funding is not renewed, that is the end of support for aboriginal people, and that is simply not true.

I would like to address some of the issues she raised.

We have funding in this budget for the national native alcohol and drug abuse program, the national youth solvent abuse program, the brighter futures program and the building healthy communities program. We have a national youth suicide prevention strategy and funding. We have the Indian residential schools crisis line. This continues. There are future care awards under the independent assessment process. Twelve healing centres will continue to be opened. There is the network of women's shelters that we have announced, including additions to that. There is the Indian residential schools health support programming. That is available to every student who has gone to residential school and their families. It includes things like emotional support services, culturally-sensitive support services, including traditional ceremonies, prayers, traditional healing and so on, as well as professional counselling and even transportation help to get to those services if it is not available right in their community.

I do not want her to paint the picture or leave the impression that there are no services available. There is an intention here, and we will debate this here tonight, to continue services to the Indian residential schools survivors. It is important to this government, and it is important, I think, to carry that message to aboriginal people across the country.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the discussions we have had in the past and certainly the responses the minister has given me as we seek support for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

However, I have to share the message that not only I believe but that thousands of Canadians have shared with me. With the loss of the AHF is the loss of the aboriginal peoples' control over their healing processes. That is what is so fundamental about the AHF.

Yes, there are programs that deal with suicide prevention, that deal with promoting healthy initiatives in communities. However, the AHF is the only program targeted to communities and has that model of self-government where communities themselves, not bureaucrats in Ottawa or in our capital cities, describe how they can heal. That will be the crying shame if the AHF is lost.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, over the course of the evening, I will have the opportunity to say what needs to be said on behalf of the Bloc Québécois.

First, I have to admit that I was wondering if this emergency debate was warranted, why this debate is important. That is, until I read the documentation and learned about the healing of the first nations. This matter goes hand in hand with government action on residential schools and all that followed. Just now, my colleague spoke of Pikogan. I will come back to that later because Pikogan is a small community near Amos.

However, I would like to ask my colleague a question. I would like her to answer the following. If the program is cut, what will be the direct impact on those communities that depend on the program?

• (1845)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Quite simply, it will be disastrous. One of the people I had the honour of working with said that if the community loses the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, in a few months there will be a resurgence of suicide among our young people. In fact, our youth will no longer have somewhere to go to reconnect with their community, to rebuild their identity and to rebuild a healthy community.

That is the story of every community with a healing program established by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

[*English*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be able to give my support to this issue raised by my colleague, the hon. member for Churchill, and to add a few words to the appeal to maintain the funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Before I continue, I want to recognize some of our first nations people who are in the audience tonight because this is an issue that is important to them.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing may not be aware, but it is unparliamentary to point out the presence of guests in the gallery.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I am still learning.

For over 10 years the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has provided support to the survivors and the families of survivors of the residential school system. This good work will come to an end while the need it was intended to address continues.

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We are well aware that the government made a formal apology to the victims of the residential school system, an apology for the treatment of young aboriginals who were subjected to unspeakable acts of physical, sexual, mental and cultural abuse in that system.

It was an important and vital step in the restitution of first nations people, as the government finally admitted that what had occurred in the school system was a horrible scar on this nation's history, in particular on first nations history.

However, it is not enough to simply make apologies for the residential school system. We need programs in place to help those who have been touched by these wrongdoings to allow their voices to be heard. We need programs in place to help those who are still suffering from the torment of abuse to be able to allow their emotional scars to heal. We need programs like the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to ensure that the apology the government has made to the aboriginal people of Canada adds up to more than just flowery language.

The apology was a first step in providing restitution to the legacy of abuse that the residential school system had cost first nations in this country, but first steps amount to little unless they are followed by a march in the right direction.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation is of vital importance to the reconciliation of first nations people in Canada. The foundation provides services and community-based aboriginal healing initiatives from a community perspective.

Instead of being a top down government run organization, the AHF works in collaboration with communities to provide grants that allow for healing initiatives that operate at the local level.

As we all know, no two communities operate the same and this can be said about aboriginal communities as well. The AHF funds 134 independently run programs. Many of these are unique to the circumstances of the victims they are serving.

It is this type of approach to reconciliation and healing that top down government run programming would not be able to provide for these communities.

[*Translation*]

The riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing has a large aboriginal population. The first nations represent 14% of the riding's population. If the government does not restore funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, there will be serious repercussions for this population.

[*English*]

Let me give some examples of programs that go to help support the aboriginal people within my community. The AHF provides funding for the community healing strategy of the Shingwauk Education Trust

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•(1850)

The community healing strategy is continuously being developed through survivor and community input, and provides individual support programs, a staff wellness program, a traditional healing process for damaged spirits, and a community evaluation matrix for residential school survivors.

The Enaahitig Healing Lodge & Learning Centre has developed a trauma recovery and residential program. The mission statement of the trauma recovery and residential program states:

The project encompasses an intensive two week trauma recovery residential program and allows us to develop components to the already existing four week residential programs being offered at Enaahitig. The ongoing four week programs would serve as an aftercare program to the intensive two week trauma recovery as well as address the needs of those individuals who not necessarily in active trauma.

These are just two examples of programs that help the Ojibwa-Anishinabek people in my riding, through grant funding provided by the AHF.

Grand Council Chief Patrick Madahbee of the Union of Ontario Indians is disappointed and extremely concerned about the loss of funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. The Union of Ontario Indians indicates that failure to continue with this program, which has seen great successes in assisting their people, would be a shame and would prove to be a huge mistake.

The union points out that other government services would then face the increased load of dealing with the social, physical and mental health issues that residential school survivors and their families are facing, not really knowing what these first nations communities actually went through.

The damage that the residential school system has caused our first nations people is incredibly far-reaching. Take, for example, the James Bay area. Last year, there were 13 youth suicides among the aboriginal people in that community. Of those 13, 11 have family members whose roots can be traced back to one particular residential school.

Aboriginal suicide rates are five to seven times higher than other ethnic groups in Canada. If we can take any steps in helping to reduce those numbers, it is the government's duty to do so.

My colleague, the member for Timmins—James Bay has made comments on the need for the aboriginal healing program. He was quoted as saying, “It's disheartening to see that the government shows so much disinterest in helping these communities. Over and over again we hear of the horror stories and now we see a government that is intent on ending funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, a foundation that has proven to be effective in helping in the healing process”.

I also have a colleague from the Northwest Territories who said, “In the past 10 years, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has had a tremendous impact on aboriginal people with trauma from the residential school program which has such a dominant reality for aboriginal children in northern Canada”.

These are disconcerting words from my colleagues who have seen, first-hand, the damage that the residential school system has caused for people in their first nations communities.

A member of the National Residential School Survivors' Society has provided me with his take on why the AHF is important. He tells me that the services being delivered by the AHF are community-based by people on the ground working with people from those communities. It is local and not out of INAC in Ottawa.

He believes that the government is ignoring the long-term impacts of the residential school system, specifically the damage that is being caused to the children and grandchildren of residential school survivors.

If members take nothing else away from this, just know that the people working for the National Residential School Survivors' Society wholeheartedly support the work of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and have seen first-hand the positive results this is making in their communities.

In the years since the AHF has been in operation, it has provided healing and support services to countless aboriginal people across this country, but it is certainly not enough time to repair all of the damage the residential school system has caused. The National Residential School Survivors' Society states that one cannot take 150 years of abuse and expect to have it dealt with within 12 years.

•(1855)

I want to add a few more comments from this society. It said, “Government believes the Commons Experience Payment should suffice and are ignoring the long term impacts...What is now occurring is that the perpetrator, that being the government, is choosing an avenue of being micromanager and adding more bureaucratic red tape; therefore are continuing to abuse the survivors”. It went on to say, “Courts found the government liable, because the government apologized does not mean that the healing has ended; this is a long term process”.

If the government is serious about providing reconciliation for first nations people, then we cannot in good conscience let the AHF slip away.

I would like to quote some information that was provided to the hon. Prime Minister by Jack Layton. He said:

For many people living in rural and remote areas, the programs that the Aboriginal Healing Fund (AHF) helped create were their only window into mental health programming, counselling and therapy. There simply are no other resources available. When the Aboriginal Healing Fund programs ends, nothing will replace them. That is particularly true in Nunavut and the other Inuit settlement areas where Aboriginal Healing Fund programs are the only ones currently operating that deal specifically with residential school trauma.

Mr. Speaker, I just realized I made a mistake a few minutes ago and I mentioned my leader's name. I apologize.

I would once again like to thank my colleague from Churchill for bringing this issue to the forefront.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, it is important that we not leave the impression that there is only one source or one way to help aboriginal survivors. Certainly, there is every intention of this government to continue services to aboriginal people. We realize that the healing, as the Prime Minister himself has said, involves people who are at different parts on a long journey, some of them a lifetime journey, of reconciliation. We know that and understand that.

An important point, for example, is that Health Canada will make available the Indian Residential Schools Resolution and Health Support Program. Every single former student and his or her family, and family is anyone who is a spouse, a partner, those raised in the home or raised in the household of a former survivor, any relation who has experienced effects of intergenerational trauma, can qualify for this program.

This program includes: emotional support, not from an Ottawa bureaucrat but from an aboriginal mental health worker who will come alongside and work with survivors; cultural support, that is right down to ceremonies in the community, prayer support, healing circles, traditional healing for example; professional counselling, for those who want to use that approach because they feel it is effective; and including even transportation to where those things are available if they are not available close by.

The effort is to continue services to aboriginal people and we are absolutely determined that it will happen.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's comments. What we have seen since the residential school apology is basically a removal of rights to first nations. We have seen this with the imposition in Ontario and B.C., especially in Ontario, with regard to the HST on first nations, and we know that we have aboriginal communities that are opposing that. Specifically, I know that Chief Shining Turtle has been lobbying continuously on the issue. As well as on the matter that is before us.

The minister mentions the fact that there are all of these programs available, but what he is not telling us is that this is not community-based and that it is not provided by aboriginal people. In closing, does he not believe that these people can actually run their own programs and continue to run their own programs?

• (1900)

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister fails to understand that indeed many of the programs he mentions were already in place while the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was doing its valuable work. They were complementary to each other. They were supplementing each other's work, but they were doing different work.

When the minister talks about Health Canada, Health Canada was already doing this work. It was part of the Indian residential schools agreement. That is the legal obligation, a signed obligation that we have as the Government of Canada, representing the people of Canada, to deliver these services. So, Health Canada was doing this work. Other agencies were doing the work. The piece that is missing,

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once the minister cuts this program, is that there is going to be a huge piece of the healing that is not going to be taking place.

Could the member please comment on that?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with my colleague with respect to the fact that these programs already existed. These programs complemented themselves.

As I have indicated, what the hon. minister has put forward is not community based. These are people who understand their communities and their people. They do not need their money funnelled somewhere else or taxing the programs that currently exist dealing with other issues.

The government indicated that there has been some misinformation about the \$199 million of additional moneys to meet commitments in the residential school agreement around the independent assessment process, but it is incorrect. It is just because more people came out. There are still people telling us that they have not come forward yet. Some of them are still ashamed of what happened to them.

We need this process and programming in place, and the best people to do it are the aboriginal people.

[Translation]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to further the debate about federal funding of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

[English]

We all know that the Indian residential school system is a sad but undeniable part of Canada's history. This was an educational system in which young children were removed from their homes, and often taken far from their communities.

First nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were frequently prohibited in these schools. Accounts of the abuse and neglect suffered by some students are haunting, and will always be haunting. Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home.

The consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were for the most part negative, not only for the individual students and families but also for the lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language. The legacy of Indian residential schools contributes to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

Only by working together can Canadians come to terms with our past, however painful, and create a better future. Our Conservative government is committed to a fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of Indian residential schools.

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Four years ago, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement earned the approval of all the key participants: the Government of Canada, former students, several churches, the Assembly of First Nations and representatives for Inuit. The agreement was the culmination of an exhaustive process of research, conciliation and negotiation.

The settlement agreement is a historic milestone for Canada. It is the largest settlement of its kind ever negotiated in this country. Yet acknowledging past sins is only an important first step. The greater goal of justice for the victimized through the unflinching pursuit of truth, reparation and reconciliation is the call we must now remain vigilant to heed.

On June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister rose in the House to deliver an unprecedented apology for Canada's role in Indian residential schools. Regarding the terrible legacy of the residential schools and the shattering intergenerational impacts that continue in first nation communities, the Prime Minister addressed aboriginal leaders here in the House of Commons. He said:

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a government, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential schools system to ever again prevail.

You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time, and in a very real sense we are now joining you on this journey.

• (1905)

[Translation]

As acknowledged by the Prime Minister, individuals and communities affected by Indian residential schools have been working on recovering from their trauma for a long time. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has played a leading role in that effort. And for that role, we thank them.

[English]

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was established in 1998 in response to recommendations arising from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Managed by aboriginal peoples, it is a not-for-profit national funding agency that encourages and supports community-based healing efforts addressing the intergenerational legacy of physical and sexual abuse in Canada's Indian residential schools system. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation funded projects to help aboriginal individuals, families and communities to heal from the effects of abuses and cultural losses suffered as a result of attendance at Indian residential schools.

The federal government provided the foundation with an initial grant of \$350 million to fund community-based healing projects during a 10-year period. Toward the end of this initial mandate, the government subsequently provided an additional \$40 million for 2005 to 2007.

As part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the parties to the settlement agreement negotiated an additional \$125 million endowment for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. To best meet the needs of former students, in 2007 the foundation laid out a five-year project spending plan for this \$125 million. The plan concentrated spending on existing community-based healing projects in the first three years of the settlement agreement, when the greatest demand for services was expected. About 134 community-based

healing projects were funded through March 31 of this year, and 12 healing centres were funded through March 12, 2012.

In all, the Government of Canada has contributed a total of \$515 million to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation since 1998. The work of the foundation has been invaluable and we recognize that. Again, we thank the Aboriginal Healing Foundation for its dedication in providing healing programs and services to address the experiences of survivors of Indian residential schools, their families and communities.

Reciting funding figures for the past 12 years does little to illuminate exactly what community-based healing entails. In its more than a decade of operations, with a half-billion dollars of federal funding, the foundation has supported programs delivered from coast to coast to coast.

For those who are interested in following up on the impacts of these projects and what they mean in some of these communities, I recommend a feature article in the spring 2010 edition of *Healing Words*, which is a periodical published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was never intended to last forever. As part of the foundation's 2010 to 2015 corporate plan, it outlined a wind-down strategy. The 12 healing centres will continue to provide services until March 2012. Over the coming three years, as part of its wind-down strategy, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation will fulfill the remaining work of its mandate: the publication of annual reports, corporate plans, newsletters, the production of five more major research projects and the gradual reduction of staff and space. In many ways, of course, the work of the foundation laid the foundation for the Indian residential schools settlement itself.

The Government of Canada's decision to fund the Aboriginal Healing Foundation beyond its original mandate demonstrates a commitment to accountability for the legacy of Indian residential schools. The good work of organizations funded by the foundation informs the reconciliation with aboriginal peoples for all Canadians and has been essential to Canada's continued growth and unity as a nation.

[Translation]

Implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement began more than two years ago and aims to resolve a painful legacy. The settlement agreement includes individual and collective elements:

[English]

Those elements are common experience payments for all eligible former students who resided at a recognized Indian residential school; the independent assessment process to investigate and compensate claims of sexual and serious physical abuse; a truth and reconciliation commission; a series of commemorative initiatives; and measures to support healing such as the Indian residential schools resolution health support program and an endowment to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

No amount of money can fully heal the damage done by the Indian residential school system, but compensating victims is an important part of recognizing and amending the injustice. At the time of the implementation of the settlement agreement, it was estimated that there were approximately 80,000 persons alive who had attended the schools. It was forecast that approximately 12,500, or about 15%, of these men and women would be eligible for compensation through the independent assessment process. They are individuals who went through further abuse and trauma at the schools. It is now expected that approximately 21,000 individuals will apply.

As of three weeks ago, the Government of Canada has received nearly 100,000 applications for common experience payments. It has processed more than 96,000 of these, and more than 75,600 have been paid, bringing the total payment to former students to over \$1.5 billion. This includes the advance payments totalling almost \$83 million already provided to former students aged 65 and over.

The common experience reconsideration process is a second review by the government, as administrator of the court-supervised process, to ensure that the original common experience payments decision for each applicant is accurate and appropriate. The review also considers any additional information provided by the applicant.

As of March 8, 2010, the Government of Canada has received a total of nearly 15,000 claims related to the independent assessment process and to alternative dispute resolution claims. More than 5,000 hearings have been held to date, and total compensation related just to these claims was more than \$530 million as of February 26 of this year.

So good progress has been made on handling those applications, going through the review process. I relate those numbers so people can get an idea of the magnitude of the problem that faces us all and the serious impact it had on aboriginal people, and consequently on Canada as well.

As my hon. colleagues can appreciate, the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is also intended to promote healing amongst all Canadians. Commission hearings will serve to shine a light on a dark period of our history, as I have already talked about, and to promote reconciliation at both the national and community levels.

The creation and preservation of a complete and accurate historical record of the Indian residential school system and its shameful legacy will allow Canadians to confront the past and build a better future.

The commission will honour the experiences of former students and their families, pay tribute to their suffering, assign responsibility appropriately, and foster healing across the nation.

Further, another \$20 million has been allocated for commemoration activities that will promote awareness and public education about the residential school system and its impact.

As all of us know, however, we must consider all these accomplishments against the backdrop of our current financial situation as well. Budget 2010 takes an important step toward balancing the books. We are emphasizing restraint in government

expenses. During the recent economic downturn, many Canadian families and businesses have had little choice but to exercise restraint.

Fairness to future generations requires that government must strive to keep costs under control today.

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

In this new reality, the Government of Canada is doing its utmost to ensure that former residential school students and their families will have access to mental health and emotional supports.

[*English*]

Budget 2010 commits an additional \$199 million over the next two years to ensure that necessary mental health and emotional support services continue to be provided to former students and their families and that payments to former students are made in a timely and effective way.

As well, the Government of Canada continues to fulfill its obligation to provide emotional and mental health supports to former Indian residential school students and their family members participating in the settlement agreement through Health Canada's resolution health support program. Under the program former students and family members who participate in the agreement are eligible to receive mental health and emotional support services. These include professional services, para-professional services delivered by aboriginal community-based workers, culturally appropriate supports through elders, and transportation to access supports not available in the home community.

I would like to address the accusation that people in Health Canada are insensitive or are unable to deliver services in some way. I do not think that is fair to some of the health workers out there, many of whom are aboriginal. In a survey that was done it was found that 90% of the claimants who responded to the survey received some of the health services support from Health Canada, and 93% of the survey respondents indicated that their experience was safer and more supportive as a result of the health services provided. Most importantly, 89% of the claimants who received counselling indicated that the resolution process was a positive experience. Those workers obviously were sensitive and did a good job of delivering important emotional and mental health services to aboriginal people.

It is also important to note that the funding allocated to Health Canada in the federal budget is not a re-allotment of the money previously allocated to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. The \$66 million over two years included in budget 2010 is new money. The additional money for Health Canada's existing Indian residential schools resolution health support program was allotted to meet the anticipated increase in demand for services due to the implementation of various processes of the settlement agreement.

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Budget 2010 also allocates an additional \$133 million over two years to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to support the independent assessment process and the common experience payment. In addition, the Government of Canada also funds two other initiatives designed to support survivors of Indian residential schools, also the national Indian residential school crisis line which provides telephone assistance and guidance on how to access services. The future care program enables eligible victims to access additional funds for counselling on top of that.

The future care program is linked to the independent assessment process and claimants can apply for funding to cover the costs of future treatment or counselling services worth up to \$10,000 for general care and up to \$15,000 for psychiatric care. To date, the average independent assessment process award is about \$125,000 for an individual, and the average future care component is more than \$8,000.

I believe it is abundantly clear that the Government of Canada is committed to a fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of Indian residential schools and recognizes that bringing closure to the legacy lies at the heart of reconciliation and a renewal of the relationships between aboriginal people who attended these schools, their families and communities and all Canadians.

• (1915)

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to address some of the comments that were made by the minister. He said that this was not intended to go on forever, but I do not think any aboriginal people themselves intend it to go on forever. The aboriginal people I talk to who are in the healing process want it to end as soon as possible. They want their own personal journey of healing to come to a point where they do not need the services of either Health Canada or the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, but right now they do need it. Many people are saying that the journey has only just begun.

The minister acknowledged that many people are on different parts of that path and that they need help. When he mentioned the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Justice Sinclair himself said he would like to see the continuation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation because it would make his work much better and the work of the commission much better, much more useful and it would be complementary to him.

I believe I heard the minister say that this was basically a cost-cutting measure, but has the minister thought about the costs when there are increases in alcoholism, drug abuse, family breakdown or community dysfunction? What are the costs of those? A lot of people look at the healing journey as an opportunity to build communities, for individuals to be built up in our society.

Does the minister see the need for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and does he see that his government has made a mistake and it should change its mind?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Madam Speaker, it is important in this debate and in our communication to aboriginal people across the country to not leave the impression that there is one thing the government could do, or one thing the churches could do, or one thing that individuals could do, and if that is not done, then all is lost. That is the wrong message.

The government asks what it can do to help. In an earlier speech someone said, and I acknowledge it, that there are people affected by this and it is reflected in the suicide rate. We have developed through Health Canada programming a national suicide prevention strategy because that is important. That is not all, of course, but it is important.

When people need help to make sure they get access to programming, by all means we need to make sure there is a crisis hotline that people can call to speak to someone in the language of their choice, to make sure they get access to the services they need and so they do not hear about it well after the fact that they could have had help along the way.

We want to make sure that the future care program that is tied into the independent assessment process allows people to choose the type of help they need. Some may say they want a traditional healing experience. Others may say they want a more western approach. Some may say they want to deal with the elders. We say they can have help for all of that. Those are all available and more.

We do not want to leave the impression with the winding down of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation that we are pulling supports out from underneath aboriginal people. That is not the case. In fact, we are expanding those supports in this latest budget.

• (1920)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the decision to permit this important debate to take place and for the respectful conduct that is associating itself with this important discussion. It is appropriate.

I also want to acknowledge that the Prime Minister was good enough to receive a letter that I sent to him earlier today. He took the time to read it, which I appreciate. I know he gets a lot of correspondence on important issues. It is also true, as I mentioned in the letter, that we all had an opportunity to work together on one of the most important moments that has ever taken place in the chamber, which was when the apology was made with the leadership of first nations, Métis and Inuit people right here on the floor. It was a solemn moment.

I recall at the time saying that I had talked with some chiefs and received some advice from some elders. There were two things mentioned to me. One was that an apology also consists of what happens after the apology is stated. We all understand that and it is in that context that the discussion we are having and the feelings around it need to be understood. The other actually came from some elders in the Kenora area. They said that we always have to be thinking about the family and community, not just the individual who may have experienced the trauma of having been removed from the family and taken to a residential school. The entire approach to dealing with healing needs to reflect an understanding of family and community and the rebuilding and reconnecting that takes place in that collective context.

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I am also reminded of the fact, and I think we all mentioned it in our apology statements, that it was a government policy to kill the Indian in these children. It was literally the objective of it. That old phrase, “We are from the government and we are here to help you”, has nothing to do with health care workers. I have no doubt about their competence and their desire to help. I have no doubt about what they can contribute. But the notion that the government would take over a process which in fact could be best delivered and has been in the process of being delivered by the communities themselves is the problem here.

I simply want to once again underline and put to both ministers that we find a resolution, that we work together to make something work with this jewel which is the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the leader of the NDP, who the Prime Minister thanked especially for his leadership during the development of that apology. I thank him not only for his ongoing interest in it but his passion on the subject, and no one doubts that. I just wanted to start with that.

I would urge the hon. leader to go to Health Canada's website, or I would be happy to make a copy of the document I have in front of me, to try to describe in some detail what the Indian residential schools resolution health support program will do for each and every survivor, their families, people who were in their homes, and the intergenerational impacts that it might have had.

When Health Canada talks about emotional support for one of the services it provides, what it wants to have happen is that these are services to be provided by local aboriginal organizations. They will be delivered by aboriginal mental health workers who will work with people through the entire settlement agreement process and following. In other words, it is aboriginal organizations with aboriginal mental health workers.

There will be cultural support, which means a coordination of services, working with elders and/or traditional healers in order to make sure that we give the best possible help to individuals and their families in a culturally sensitive way that will have the biggest impact.

There will also be professional counselling services. If people say they need the help of a professional psychiatrist and if that is not available in their community, then we will provide transportation to get them to those services.

There is an effort. I do not want to leave the impression that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and the good work that I acknowledge it has done, is the only thing available. An extraordinary effort will be made to make sure that help for students and their families is delivered appropriately, in a culturally sensitive way, by aboriginal mental health workers whenever possible, and to get that help to them whether we have to bring help to them or bring them to the help.

There will be an extraordinary effort on an ongoing basis. This will not end, because this is both a moral and a legal obligation, but more importantly a moral one, that Canadians owe to aboriginal people in the long term.

● (1925)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is very brief and is for the minister.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which the government has had so much difficulty setting up, has barely started its work.

Does the minister not feel he could give the Aboriginal Healing Foundation more time? The issues that will be raised in communities through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have barely started to surface. Does he not believe that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation should be maintained in order to deal with problems that will surface in these communities?

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. minister has less than two minutes to respond.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Madam Speaker, we have a lengthy time for debate tonight and I am sure we are going to have lots of debates back and forth as the evening progresses, so we have lots of time, if not in this particular answer.

The short answer is that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is going to be another of the very important pieces of a very big puzzle of reconciliation with aboriginal people. It is not the be all and end all. Some people will never be comfortable telling their horrible stories in a public way. It is just too overwhelming for them, but it is a part of the big puzzle.

Part of that reconciliation commission work will involve counselling services and help to those who are participating in the commission hearings. It is important to remember too that in the foundation itself, there is still some \$30 million to continue the work over the next couple of years. It does not all end on March 31. The foundation has more work yet to do, will do, and we look forward to its participation in both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission work and in other activities.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to the issue of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, a very fundamental issue. I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague, the member for Vancouver Centre. I also want to thank the Speaker for allowing this important emergency debate to take place.

As the Liberal critic for aboriginal affairs, I have been hearing from many of the impacted individuals, groups and organizations concerning the end of funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. In fact, despite being excluded thus far from the formal Indian residential school settlement, several organizations in my riding have obtained Aboriginal Healing Foundation funding for work with former students in Labrador. That is the beauty of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

In Labrador and throughout the country, 134 projects funded by the AHF have worked with residential school survivors in aboriginal communities to move beyond the residential school legacy. They are now on the chopping block.

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The Nunatsiavut government represents the self-governing Inuit of Labrador. Labrador Aboriginal Legal Services works with members of all three aboriginal cultures in Labrador, the Innu, Métis and Inuit. Both organizations have operated important healing programs with this funding. They say that the trust and momentum is only now starting and only now building and they will need to lay off people. The capacity they have built will need to be downsized.

These organizations, along with others across Canada, have been very vocal in expressing their utter shock that the recent federal budget did not provide for a continuation. I share their disappointment, especially given that all Canadians and the aboriginal people who have been served through the foundation have received exemplary service.

The minister's own report from December 2009 finds that:

...AHF healing programs at the community level are effective in facilitating healing at the individual level, and are beginning to show healing at the family and community level;

Impacts of the programs are reported as positive by the vast majority of respondents....

The report goes on to state:

...that one of the most profound impacts of the healing programs (and the Apology) is that the "silence" and shame surrounding IRS abuses are being broken....

It is undeniable that Aboriginal Healing Foundation funded programs and services have been successful throughout Canada, from coast to coast to coast. They have been accountable, transparent and are delivering results. Enrolment and the demand is up by 40% among survivors and their families. More young people than ever are involved in the cases. Alcohol abuse and suicides are down. These are tangible results and real results.

I emphasize that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation also responds to all three aboriginal peoples of Canada, including the Métis and Inuit, who share in this history, who shared in the apology and who are sharing the healing journey together.

Just today, along with other members of this House, I received a very powerful and emotional open letter, jointly authored by Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, describing the impact of the Healing Foundation and of the impending loss of funding on the Inuit in the Arctic. It states:

As the term of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is coming to an end our people are anxious and fearful of the tremendous loss this means to them. ...The AHF is ours, and our people trust it and take pride in it.

The many aboriginal peoples of Canada are culturally and regionally diverse and often have differing interests or views but on this matter there is solidarity. The voices in support of the foundation have come from right across the country. We have heard voices from Nunavut where the Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous motion calling on the federal government to reinstate funding for the foundation. There were many passionate speeches in support of that resolution.

● (1930)

I want to briefly quote the words of the hon. Hunter Tootoo who said:

This is a long journey. The way I look at it, the two-year funding commitment from the federal government to help individuals along this road and then they paved

the road, the road only goes for two kilometres, a kilometre per year of funding, for example, and then it runs into a cliff and then everyone's standing there, they have been abandoned.

We have heard voices from Nunavik, Arctic Quebec, such as Annie Popert of Kuujuaq. These are her words in the *Nunatsiaq News*:

...it seems to me that any time we make some head-way, the governments cut us off. This includes the non-renewal of funds to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation by the federal government.

We have heard National Chief Shawn Atleo, representing the Assembly of First Nations, say:

We cannot heal one hundred years of abuses in twelve years. Ending projects supported by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation now will create a gap in support at a time when it's needed the most.

Those are powerful statements.

When we appreciate the history and legacy of residential schools and the efforts that aboriginal peoples and communities have made to overcome that legacy, we get a sense of where these leaders and individuals are coming from. They speak from the heart. Many others speak from the heart, like in the minister's own report when they used the words to describe the loss of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation as disastrous, a betrayal of trust, a removal of hope.

Aboriginal leaders spoke from the heart on the floor of the chamber almost two years ago, on June 11, 2008, just as the Prime Minister and all of the party leaders on behalf of all Canadians spoke from the heart on that historic day, the day of the residential schools apology. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation is intimately tied to the apology. It is part of the reconciliation and healing process and helps turn the words of the apology into action.

I turn back to the letter from Nunavut Tunngavik and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association. President Kaludjak and President Eegeesiak end with this plea:

Please join us and help to ensure that the words in the apology on June 11, 2008, are more than just words.

Those who lived the residential schools experience and those who experience the intergenerational impacts need more than words. They need a hand up, they need healing and they need support. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation provided it.

I urge the government to reconsider, to think about the words of the residential schools apology and to turn toward continued support, to put those words into action.

For many the healing has just begun. I say to the government that it is a time of opportunity, a time of healing and a time to raise individuals up, families up and communities up. This is an opportunity for Canada to grow as a country. I urge the minister to restore the funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

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•(1935)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the words from my critic across the way, who I am going to guess is symbolic of what we will be hearing tonight. There is a lot of passion about this issue and a lot of heartfelt words because people want the very best for aboriginal people. I think we will hear that on all sides of the House in this debate and that is great. They are absolutely sincere and I agree with him that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has done good work. In that sense, we will agree.

As I said earlier, there are many pieces to the puzzle. The part I worry about is not in the debate in this civil chamber, but what some people are trying to suggest outside of this place, which is that if the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is not renewed for some unknown length of time, all is lost. I hope that is not what will be communicated. I hope we will have a good debate on the efficacy of it and find the best way to move forward.

As I pointed out earlier, it is great to hear that in some communities the suicide rate has gone down but is it all because of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation or is some of it because of the national suicide prevention program or the youth suicide prevention work that is being done? Maybe it is the work in building communities that is being done through different programs, like Brighter Futures and Building Healthy Communities. A lot of work is going to be done and a lot of it is targeted toward aboriginal people.

Mr. Todd Russell: Madam Speaker, I would implore the minister to look at his own report and to honour the words of the survivors and those leaders in the communities who acknowledge that there are other pieces of the puzzle. They say that the puzzle is not complete and that the healing process will not be complete without the Aboriginal Healing Foundation because it set a new path, a new way of doing things, a new model for healing in this country and a new model for healing around the world for indigenous peoples and maybe for non-indigenous peoples.

When something is so vital to completing the puzzle and so vital in terms of completing the journey, I say to the minister that we must continue it. We must allow it to go to its logical conclusion. People have found the help there that they require, they will find the help there if he allows it and it will be there for people in the future.

This is the beauty of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and what it has done. It was done by aboriginal people for aboriginal people. It was the way they wanted to do it. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was empowering in itself.

I would ask the minister to honour the words of the survivors, of those who give testimony to what the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has done for them and their families, and continue the funding.

•(1940)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to give the hon. member for Labrador the opportunity to talk about two projects I am aware of in Labrador that exemplify the kind of approach that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation programs take.

One project is the Labrador Inuit healing project operated through the Nunatsiavut government, which is a very new form of self-government in Labrador. Its project is focused on reviving cultural practices such as healing circles and approaches to coping, healing and counselling. Many of these practices were lost due to the residential school system. It has a five-week treatment program. It has healing circles. It promotes community and family wellness, traditional healing activities and a parenting program, all of which serve to help in rebuilding those communities.

The other project is the Labrador legal services project, which is focused on people who are incarcerated. It gives them the tools to go back to their communities and avoid reoffending. It helps them cope with the problems they had, such as solving problems of alcohol abuse, bringing down suicide rates and all of the things that are important to rebuilding aboriginal health.

Could the member make a few comments on those projects and his awareness of their personal successes?

Mr. Todd Russell: Madam Speaker, those two projects are indicative of other similar projects around the country where people can design the healing program to meet specific community needs. It can be done to deal with people on an individual basis, in groups or on a community basis.

This was what the Aboriginal Healing Foundation gave to various communities like Nunatsiavut, the new government in Labrador and the Labrador Aboriginal Legal Services. It gave them the opportunity to design things that they were comfortable with and that people would engage in. Healing is much more beneficial when it is done in this particular fashion.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to protest the Conservative government's decision to end funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation suddenly and with little warning, effective tomorrow, March 31.

This funding began with \$350 million in 1998 by a Liberal government and it was meant to allow aboriginal indigenous communities to take charge of the healing, which they needed very sorely to recover from acts of colonialism that have created generations upon generations of aboriginal people with a legacy of pain, a lack of self-worth, a sense of shame and deculturalization. It left them with a legacy of physical, mental and sexual abuse and with family breakdowns, addiction, despair, suicide.

Many governments have subsequently tried to "heal" aboriginal peoples. Many governments have since tried programs and initiatives to ensure that these effects were no longer evident, and they all failed. They failed because they did not have the right vehicle.

The Aboriginal Healing Fund was meant to:

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—promote reconciliation and encourage and support Aboriginal people and their communities in building and reinforcing sustainable healing processes that address the legacy of physical, sexual, mental, cultural, and spiritual abuses in the residential school system, including intergenerational impacts.

There are two words that I want to focus on: intergenerational impact. That means that it would not be fixed in one generation, that it did not just span one generation, that it would take a long time for the results and for the healing to occur. Sustainable means that it must go on until whatever time it takes for healing to occur.

I am a physician. Healing does not occur because I will it to. Healing does not occur because I say I will do this for six months. Healing occurs in its own time. With all of the centuries of pain that aboriginal people have suffered, it will take a great deal of time for that healing to occur.

I would like the minister to note the words he said in his defence “that the healing fund had done good work but it was never meant to be a permanent policy or permanent service delivery”. That alone tells us the hon. minister does not understand the process of healing for indigenous peoples.

Even if he does not understand it, let us look at what his own department had to say a year ago with regard to the outcomes and the effectiveness of this fund:

Although evidence points to increasing momentum in individual and community healing, it also shows that in relation to the existing and growing need, the healing “has just begun”. For Inuit projects in particular, the healing process has been delayed due to the later start of AHF projects for Inuit.

That was said by the minister's department in its evaluation of the Aboriginal Healing Fund. It noted that the majority of projects were not sustainable without AHF funding.

The department said as well that the evaluation “results strongly support the case for continued need for these programs due to the complex needs and long-term nature of the healing process” and that “this support is needed at least until the settlement agreement compensation processes and commemorative initiatives are completed and ideally beyond until indicators of community healing are much more firmly established and aboriginal people in communities either no longer need such supports or are able to achieve healing from other effects and through other means”. This is very clear. The minister does not have to listen to me. He just has to listen to his own department.

Yet the minister further argues that the government has transferred a lot of this healing fund to Health Canada for delivery. It will deliver \$199 million over two years, \$130 million of that over two years is going to go to claims settlement. Only \$66 million over two years, which is \$33 million a year, will actually go to the delivery of emotional support. Last year that emotional support fund spent \$39 million, so in effect to give \$33 million a year means the government has cut that fund as well.

• (1945)

What is really important is that people have to understand the nature of aboriginal healing. This is a people whose healing is based in communities. It is a holistic healing. It is culturally appropriate and delivered by their own people. When aboriginal people deliver their own healing in ways that are culturally appropriate, what they are also saying to each other is that they can do these things, they are

worthwhile, they know how to do these things. They have knowledge, capability and are able. They do not need someone else to come and fix them. That is exactly why the healing fund is important.

The need for this fund is so great that not only has INAC, the department itself, studied this, and I quoted INAC, but the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission also said that this was an extremely important fund.

We heard from the territorial government of Nunavut that this was very important. We heard from the Women's Shelter of Montreal that it was important. However, I want to give hon. members a quote from the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The chair, Justice Murray Sinclair, said that to hold back during the duration of the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the healing fund, “We felt the aboriginal healing foundation's funding should be continued at least for the term of our commission”.

In Nunavut, when members of the legislative assembly unanimously voted on Thursday to press the federal government to continue the AHF, Mr. Ningeongan said these words, and they speak for themselves:

Mr. Speaker, to terminate the Aboriginal Healing Funding now would defeat the whole purpose of the apology that our Prime Minister made on behalf of Government of Canada. The federal government must recognize that healing takes time, recovery does not happen overnight.

In B.C. I know very fully that the B.C. Indian chiefs have also said the same thing. About 134 communities that depend on this fund that will have nothing as of tomorrow.

The irony of this, though, is that the Liberal government issued a statement of regret in 1998 and followed it up with \$350 million. The Conservative Prime Minister in June felt regret was not enough, so he made a long statement of apology and then he removed money from the table instead.

I want to read what the Prime Minister had to say and let members hear the irony of it all. I quote the Prime Minister in June 2008, when he said:

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language...by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities.

The legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

That was two years ago. I do not believe that those problems suddenly disappeared in two years. The Prime Minister promised:

You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey.

We do not join people by taking away the tools that they need to help themselves.

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I do not believe the Prime Minister did not mean those words when he said them, but in order for words to have credibility. They have to be followed with concrete action. It is cruel to give hope with fine words and then pull that hope away by removing the means for realization of that hope. I may be cynical, but it seems to be to be typical of the government, that it says and does what looks good, that the optics are important, but it does nothing to achieve the objective.

We have come full circle. I have listened to the minister say that everyone wants the best for aboriginal people. The aboriginal people want what is best for them. We are no longer handing them something. This colonialization has got to stop, and inherent in those words is that full circle of "We know what is best for you". Comparing the aboriginal healing fund to other programs that are non-aboriginal in nature also does not show he understands. The very ability of aboriginal people to heal means that they must be empowered, they must be given the right to heal themselves. They must let us know we can no longer think that we can tell them what is best for them and let them take charge of their own healing.

In order to bring back pride, culture and empowerment to aboriginal people, this is an absolute necessity, to bring back the aboriginal healing fund.

• (1950)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her most impassioned address on this issue. The issues surrounding the apology in the House of Commons were profound and they cannot be ignored. We cannot go back in a direction as she has stated.

In my riding in the Northwest Territories many small communities took advantage of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to establish processes within their communities to bring people closer that complete nature, to the understanding of the damages that happened to them and their community, to view their trauma as a wholeness.

When we look at changing this now, where individuals will apply to Health Canada, this will be so difficult for so many people in many small communities. We are tearing apart a structure that we invested in, that we created with the full authorization and full intent of the aboriginal people. They created this institution and now we are tearing it apart.

How will this work for the people in the small communities that I represent?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member knows that if Health Canada is again in charge of programs, it decides what programs are best. It makes a decision about what will happen and there we go again: we are making decisions for aboriginal people once more and telling them what is best for them.

The aboriginal healing fund allowed aboriginal people to decide what was the best thing for them to do, depending on their communities, depending on their needs. It worked because it gave them back a sense of control over their lives. Healing must be theirs if we are to empower aboriginal people again, and in empowerment will come healing.

• (1955)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status

Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Madam Speaker, perhaps I was expecting too much to think we were going to debate on the issues and the facts at hand.

For example, to set a few things straight, the hon. member said that the Prime Minister signed the apology and then took money off the table. We signed the apology, something the Liberals did not do, and we fully committed, fully funded and fully carried out the agreement that we negotiated with the Assembly of First Nations and others on the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. It was fully implemented, every dollar of it.

The NDP said that we were withdrawing funding from the Labrador Inuit. That is totally a separate program. It deals with people who went to day schools. It is not affected by what we are talking about tonight. The Labrador Innu, the people of Natuashish have a separate healing strategy, different and separate from this. It is not affected by this.

The member talked about the money, and the member for Yukon also raised this, that was not in the budget for Indian residential schools resolution and health. They talk about numbers and that it has been reduced. It is not true. The money has been increased. It is in fact money over and above the base funding from last year. Therefore, it is much more money this year than it was last year, but the members keep perpetuating these myths, telling aboriginal people that there are no services for them.

Services will be there. It will be sensitive to their culture. It will be administered by aboriginal healing people in their community, including traditional healers.

I urge hon. members to get the facts straight, debate the issue by all means, but do not spread the fear when the facts do not back it up.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Madam Speaker, I do not know how to answer that because it was a statement rather than a question. It is a statement that says if we look in this part, there will be that program there. At the end of the day no one in the House of Commons is telling aboriginal people to be afraid, that this is changing. Aboriginal people themselves have said that this is what they want, to allow them to heal. To remove the aboriginal healing fund will surely damage their ability to heal.

If we truly believe aboriginal people know what is best for them, we will listen to them for a change. It does not matter how the minister spins it. It does not matter what he says and whether we add a penny here or take a penny from there. The government has taken money off the table, and that is the money for the aboriginal healing fund.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would be very happy if this debate could rise above the issue of whether funding should be cut or reinstated or whether this funding will be replaced by another program. I believe that that is not the issue.

Should the Aboriginal Healing Foundation continue to exist for a time in order to help the aboriginal peoples, the aboriginal communities, the individuals and the families affected by everything that happened in the residential schools?

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I say that it should, and so do my Bloc Québécois colleagues.

I will try to explain the importance of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to the minister and the people who are watching by giving a very specific example.

Near Amos, there is a small town named Saint-Marc-de-Figuery. An Indian residential school was set up there in the 1950s and remained open until 1963 or 1964 or maybe even a little later.

In the fall, all the Algonquins who could be found along Lake Abitibi or the railway were brought by force to the Indian residential school in Saint-Marc-de-Figuery. Terrible things went on in this school and probably in many other Indian residential schools. The government acknowledged that there had been abuses and put in place a system to help communities and individuals deal with what they had gone through.

The National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn Atleo, is a true visionary. He said this nearly three months ago:

As we look forward we must also remember our history, and this is especially true of residential schools survivors. The resources in this do not specifically reference the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. This concerns us because the Foundation delivers critical programming to help survivors right at the community level. [Every word is important.] This work is needed now because the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is underway and survivors will be telling their often-times painful stories.

There is no better way to express the importance of preserving and renewing the funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which does a remarkable job.

I am going to explain what happened. The consequences of the forced assimilation policy, and I do say forced, of the Indian residential school scheme continue to burden the aboriginal people even today.

● (2000)

Many people who were in the residential schools did not have the opportunity to develop parenting skills. They had to fight against the elimination of their identity as aboriginal people, and against the disappearance of their language and culture.

Even today, generations of aboriginal people remember the trauma they suffered, the neglect, the shame and they poverty they were victims of. Thousands of former students have publicly disclosed that physical, emotional and sexual violence was endemic in the system, and that little effort was made to stem it, to punish the people committing the abuse, or to improve conditions.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation operates, and I hope it continues to operate, in a culturally and politically complex environment, often finding itself embroiled in controversy. That being said, the foundation itself is an apolitical entity that is concerned only with healing, and it maintains excellent relations with aboriginal political organizations, aboriginal people, the government, the churches and the Canadian public in general. The foundation is considered to be a very successful experiment, a model to follow.

That is why we, as parliamentarians, must absolutely speak out against the risk, if it were only the risk, that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation will disappear. It has to continue to operate and to work

with aboriginal people and communities. I have had it explained to me that near Amos, an aboriginal community called Pikogan, and I apologize for saying it so bluntly, scraped up the pieces of the survivors of the Saint-Marc Indian residential school near Amos. These are people who suffered severe trauma. In recent years, they have started to set up an Aboriginal Healing Foundation in the community of Pikogan. For the Algonquins of Pikogan, Lac-Simon, Kitchisakik and Winneway, of Notre-Dame-du-Nord—I could name them all—it is extremely important that this Aboriginal Healing Foundation continue. I do not want to limit my comments to the Algonquins, but those are the communities I know in my riding.

We have to go back a ways into the past, but it was the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples that produced the famous Erasmus-Dussault report, which prompted the government to set up the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. It was created in 1998. I do not want to go over that again, it has been discussed at least three times in recent speeches in the House. But it must be understood that the reason why a need to create an Aboriginal Healing Foundation was perceived was that the job was going to take a very long time.

● (2005)

People do not recover from the trauma suffered in the Indian residential schools from one day to the next. Whether named Kistabish, McDougall or Blacksmith, these people have passed on the problems they experienced from father to son, from mother to daughter.

At the residential school of Saint-Marc-de-Figuery near Amos, the first thing they did was to cut the hair of the aboriginals brought there to be educated. If the residential schools were not reform schools, I do not know how else to describe them. There were all kinds of abuses. This mistreatment left wounds that take a very long time to close. They will never heal completely.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation works in the various communities, which is very important. This evening, I heard that individual therapies are available as well as competent personnel—I am very sure of that—to provide individual assistance to the people marked by these experiences.

Who will take care of the community when people start to relive everything that happened? As National Chief Atleo said, “This work is needed now because the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is underway and survivors will be telling their often-times painful stories.”

The government had difficulty establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I say that with respect because I can understand the reasons. I have been sensitized to the problem. Still, the commission is just beginning its work. It will go to a number of communities to meet people and try to understand what happened then and what is happening now.

The wounds will never heal. I spoke with Jackie Kistabish, an aboriginal woman who was affected by what happened in the residential schools. She told me that when her mother came back from the school, she did not recognize her. When she herself came back from the school, her parents were no longer able to take care of her. She had lost her culture. Relearning her culture was very difficult for her. All sorts of things happened in the residential schools.

Without taking anything away from the government, I would say they may have been surprised. Maybe they did not realize how great the impact would be of the failure to renew the funding of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. However, that impact is huge and could well cause irreparable damage to aboriginal communities.

We are not asking the government for a lot: we just want it to maintain the funding. It is extremely important to take care of the communities affected by what happened in the residential schools.

I want to speak briefly about the amount of money.

• (2010)

I do not think that this \$45 million would cause irreparable damage to the federal government's budget. I listened to the minister and am not deaf. I understand we are running deficits now, but the government has to understand as well that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is essential. It plays a key role in the re-establishment of connections between aboriginal peoples, aboriginal communities and non-native communities.

I want to thank my colleague in the New Democratic Party who sought this emergency debate and obtained it, as well as the Speaker who granted her request. I repeat that we think it is essential to restore this funding. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has done nothing wrong. It took a long time to establish the foundation because nearly a year was needed for it to really begin its work. It was officially established in 1998, but a year or two were needed for it to really start working and disbursing funds.

We must help aboriginals not only by acting on an individual level, which the government claims to have done by giving money to Health Canada, but also by acting on a community level. I cannot stress enough the importance of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in helping communities take charge of their situations. If the alcoholism and dropout rates are so high, and if there are a number of problems in many aboriginal communities, it is likely because of the problems they have had in their childhood or even early childhood. In some cases, we are talking about people who are now grandmothers and grandfathers.

With all due respect to the minister, it seems odd to me that on the one hand, they are cutting funding and not renewing the budget for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and on the other hand, the minister has introduced Bill C-3, which will soon be examined in committee, to review the Indian Act. Section 67 of the Indian Act was also repealed, which means that the Canadian Human Rights Act will now apply to aboriginals.

There is one more big step to be taken, and I do believe that the Canadian government will soon adopt the declaration on indigenous peoples. It took a long time to convince the Conservatives, but these

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good intentions could be forgotten if funding is taken away from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

In conclusion, I urge my colleagues and the minister to reinstate funding, not only for the sake of aboriginal peoples and their communities, but also for the sake of all of Canada. It is in our best interests to reinstate funding so that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation can continue to do the extraordinary work it has started and has yet to finish.

• (2015)

[*English*]

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleague on the aboriginal affairs committee. He did open up by saying he wanted to elevate the debate and the discussion. He did indeed do that, and it is most appreciated.

I would like to ask a question, because the member has a very solid point of view that does not take into account the fact that Health Canada, which is the one that is going to be delivering these programs, has a presence and a mandate in each and every community, whether it is on reserve, off reserve, in the north or in the cities, and indeed is already present in many first nation communities. We are actually moving in a very inclusive direction. I have been in first nation communities where Health Canada certainly has a presence and is very respected. I appreciate that it is doing a great job and has been reaching out. The minister did talk earlier about the positive feedback on a survey done in this regard. I wonder whether the member would like to address the fact that in almost every way Health Canada has a bigger presence and is willing to deliver aboriginal-based programming to aboriginals in a way that would meet our legal and moral responsibilities.

• (2020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Madam Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's question and the answer is yes; I agree. I say what is on my mind and I think Health Canada is doing good work in first nations communities. There are five first nations communities in my riding. I have visited a number of them as the Bloc critic for Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada. I do not have anything negative to say about Health Canada.

However, that is not the problem. The problem is that Health Canada is working on an individual basis with people who have mental, physical, psychiatric, psychological and other problems. Health Canada provides individual assistance, unlike the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which does community work. I received a good explanation of how the Aboriginal Healing Foundation works in Pikogan, near Amos. It works with and within the community. It is not individual work, as Health Canada does. I respect that. I know that and we understand that this work will continue.

However, we are concerned about putting an end to the magnificent work the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is doing, the reconciliation work and the community-based work, because that is where we might run into problems.

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Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his comments and especially for reminding us what the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn Atleo, said.

I would like to ask him some questions. The hon. minister said that the Conservatives were willing to provide services to aboriginal people in their communities, and if this is not possible, they would be willing to pay for those people to travel. Once again, we see that the government wants to take these individuals out of their communities and provide services elsewhere. Yet that is exactly what happened with residential schools. They took aboriginal people out of their communities and that is not what they want. Aboriginal people want to receive services in their communities.

Right now they have a great service that is serving them well, but that service is being eliminated. This is not the right way to go about this. This service is needed.

Does the hon. member know if the Health Canada program is for survivors only, and not for their families?

Mr. Marc Lemay: Madam Speaker, I hesitate to answer “yes” to that question. From having worked with aboriginal communities, I know that not all treatment is offered in aboriginal communities. Things like psychiatric care and child psychiatric care are given elsewhere. I respect that and can accept it.

Some aboriginal people probably have to leave their communities to receive such care. Like my colleague, I cannot help but wonder who will give this care to the communities. The entire community cannot be removed from the land. Problems that stem from Indian residential schools must be dealt with in the community, with the help of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

That was the mandate of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and I hope that remains its mandate. Community work must be done on the reserves or within the aboriginal communities.

• (2025)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Madam Speaker, first of all I want to answer a question that the hon. member from the NDP raised, asking who can receive the services I talked about earlier. It is in Health Canada's definition. It involves the family of former students as defined as a spouse or common law partner, those raised by or raised in the household of a former Indian residential school student, and any relation who has experienced the effect of intergenerational trauma associated with the family member's time at an Indian residential school. It is quite inclusive.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech. I can tell that he is passionate about the issues that are important to aboriginal people.

[English]

The member mentioned in passing that \$45 million does not mean much. The government can accept that, but in all the many

appearances I have had before the standing committee, I have never yet heard a recommendation from the opposition to cut one dollar of a single program of any kind anywhere in Canada. So these are difficult decisions.

I ask the hon. member to look at what we are talking about: cultural supports that involve ceremonies, prayers, traditional healing, with aboriginal mental health workers to work with former students and their families. I would argue that this, combined with many other programs that are not strictly this one from Health Canada, are meant to address both community needs and individual needs. My hope is that people will look through the services available and understand it is a complete package of services available to all survivors.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Madam Speaker, I understand perfectly what the minister said, and I accept that. I have been asking him the same question from the outset. I know that there will be counselling for individuals, that they can get a helping hand and that there is funding. But who will take care of the community as a whole?

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission goes to Pikogan, who will pick up the pieces? There are people who have never been able to speak about what happened to them who will speak about it then. Jackie Kistabish might be able to access services, but who will help bring the community back together? Who will replace the Aboriginal Healing Foundation?

[English]

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to share my views on this important and difficult issue of federal funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. I will begin by setting some context in terms of information about this.

The idea for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation grew out of the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples published in 1996. I will add that I have been involved in this portfolio since prior to 1996, so I fully comprehend how we got to where we are now. It has been a long journey and it is a continuing journey. The government is continuing to be actively engaged and we want to ensure that every community and every eligible person continues to receive the programs and services that they will require.

The report of the royal commission described some of the lingering social and psychological effects of Indian residential schools and how these effects continued to have an impact on many aboriginal communities. To address these effects, the Government of Canada chose at that time to invest \$350 million over 10 years in an independent organization mandated to promote healing among aboriginal peoples.

This foundation is managed and operated by aboriginal people for aboriginal people. It follows a holistic approach. It funds community-based programs to promote healing, reconciliation and self-determination. Its slogan is “Helping Aboriginal People Heal Themselves”, which echoes this approach.

The foundation's website describes its mission statement:

Our mission is to provide resources which will promote reconciliation and encourage and support Aboriginal people and their communities in building and reinforcing sustainable healing processes that address the legacy of physical, sexual, mental, cultural, and spiritual abuses in the residential school system, including intergenerational impacts.

There is little doubt that the community-based approach adopted by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has produced positive results. Hundreds of thousands of people in communities across Canada have participated in their projects. Last year alone, the foundation funded more than 130 community projects and continues to operate 12 healing centres.

A team of independent auditors evaluated the foundation on behalf of the department last year, and the evaluation was very positive. I can quote:

A number of indicator measures provide evidence that AHF healing programs at the community level are effective in facilitating healing at the individual level, and are beginning to show healing at the family and community level.

The Government of Canada does appreciate the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's valuable contribution. It is precisely for this reason that the parties to the settlement agreement negotiated an additional \$125 million endowment for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. This funding effectively extended the organization's mandate through to March 2012 and supports the operation of the foundation's 12 healing centres until that date.

The budget tabled earlier this month, however, does not allocate additional money to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and that is what today's debate focuses on, the merits of that decision. I encourage my hon. colleagues to consider this matter in an open fashion.

Two important facts are germane to today's debate. One is that the Government of Canada allocated the foundation's funding for a fixed period of time, and while this period was later extended, there was no expectation to provide permanent, ongoing funds.

● (2030)

The second factor is that the foundation predates the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement by nearly a decade. The agreement involves a massive commitment of public funds, a total of more than \$5 billion, to address the legacy of Indian residential schools.

So we cannot do an evaluation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation without a review of the settlement agreement.

Nearly four years ago, our government proudly concluded the historic Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. It represents the consensus based on an agreement between the Government of Canada and legal counsel for former students, churches, the Assembly of First Nations, and other aboriginal organizations. It is to achieve a fair and lasting resolution of the legacy of Indian residential schools.

The agreement represents a historic milestone. It is the largest class action settlement ever negotiated in Canada, and certainly one the largest in North America. It is an important act of reconciliation between non-aboriginal and aboriginal peoples. Never before has a nation acknowledged as tangibly the devastating role that its policies and actions had on the peoples who originally inhabited its lands.

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However, as momentous as this acknowledgement may be, the settlement agreement also aims for much higher goals. It strives for truth, reconciliation and reparation.

The agreement was the culmination of a lengthy process of research, conciliation and negotiation. It features five main elements: a common experience payment for all eligible former students who resided at recognized Indian residential schools; an independent assessment process to investigate and resolve claims of sexual and serious physical abuse; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission commemoration initiatives; and measures to support healing, such as the Indian residential schools resolution health support program and the endowment to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Each of these elements aims to deal with the negative impacts that Indian residential schools had, and continue to have, on former students, their families and other citizens of Canada.

The Prime Minister spoke of the enduring nature of these impacts when he rose in the House nearly two years ago and apologized to former students on behalf of Canada. To quote from his address:

The legacy of Indian residential schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

We all recognize that many former students and their families suffered terribly during this regrettable phase of our history. We must also recognize that Indian residential schools, effectively, diminished all of us.

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement aims to confront these truths and help us overcome them. This is why the settlement agreement features both tangible and symbolic elements, why it provides financial compensation, counselling and support services along with commemorative activities.

The Indian residential schools legacy affects each of us in different ways and to different degrees. The particular components of the settlement agreement contribute to the full range of healing and reconciliation processes.

The implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement continues steadily, and all Canadians should take pride in this progress. More than \$1.5 billion in common experience payments have been made, and more than 99,000 claims have been received.

The independent assessment process has achieved similar success. This out-of-court settlement process aims to resolve claims of physical and sexual abuse suffered at Indian residential schools. So far, more than 15,000 claims have been received, and victims have received more than \$270 million in compensation.

● (2035)

Of course, no amount of money can ever hope to fully compensate for the damage caused by Indian residential schools. All we can do is hope that these funds enable individuals to move forward with their lives and achieve a sense of peace, and that reconciliation brings aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians a little closer together.

Remember, there is no precedent for such large-scale reconciliation. As citizens of Canada, we must find our own way, and we have.

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The Government of Canada remains committed to a fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of Indian residential schools. This government recognizes that bringing closure to the legacy lies at the heart of reconciliation and a renewal of the relationship between aboriginal people who attended these schools, their families and communities, and all Canadians.

Budget 2010 supports these goals by allocating additional funds to ensure Canada honours its commitments and obligations under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The bulk of this money is spread over two years and will cover the greater-than-anticipated cost of implementing the agreement. These funds will help Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to support the independent assessment process and the common experience payment.

In addition, funds and a full commitment have been allotted to Health Canada's Indian residential schools resolution health support program. The program provides mental health and emotional support services directly to former students and their families as they participate in the various components of the settlement agreement, such as the independent assessment process and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This is a moral and legal obligation.

It is important to note that this is new money. It is also important to note that these funds enable Canada to fulfill its ongoing legal obligation to provide emotional and mental health supports directly to former Indian residential school students and their family members as they participate in the various components of the settlement agreement.

Since its inception, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has received a total of approximately \$515 million from the Government of Canada. This is a large amount of taxpayer money which was entrusted to an independent agency, and the Government of Canada is very grateful to the foundation for providing effective community-based programs and services.

The current context will also provide the range of services delivered, except it will be through Health Canada.

The Government of Canada continues to fund initiatives that directly support survivors of the Indian residential schools. The national Indian residential school crisis line, for instance, helps people access counselling services. The independent assessment process, a component of the settlement agreement, enables eligible victims to access thousands of dollars worth of future treatment and counselling services. To date, the average independent assessment process award is \$125,000, and the average future care component is more than \$8,000.

Canadians recognize that the Government of Canada must regularly make difficult decisions. We continue to ensure that the Indian residential school survivors will be able to access services. The government will continue to provide reconciliation for the legacy of Indian residential schools by supporting the settlement agreement.

This government will also continue to support a range of programs and initiatives that aim to improve the quality of life experienced by aboriginal peoples in this country.

Canada continues to make significant progress on a broad range of the issues that prevent many aboriginal peoples from sharing in the full prosperity of the nation. From specific claims and drinking water to education and family services, a variety of reforms and initiatives are under way. Tripartite agreements with provinces and aboriginal groups increase access to programs that are more effective and respond directly to specific needs.

● (2040)

The implementation of a comprehensive northern strategy has begun to generate a multitude of opportunity for thousands of aboriginal people and northerners. Legislation supported by Parliament established a specific claims tribunal and extended the protections affected under the Canadian Human Rights Act to residents of first nations community.

This government continues to support a host of programs, initiatives, and activities that benefit aboriginal people, including those directly affected by the legacy of Indian residential schools.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech although I just cannot believe he does not get it. Here we are talking about a program that was designed, implemented, and carried out by aboriginal people to deal with their issues regarding the residential school issue. It is their solutions that will lead them forward.

I am sure my hon. colleague understands that concept. He understands that concept of self-actualization, of people taking care of their own destiny, of healing themselves.

Why does he continue to ignore our questions about that part of the solution for this particular issue? Why does he want to continue to say, "we will do this for you"? When will he turn his head and look the other way?

● (2045)

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, this is a case of people not hearing each other. We have said very clearly that the programming that is intended to continue to support services for former students and their families will be the kind of counselling and paraprofessional services which are provided through aboriginal community-based workers, many of whom speak aboriginal languages; culturally appropriate supports through elders; and transportation to access supports not available to the home community.

We have results of a survey that would indicate that these kinds of programs have been very well received. I would argue there are more available generally and we will ensure they are applicable to all people. As I said several times now in the House, there is a moral and legal responsibility for us to do that.

The programs run by Health Canada are under the Indian residential schools national resolution framework and have been accessed by people who responded to the survey. Some 90% who responded said they had accessed programs and 93% indicated their experience was safer and more supportive as a result of the support they received. About 89% said what they had received in the way of counselling was a very positive experience. Who would argue with that?

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Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member stated that the settlement agreement strives for a higher goal. I would like to ask the member, is there a higher goal than healing? As a physician and a healer, I like to think, it is part of my professional training to evaluate the efficacy of any healing or therapy based on sound evaluation and good evidence-based outcomes.

Since the hon. member himself referred to his department's evaluation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in 2009, I would like to quote from it. It said:

—keeping in mind...the fact that Health Canada support programs are designed to provide specific services that are complementary but different to those of the AHF...there is no equivalent alternative that could achieve the desired outcomes with the rate of success the AHF has achieved.

This is from the evaluation by his own department. Does the member not agree or listen to his own department's advice and recommendations?

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am not sure of the context of saying something about a higher goal, but I will say that healing is a higher goal. I certainly agree with that.

In terms of the statements regarding specific programs from Health Canada, over the last period of time, Health Canada has made a major effort to ensure that all of the communities that were touched by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation have accessed those programs. They are looking at ensuring that they can provide all of the services that were served, plus the existing services.

It is not like they are going to be exactly the status quo. They recognize that they have some new responsibilities and obligations, and they have received funding accordingly.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. parliamentary secretary and I were first elected back in 1993. Prior to that and since that time, he has been involved both in a policy development side on the aboriginal affairs file and in the community as well. There are a number of aboriginal people in his riding who he has had positive contact with over many years.

I was just thinking about the case of B.C., where there are some 200-plus first nations groups. I think there are 42 first nations in my riding alone. Those that have been fortunate enough to have access to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's services have been very pleased with them. Everyone agrees that they have done some great work.

However, in the B.C. reality, there is a lot of small communities spread over a big territory. In his experience, does he think that the services that might be available going forward are going to be available to all those communities, or is it just to a select few? In both the talking points and the reality of the many programs we have talked about here tonight, will they be available to all the survivors, or just in the major centres? Can he tell people whether he thinks it is going to work, especially in the B.C. context, which is a little different than some parts of the country that have larger but fewer communities?

● (2050)

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, it is true that we have 200 first nations. I have 24 in my riding. I can say with certainty that Health Canada has a much bigger footprint than the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. It is integral to the community. It is community-based and community driven.

I have visited other ridings in British Columbia with similar observations. I do not think this is restricted to British Columbia. We have 634 first nations in Canada. We have the North and we have our urban off-reserve aboriginal people. There are residential school survivors in all of those locations.

The programming that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation provided is great programming. However, if we want inclusiveness, I would like to point out to the viewers that, in my mind, this will create inclusiveness that is much more comprehensive.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Churchill. A very short question, please.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the last few months, when many people wrote to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, they received a response that, pending the evaluation, the fate of the AHF would be decided. This happened many times during the fall.

What happened to that evaluation? I understand it stood as a draft evaluation for months and it was only tabled a day after the budget. Providing that the draft evaluation was around for so many months and providing that it was a positive evaluation, which we know it was, how did that result in the AHF not receiving any funding or any further commitments as we moved forward?

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I think the gist of the question is the gist of this debate. I think we have adequately responded to why we are doing what we are doing, and why budget 2010 set that out.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am privileged but very sad to have to participate in this debate this evening. I will be sharing my time with the member for Papineau.

The government has heard the uproar across the country from thousands upon thousands of people about shutting down the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

When I came into the chamber tonight, I was hoping for a compromise solution. I was hoping the government would listen to those people so in need. I was hoping for a win-win-win compromise situation, a non-partisan win, where all members of the House, on this side for sure, and a majority of the House vastly believe in the importance of carrying on this good work. Even the minister and the parliamentary secretary have said good work has been done. The minister's own evaluation talks about this indispensable work.

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Why not? It makes the most common sense to come to a compromise situation. The government could perhaps re-profile some of the \$199 million so that we could carry on for another year, and come up with a solution to this incredible problem that is the reason for this very important emergency debate that would not have occurred if these very valuable and important services in people's lives were not going to be shut down across the country in about four hours.

This is particularly devastating to the people in the riding of the Minister of Health, Nunavut. In the Nunavut Legislature there is a motion calling for the reinstatement of this funding.

There is also a logical dissonance in the government's decision to cut this down. It has admitted, by saying it needs \$133 million for more payouts for many more survivors, that obviously these people need health and healing services that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation provides. The government is cutting those off. It is only paying for one piece of the puzzle.

The healing is obviously not finished. The government is dreaming in Technicolor if it thinks the serious major impacts on people's lives are over in a year or two. Even with the services that Health Canada provides, which are excellent services, it is one piece of the puzzle. The other huge piece provided by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is necessary and ongoing.

If the healing was over, why do thousands upon thousands of people still access the 134 projects? Health Canada has made it quite clear that the money in the budget will allow it to continue the services it has always provided. That is its job. It has to. It is a statutory requirement. It will continue doing that.

The budget says that the necessary mental health and emotional support services continue to be provided to former students. It is great that Health Canada continues its small part of the puzzle. However, the big, gaping hole left by closing these 134 healing projects across the country is not being filled by anything.

I am going to give an example of some of these from my own riding. There are only four projects in my riding.

The first one is the Committee on Abuse in Residential Schools Society that provides talking circles, outreach work, educational sessions, et cetera, for \$603,000. This one project has thousands of contacts. Out of 134 institutions and projects, imagine how many people that is across the country. This project was for \$603,000, and that ends with no replacement in about four hours.

The second project is the Northern Tutchone Tribal Council. The goal is to rebuild the families, homes and communities of the Northern Tutchone Tribal Council. It provides ongoing counselling and traditional land-based activities to assist community members to address the legacy of residential schools on their lives and families. Its \$616,200 ends in four hours.

The Kwanlin Dün First Nation's project will provide one-on-one counselling to survivors and their family members to address issues of physical and sexual abuse, shame and addictions. The project develops holistic healing plans for each participant receiving counselling. It provides a series of workshops, which include history and impacts of residential schools, communication skills,

traditional medicine, traditional knowledge and culture, resiliency and recovery, and the Virginia Satir model, understanding self within the family structure.

The project provides elders with healing circles, a men's support group, a women's talking circle, a residential school survivor support group, and an elder women's sewing circle. None of this is being replaced. There was no suggestion by anyone in the government that those programs would be replaced. Their \$710,748 funding ends in four hours.

● (2055)

The last one, the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, has done excellent work for years. I will give more detailed feedback as an example of this type of work in a small, remote community that has a number of challenges, and obviously nothing is replacing this. It states:

A more powerful approach to the argument as to why the AHF [the Aboriginal Healing Foundation] should continue is that over the last 10 years we have learned a lot on what the First Nations people want and need to promote a lasting healing environment. In the past many professionals have been dropped into communities to hold workshops and provide counseling. Then they left, sometimes leaving the people feeling open and raw with reawakened memories and also feeling abandoned, once again. These temporary interventions are not sustainable.

We can think how they feel tonight. It goes on to state:

Communities desperately need local individuals to be educated in the helping fields so that there may be a true understanding of the magnitude of cultural and historic issues and how they affect the healing journey. In the last 10 years we have provided counseling and education that is strength based and addressing violence in the context of safety and justice.

We have built these up over 10 years. They are finally working and now we are going to cut them all down. The Women's Society goes on to state:

When we started 10 years ago there was a lot of fear in traditional healing and because of our AHF program providing traditional psychotherapy many members have been more involved and open minded about traditional healing. Our programs have been very diverse, with its foundation rooted in Kaska Culture, we have offered many different programs that helped members heal the scars of residential schools. We have a website that has many pictures of our many paths, www.liardaboriginal-women.ca. We provide programs that are holistic with Naturopathic medicines for which many members have changed their diets and are more educated on health and taking responsibility for their own wellness. We have offered Traditional knowledge workshops at our camp at Frances Lake and had the camp filled to capacity with family members from grandmothers to great grandmothers and grandfathers teaching the youth and adult about our culture. We have offered counseling to members in Ross River, Yukon with a Doctor visiting them 6 months out of the year. We have offered many other successful programs over the last 10 years and would need to write a book to cover the many stories.

1. LAWS is the only organization in [our town] that offers counseling and culturally based projects to First Nations without a specifically religious or government policy base.

2. Most of our workshops are based on First Nations culture and ideals, however the entire community is always invited to join.

3. Individual counselling is very confidential, client centred and focuses on wellness and abilities, as opposed to illness and barriers.

4. Quote from a client, "I love getting out of the house and being able to do things with other women in a fun way!" "It's nice to be able to get together and laugh and not worry about all the problems".

From a young woman, "I really like having the chance to learn about our ways from the Elders, this is amazing!"

From an elder to our counsellor, "You are good for our people".

"We need to do something to help get funding for your Society"

"I am upset to hear that you will be closing"

"Where are we going to go to get counselling?"

It goes on to say, "Our therapist is the only therapist in town that goes to our local shelter to provide counselling on a regular basis. Without this program, there will be a huge gap in services that provide counselling support, there will be no education and awareness to the epidemic of violence against the women in our community. There will be no workshops that bring women together in the winter months for a time to sew and share stories of residential schools, validate their courage and strength at the residential schools. We are recognized in our community as a team player and have formed strong networks with all the government agencies, non-profit agencies and first nations organizations in all five Kaska communities. Souga sin la".

Probably the most shameful comment I heard from the minister was that this was partly based on the current financial situation. How can the government take this away from the most vulnerable in Canada? If anything, money should go to people who are on the verge of suicide, family breakup pt on addictions. It should go to the neediest of the neediest. The government says that the financial situation is one of the reasons it cut this program.

If any of us here had our children taken away and they were told they could not speak English or practise their culture, it would be shattering. That would take years and years of healing and that should not end tonight at midnight.

● (2100)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Yukon for his speech tonight on the emergency debate moved by the member for Churchill.

In the supplementary estimates under the major specific initiatives it states:

The number of students claiming sexual and/or serious physical abuse and the severity of abuse has proved to be much higher than initially estimated, resulting in total projected payments in 2009-10 to exceed the \$160 million annual allocation.

If the problem is actually larger than expected and this foundation is actually just beginning to show good results, it seems that the foundation should be getting more money, not less. Why the cuts? Is it, as the Minister said, he needs to "tackle the deficit", the real reason for the cuts?

● (2105)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: The member makes another very good point about how illogical this decision is when all the parties here, the minister, his parliamentary secretary and the evaluation all point out to this good work and the minister says that there are more and more survivors. As the member said, if there are more and more survivors and therefore more and more patients, then obviously we need more and more healing.

Instead of closing the hospital, closing the services and cutting off all the healing, why would we not be providing more until the healing is finished? It is incomprehensible, which is why I think the Speaker is allowing this emergency debate and why vulnerable

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people across the country are so upset. It is incomprehensible why in this situation of need that we would all of a sudden at midnight tonight cut off everything except 12 institutions and they get one year more.

The minister says that there are other places to go but no other new places have been offered. Other places have pieces in the puzzle but for these thousands upon thousands of people and the successful organizations built up over 10 years are being ended, zilch, nothing more and closed tonight. That is just incomprehensible and I cannot answer that question.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Yukon, particularly for sharing the stories and the words of those who have been most directly impacted by Indian residential schools and those who have participated in the Aboriginal Healing Foundation programs.

I would say that there are so many gathering stories across the country for which the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has been responsible. I hold some in my hand from the people in Labrador through the healing journey team at the Labrador Aboriginal Legal Services.

It seems to me that the government's entire argument or its logic rests around the fact that somebody else can deliver these services but its only evaluation report, which bears repeating and we will repeat it again and again, states:

...Health Canada support programs are designed to provide specific services that are complementary but different to those of the AHF; and the reported numbers of Survivors seeking help from AHF and Survivor Societies, the logical course of action for the future would seem to be continuation of support for the AHF.

Does my hon. colleague from Yukon agree with that particular statement and how would he recommend we go forward?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member makes an excellent point. These are totally different.

I have gone into these organizations where some of this healing is going on and these people would never be comfortable going into a government program or service. These people would never go into any other organization except these organizations with the local people who have built up the trust.

The government is not even offering any alternative for these thousands of people. Health Canada has said that it is continuing the programs it is doing now. It is not even offering any new programs to deal with these thousands and thousands of people when in a rare instance we have an institution with 134 projects going on across the country that are finally working.

[Translation]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 14, I chaired a public consultation meeting in Papineau on the status of women, together with the Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

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Nakuset, the Director of the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, gave a presentation at this meeting. This organization, which helps aboriginal women achieve balance through empowered healing, is a suborganization of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Nakuset's testimony was so moving that, for a moment, in that room, we forgot about our Greek, Lebanese, South Asian or other origins, and we were all aboriginal people.

The request to maintain funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation received the support of all those present, including our leader. The next day, my colleague for LaSalle—Émard asked the Minister of State (Status of Women) how she expected to ensure the safety of all Canadian women, including aboriginal women, while cutting funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and thus putting at risk 134 projects across Canada, such as the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal.

I know that it comes as no surprise that, when a question is directed to a specific person, the government habitually has someone else answer. The question was answered by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. He claims that he has increased funding and pats himself on the back for meeting his obligations under the Indian residential schools agreement.

I know that 12 years ago, the Liberal government invested \$350 million and the programs got underway. These programs are established by and familiar to the communities. Cancelling them would be disastrous for aboriginal women in Quebec and Canada, and for all survivors of residential schools.

The government must invest the \$199 million not in Health Canada, or to make amends, but in organizations such as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, that were established by aboriginals, and are managed by aboriginals, for aboriginals.

● (2110)

[English]

The government has done it again. On one hand, it apologizes for the Indian residential schools system and on the other, it takes away the funding that helps the victims, families and communities move on with their lives.

The Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, NWSM, has provided support to first nations, Inuit and Métis women and their children who are in difficulty since 1987. The NWSM provides a safe, culturally relevant, therapeutic environment where aboriginal women can focus on their various personal challenges, such as addictions, mental health, homelessness and abuse.

The shelter offers in-house programs and services funded through the Aboriginal Healing Foundation of Canada. Without continued funding from the AHF, as of tomorrow, March 31, the NWSM is faced with the immediate termination of all healing programs. The implications of this termination are devastating.

The shelter will no longer be able to continue to meet its mandate of providing aboriginal women and children with the holistic support necessary in empowering them to regain their independence and transition successfully within the community, leaving the shelter to provide only basic services of food and emergency board.

Moreover, the compounding effect of these cuts to the NWSM will result in the loss of several culturally sensitive personnel, of which two-thirds are occupied by aboriginal women. Indeed, one of the healers had arrived at the centre years before in crisis and in need of healing herself and had come so far because of the centre that she is now healing others. That is what the funding for the AHF achieves.

[Translation]

As I said earlier, 134 programs like these are threatened. In the past 12 months, these programs have helped more than 205,000 individuals deal with violence, depression, suicide, alcoholism and poverty.

Nearly 50,000 people have attended training workshops on family, employment and healthy living in Montreal and across the country.

Let me be clear: it is absolutely essential that this program be maintained at its current funding level. The reason why it has been so successful is that these are programs by aboriginal people for aboriginal people.

[English]

One of the greatest tragedies of residential schools is that it undermined, no, it completely eradicated a peoples' confidence in who they were and what they could achieve. The AHF was a powerful counter to that devastated narrative, an important step in righting years of wrongs.

The government's own reports evaluating the AHF are glowing. The empowerment of individuals, of families, of entire communities, has truly helped, not just in getting beyond the tragic past but in building a better future.

● (2115)

[Translation]

I continue to be astounded by this government, which is constantly trying to diminish the role of the Government of Canada with its laissez-faire, "you're on your own" attitude, a government that is dividing us as a people, a government with no vision that engages in petty politics.

We are at the eleventh hour. Funding for this program will end tomorrow, just three hours from now. Only the government can and must do something about this.

The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs supported the community-based healing initiative established by the foundation in its December 2009 report and even recommended maintaining funding for it.

The Legislative Assembly of Nunavut voted unanimously to ask the federal government to renew its commitment to the foundation. Numerous stakeholders, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, have publicly come out in favour of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

The Liberal Party of Canada and all the members of all the opposition parties call on the Government of Canada to reconsider its decision to cut funding for the foundation.

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[English]

I really hope that, like the early learning and child care agreement and like the Kelowna accord, the funding of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation will not cease simply because it was a good idea with the fatal flaw of having been created by a Liberal government.

Canada and all Canadians, especially our first peoples, deserve better.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are 80,000 residential school survivors still alive today in Canada. Cutting the Aboriginal Healing Foundation goes against the spirit of the national apology made by the Prime Minister just two years ago, in 2008. As a matter of fact, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is part of Canada's journey toward reconciliation.

The loss of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation means the loss of 134 projects across Canada. In fact, there are only 12 of them left, and those 12 are only around until March 2012. In fact, one of those remaining 12 is the Eyaa-Keen Centre Incorporated, 547 Notre Dame Avenue, in Winnipeg.

However, as the member indicated, these projects that have been around now for 10 years are all going to expire, basically, tomorrow. This is a drastic change from what people were hoping to see only two years ago. That is basically knocking us back several years in the process, and we are going to have to fight even harder to recover.

I ask the member if he would like to comment on those remarks.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that it is not only all the people these organizations and centres are serving. It is the employees of these organizations who will be losing their jobs, many of them drawn from the very communities in so desperate need of services and of healing.

The other issue that is important to remember is that the story of the residential schools is a story that left a deep mistrust of the Canadian government and its institutions. Part of that healing is in empowering and in returning the trust in the possibilities to heal offered by the government. However, that cannot happen by telling someone to show up at a health care centre or to be served by Canadian doctors or non-natives. It needs to be centred on the communities themselves, healing and building for themselves. That is the trust we have to restore, and that is the only way the federal government can truly help aboriginals in need of healing.

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to go on the same theme again. We have Health Canada with a footprint in more than 600 communities across the country. We have 200 first nation communities in British Columbia alone. We have 17 AHF programs, one in my riding. It is on a small island, which is part of my riding, and accessible to one band only out of the 24.

There has been a lot said here. There has been some high debate and some low debate. But for goodness' sake, let us at least talk about what is factual rather than what is not.

I ask for a comment on that.

● (2120)

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite needs to understand that the legacy of residential schools all too often is a mistrust of government institutions. What is required, therefore, is to empower communities to help each other.

The member opposite makes an excellent point that there are not nearly enough of these communities to help themselves. There are not nearly enough centres like the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal to help restore confidence and faith in these communities.

We should be increasing the funding grandly for initiatives like the AHF to genuinely help people and not refer them to institutions with which they have a deep and understandable mistrust.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since there has been much talk about Health Canada, I went to its website. It says:

...based on receipt of a completed treatment plan including the number of counselling sessions recommended and cost, from a recognized Health Canada service provider and with approval from the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch.

I wonder if the member could comment on the fact that it sounds as if one needs to be a hoop dancer to get through all these hoops in order to access a service.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, my colleague makes an excellent point in saying that nobody knows better how to help these people who are suffering than members of their own community. That is why initiatives driven from the aboriginal community, by the aboriginal community and for the aboriginal community will always be the best way to empower them and to help them with their healing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I resume debate, there have been a couple of questions in terms of who is asking the questions. As members know, it is the practice of the chair to rotate the questions around the House, but in the case of the debate tonight, I am not following a strict rotation. There are members who have been on their feet many times, who have stayed in the chamber and who are trying to get in a question. I am trying to accommodate as many members as possible. Therefore I will deviate at times from the regular cycle.

Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

I am pleased to stand in the House today to describe some of the concrete actions the government is taking to promote and protect the health and well-being of former students of Indian residential schools and their family members.

In his commitment toward reconciliation, the Prime Minister made his historic statement of apology for Indian residential schools. We recognize that while the settlement agreement is an important milestone in Canada's effort to deliver on its commitment to a fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of Indian residential schools, it can also be a source of deep emotion and sometimes pain.

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As such, the government continues to ensure that the appropriate supports are in place throughout the duration of the settlement agreement. This includes \$199 million over two years in budget 2010 to ensure that necessary mental health and emotional support services continue to be provided to former students and their families, and to support the independent assessment process and the common experience payment.

Although there are many mental health strengths among first nations and Inuit communities, including connections to traditional cultures and extended family networks, there are also some significant challenges. Many communities face high unemployment rates, widespread poverty, low educational outcomes, remoteness from health services and the loss of traditional language and culture. Some of the 80,000 former students from residential schools are coping with the loss of culture and language. Others may have the after-effects of trauma resulting from physical, sexual and emotional abuse. This may lead to various mental illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, addictions and personality disorders.

It is in acknowledgement of these impacts that the mental health support services offered by our government through Health Canada are available not only to former students of residential schools but also to their families. The commitment we made through the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement enables us to move forward in providing mental health and emotional support services to former students of Indian residential schools and their family members. Support is provided as they participate in the common experience payments, the independent assessment process, Truth and Reconciliation Commission events and commemorative activities.

Our health minister, through her department, provides these mental health and emotional supports through the resolution health support program. The resolution health support program seeks to ensure that former students and their families have the health supports they need to participate in the settlement agreement's process. The resolution health support program provides a range of culturally safe services to ensure that eligible former students of Indian residential schools and their families have access to mental health and emotional supports so they may safely address issues related to the Indian residential schools and disclose any abuse throughout the settlement agreement process.

Through the resolution health support program, Health Canada provides access to more than 1,600 service providers, including professional counsellors, community-based aboriginal workers, elders and traditional healers in every province and territory, in communities across Canada. It also provides assistance with the cost of transportation to access services not available in the home community.

We want to ensure that eligible former students and their families have access to mental health and the emotional supports they need. Of the \$199 million over two years in new funding for Indian residential schools included in budget 2010, \$65.9 million is for the Indian residential schools resolution health support program over the next two years. The demand for resolution health support program services continues to grow as a result of the volume of common experience payments and independent assessment process hearings, and so does the demand for upcoming Truth and Reconciliation Commission events.

Through this program, former students and their families have access to a range of culturally safe services, many of which are delivered in communities by experienced aboriginal providers. We recognize the diversity of need and are responding accordingly. It is also important that there is access to psychologists and other counsellors. Former students often request to spend time with aboriginal workers from their communities or elders who can assist them in their traditional ways.

The resolution health support program is designed to meet these diverse needs. It provides access to community-based cultural and emotional support as well as to professional counselling. Cultural support services are provided by local aboriginal organizations. Through them, elders or traditional healers are available to assist former students and their families. Specific services are determined by the needs of the individual and include dialogue, ceremonies, prayers or traditional healing.

● (2125)

Emotional support services are also provided by local aboriginal organizations. Through them an aboriginal community-based worker who has training and experience working with former students of Indian residential schools will listen, talk and support former students and their family members throughout the settlement agreement process. In addition to these services, access to professional counsellors, such as psychologists and social workers who are registered with Health Canada, is available to those who need it.

We understand the importance of providing effective services. The 2006 midterm evaluation of the Indian residential schools national resolution framework found that 90% of claimants who responded to a survey utilize one or more of the health support services funded by Health Canada and 93% of survey respondents indicated that their experience was safer and more supportive as a result of the health supports provided. Most importantly, 89% of claimants who received counselling indicated that the resolution process was a positive experience.

Since the implementation of the settlement agreement began in 2007, there has been a greater demand for various services available through the resolution health support program. The independent assessment process is hearing more claims and the need for services does remain high.

Our government has responded to the needs of former students and their families, spending approximately \$80 million since the time of implementation to ensure that sufficient mental health and emotional supports are available to former students and their families through the resolution health support program.

Health Canada and its federal and aboriginal partners are being proactive by continuing to increase awareness among former students and their families of the available services by the resolution health support program. We have also been reaching out to projects currently funded by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to ensure that eligible clients are aware of and able to access the resolution health support program services. This effort to raise awareness is in addition to the other activities that have been ongoing.

For example, since 2007, over 421,000 brochures describing the resolution health support program have been sent directly to former students, band offices, community health centres, native friendship centres, nursing stations, treatment centres and many other meeting places across this country. The resolution health support program is but one of the several mental health and addictions programs funded by the federal government and which provide important community-based services helping aboriginal families.

Health Canada funds over \$200 million in mental health and addiction services to first nations and Inuit communities throughout a number of programs. These include the national native alcohol and drug abuse program and the national youth solvent abuse program, which provide both residential treatment services and community-based prevention programming.

The brighter futures and building healthy communities programs provide funds to address mental wellness issues and crisis intervention programming, which communities use to support action on their own mental health priorities. The national aboriginal youth suicide prevention strategy supports over 200 communities to support youth mental health and to prevent suicide.

These actions clearly demonstrate our commitment to ensuring that former students are aware of and have access to the mental health and emotional support services that they need. We have taken this responsibility seriously. We have demonstrated our commitment to meeting the needs and we will continue to do so.

In conclusion, I just want to go over some of the different programs that are available, because there has been some debate in the House that has not been as factual as it could be. We want to take the high road here and let the House know that there are elder supports. There are community-based elders and traditional healers available. There are emotional supports. There are aboriginal community-based mental health workers, many of whom speak aboriginal languages. There are clinical supports and psychiatrists and psychologists who provide the counselling.

These services are designed to help former students and their families safely address issues related to the Indian residential schools as well as the disclosure of abuse throughout the settlement agreement process.

• (2130)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about a lot of programs that have come through Health Canada and various other government departments that work. No one in the House is denying there are many supportive programs in various departments that actually do work. The point is that those programs were there at the same time as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was there. They were there as INAC said specifically in its evaluation to complement and to support some of the healing process, but that none of those programs could replace the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. This is what the department's own evaluation said.

Basically what I would like the hon. member to answer is, why is it that governments in the past that harmed aboriginal people irreparably because of their decisions or that they knew what was best for them, continue to believe that the only effective programs that can be delivered for aboriginal people must come out of

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government departments? Does the government not believe that aboriginal people have the ability, as they have shown themselves to have, to take their own fund, use it appropriately in places where they can do it? Does the government not trust that aboriginal people can do this? Is this what the government is saying?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we make it clear that everyone in the House is very supportive of the aboriginal communities in taking control of their future and working through these very difficult problems. The Government of Canada has been working in partnership with the aboriginal communities to come up with programs that do work. That is why—and unlike some of the comments that have been made in the House, it is important to be factual—these programs are based in the community. These programs are provided by the aboriginal communities. They have traditional healers. They have programs that have worked.

The government has learned from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. It would be wrong to state that this organization has not done a lot of good, but the reality is the program was started back in 1998 and the program has sunsetted. We are continuing what we have learned and continuing what works with aboriginal communities. Our commitment is not only a financial one but a moral one to work with our partners in aboriginal communities to make sure we do what is best collectively working with them input and output, working together for best results.

• (2135)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have had the absolute privilege of working in many jurisdictions in Canada. I have worked with first nations and Métis people in Alberta. I have worked with first nations and Métis people in Yukon.

Of all of my experiences in my life as a lawyer I could share a couple of profound experiences that really struck home to me personally why we need to provide these exact services, why the government which has unilateral responsibility for first nation peoples needs to be committing this. In the 1970s I witnessed a young aboriginal woman run into the middle of traffic. I pulled her out from there and saved her life and took her home to her family. That is when I had my first experience with the trauma that several generations of first nations are suffering.

I am told that the last healing centre open in Alberta is going to be in southern Alberta. How are those young people going to get to Lethbridge or to Cardston throughout the far north of Alberta to go to a healing centre?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, the member's comments really describe why it is very important that we are all committed to making sure that we collectively do what is in the best interests of what aboriginal people tell us they would like to see as we go through this healing process together as a country.

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As I said in my statement, for each and every community out there, Health Canada has a footprint in many more communities than previous programs. These services can be and will be provided and we will make it available. If people do have to travel any length of time, the accommodation for travel will be made available.

In closing, I thank the member for her statements. They further support why we have to continue with this commitment.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a testament to the commitment toward reconciliation which the Prime Minister made in his historic statement of apology for Indian residential schools, this government continues to make key investments in mental health and addictions programs for all first nations and Inuit. We have taken clear action to help aboriginal children and their families in areas of priority concern, such as youth suicide and addictions treatment and prevention.

Canadians enjoy a relatively high standard of health and well-being, but this is too often not the reality for aboriginal communities. Many of the small communities are remote and isolated and have populations of less than 1,000. Some are accessible only by air. Aboriginal communities are also dealing with socio-economic realities, such as poverty and high unemployment rates.

On June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister made a historic apology before the House and all Canadians for the sad reality that for more than a century very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes and placed in Indian residential schools in order to isolate them from what was thought to be inferior influences of their families, traditions and cultures.

These children were not allowed to practise their culture or speak their language. Some were physically and sexually abused and many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents and communities.

Not surprisingly, such tragic social disruption coupled with considerable socio-economic challenges have had negative impacts on the health and mental well-being of communities and their members, particularly the youth. Some aboriginal people have higher rates of binge drinking, alcohol-related hospitalization and almost double the number of deaths.

Even more distressing are the aboriginal suicide rates which are among the highest in the world. First nations rates are three to six times the national average and Inuit rates 11 times higher. Unlike suicide rates for non-aboriginal people, rates of aboriginal suicide are highest among youth. Indeed, injury and suicide are the leading causes of death for aboriginal youth.

Helping young people and preventing aboriginal youth suicide continues to be a priority. Aboriginal youth under 20 years of age account for over 40% of the aboriginal population and this percentage is rising. The health of these youth very literally represent the future health of aboriginal communities.

In the House less than one month ago, the hon. Minister of Finance tabled a budget which included nearly \$1 billion in investments for aboriginal people. This included \$285 million over two years to renew critical aboriginal health programs, including the national aboriginal youth prevention strategy.

Through this investment, over 200 community-based aboriginal youth suicide prevention projects will continue to be funded. Communities will be able to better respond to crises and important research will take place in order that we can better understand how to respond to this complex health and social challenge.

We understand that traumatic events exact an enormous physiological and psychological toll on the people who experience them and often have ramifications that must be endured for decades. That is why we continue to invest in programs that are critical to the long-term health and well-being of first nations and Inuit.

This government funds over \$200 million annually to support a range of first nations and Inuit mental health and addictions programs, from mental health promotion to addictions and suicide prevention, to counselling and other crisis response services, treatment and after-care programs.

The national native alcohol and drug abuse program is another example of a community-based and locally controlled program. The national native alcohol and drug abuse program is also recognized as a leader in incorporating community, cultural and holistic approaches into addictions prevention and treatment programming.

Under Canada's national anti-drug strategy, our government is investing \$30.5 million over five years in addiction services for first nations and Inuit, and \$9.1 million ongoing to increase service effectiveness, to serve more people through new investments in outreach, outpatient and innovative approaches such as mental wellness teams and to improve service quality.

● (2140)

This work to increase effectiveness of addiction services to serve more people and to improve service quality, with an emphasis on services for first nations youth and their families, is being led by a partnership between Health Canada, the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, and the Assembly of First Nations.

It is being driven from the ground up. Communities, families and individuals are having a direct say in what improvements need to be made to the national native alcohol and drug abuse program. Recognizing the diversity among first nations communities, this process is not taking a one-size-fits-all approach but is allowing communities to identify their needs, build on their unique strengths, and have access to the best knowledge and local, national and international evidence to influence the programs they run.

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This government takes seriously its responsibilities to support aboriginal communities to address their mental health and addictions priorities. Whether it be by funding important youth aboriginal suicide prevention projects in communities in every province and territory or providing funding to make long-standing services more responsive to current needs and better aligned with the best evidence, this government understands that ongoing action is required.

Canada is also considered a world leader in terms of some innovative and proven aboriginal programs. Take, for instance, the national youth solvent abuse program, which is recognized internationally as an extremely effective and holistic interdisciplinary treatment program. These youth-only treatment centres have established success rates of between 75% and 85%, which is uncharacteristically high even among the world's best treatment programs.

Research clearly points to a number of serious mental health and addictions challenges faced by Canada's aboriginal people. The lasting negative impacts of the experience that many aboriginal people had with Indian residential schools continues to affect many former students, their children and grandchildren.

That is why we continue to invest in first nations and Inuit mental health and addictions programs, supporting communities, families and individuals to recover from the traumas they have suffered, in order to support their full participation in Canadian society.

● (2145)

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation programs, complemented with Health Canada, was not providing and has not provided. Health Canada itself recognizes that this is a fact.

What would the member say to all the hamlets in Nunavut, all the small, isolated northern remote communities in Labrador, along the Hudson Bay and Ungava Bay, those in Yukon and the Northwest Territories, and other places around our country?

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation designed its programs in such a way to respond to a need that existed in these communities, built from the community up, from the survivors' groups and their families. It complemented that.

There is one thing I have to say on the record, and I will ask my question very quickly after that. If there is one thing that aboriginal people deserve in this debate, it is honesty. The honest truth is that the government made a cost-cutting measure. It can be wrapped up any way, that other programs and Health Canada will pick up the slack, all these types of things, but the truth is that it is cost-cutting measure.

I ask the member, does she agree with this poor policy decision that is going to so negatively impact aboriginal people and their families?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, first of all, Health Canada has changed dramatically over the years. What used to be a bureaucratic top-down process has predominantly become many bands with transferred services, who are taking care of their own health care services, managing community-based services.

With regard to isolating one support from the many supports, the hon. member talked about the importance of the little hamlets. In spite of the excellent work of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, it could not reach all the communities. However, we have alcohol and drug workers in all those communities. We have nurses and mental health counsellors. We have tele-medicine programs. Things are really improving.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we had a residential school in my community, and many of the survivors live in Sault Ste. Marie and the two aboriginal communities that border the community. Healing centres operate out of both Garden River and Batchewana. They are very well integrated into the community and are doing some phenomenal work.

It concerns me because just last Friday I met with an elder in Garden River who has been meeting with me on and off around the issue of a treatment centre for aboriginal youth who find themselves addicted to drugs or alcohol. We do not have the services in our communities that the member just mentioned. I am told that many aboriginal communities do not have the services that she has suggested here this evening are available to all.

I note that the minister is here tonight and I appreciate the fact that he has taken time out of what has to be a very busy schedule to listen to our comments as we speak about this important program.

I am asking the member, and perhaps the minister if he will take the time to listen—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I have been trying to catch the member's eye for more than 30 seconds. I would ask him to please put his question very quickly.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of that elder, I would like to ask the member how we can get the necessary resources to put a treatment centre in our area now that the healing program is going to be done in. We cannot even get the money to send people to the treatment centres that do exist.

● (2150)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, certainly I acknowledge that there are small isolated communities that do not have a full range of services, but what they do have is a connection not only with programs and services with Health Canada, but also with regional health authorities and with their provinces. So it really is a fabric and a network of services. Every single community has some mechanism to create that fabric and network.

Really what the government is trying to accomplish is to integrate rather than fragment the very important services for healing and for health.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we resume debate, I would also like to remind members that even though we are in a special debate tonight, the rules that state that we should not refer to who is or is not in the chamber ought to be respected.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak to this emergency debate tonight. I am splitting my time with the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North.

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I would like to acknowledge the member for Churchill for raising this very important issue in the House. I know the member for Churchill has been tireless in working on raising awareness of the importance of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and I really want to acknowledge the good work that she has done.

It is very interesting listening to the debate in the House tonight, because what it has turned into is an either/or. What I hear from the government side is that it is either the Aboriginal Healing Foundation or it is services from Health Canada,

It is unfortunate that it is the way the debate has gone. I believe that from the government's own numbers it has acknowledged that there has been an increased uptake on common experience payments and alternate dispute resolution payments. Health Canada's own website acknowledges that there are currently 80,000 residential school survivors still alive today.

Clearly there is a significant amount of people and their families who are impacted by the legacy of the residential school system.

I want to refer briefly to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. There are many sections that I could quote, but I want to quote section 23. It states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

It would seem to me that we have been hearing from first nations, Métis and Inuit from coast to coast to coast, saying that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is a mechanism that they want to see providing services to their communities. They are not saying that they do not want the services from Health Canada or from other organizations, but they are saying, "We still want those services. They are effective, they are available, they are culturally appropriate, and these are the kinds of services that we also want to have".

I want to quote briefly from the final report, *Evaluation of Community-Based Healing Initiatives Supported Through the Aboriginal Healing Foundation*, of December 7, 2009, provided by INAC. It clearly outlines some of the benefits of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. It states:

There is almost unanimous agreement among those canvassed that the AHF has been very successful at both achieving its objectives and in governance and fiscal management.

A number of indicator measures provide evidence that AHF healing programs at the community level are effective in facilitating healing at the individual level, and are beginning to show healing at the family and community level. AHF research has shown that it takes approximately ten years of continuous healing efforts before a community is securely established in healing from IRS trauma.

It goes on to say:

Although evidence points to increasing momentum in individual and community healing, it also shows that in relation to the existing and growing need, the healing "has just begun". For Inuit projects in particular, the healing process has been delayed due to the later start of AHF projects for Inuit.

Under the heading "Program Impacts", it continues:

Impacts of the programs are reported as positive by the vast majority of respondents, with individual impacts ranging from improved family relationships, increased self-esteem and pride; achievement of higher education and employment; to prevention of suicides. Reported community impacts are growth in social capital indicators such as volunteerism, informal caring networks, and cultural events. One

of the notable impacts reported by case study communities is that the "silence" and shame surrounding IRS abuses are being broken, creating the climate for ongoing healing.

The question I have to put to the government is this: If a program has been evaluated as working, fiscally responsible, accountable, getting results, why would we take it apart? It does not make good fiscal sense, and it does not make good community healing sense.

I want to quote from a couple of organizations that have sent me letters talking about the importance of the foundation. This one is from Darlaene Eccleston, who states:

Without the continuation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the ongoing empowerment of our people healing our own communities and working toward reconciliation and forgiveness is severely set back.

Of course, she says much more about the importance of the program.

● (2155)

A letter from the Inter Tribal Health Authority, signed by co-chairs Chief David Bob and James Wilson, states:

The funding we receive is used to allow survivors of Residential Schools the opportunity to deal with the trauma of that tragic experience in a safe and trusting environment. After many years of suffering in silence, a therapeutic avenue was made available...To pull the funding at this time is an injustice and a disservice to the First Nations People of Canada as we have only begun the long work of helping people deal with the past.

Part of the reason I am reading these letters into the record is these people cannot come and address the House of Commons, so they need another voice here and that is what New Democrats, the Bloc and the Liberals have been doing.

This is another letter from the Inter Tribal Health Authority. It states:

The program was well subscribed and we were making progress and helping many community members break their many years of pained silence and begin an equally painful healing journey.

This letter is from the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. It states:

We request that you continue to support my recovery from the tragic experience of Indian Residential Schools. The communities of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs have benefited from the services of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and request that you provide ongoing financial resources that would allow survivors and families to continue to heal so that we may journey together to a stronger Canada that will include former Indian Residential Schools students.

This is from Nunavuk Tunngavik and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association. It states:

We are writing this letter to you to echo the voices of thousands of Inuit that suffer the impacts of the Residential School regime. For the mothers and fathers that never got to pass on their knowledge and traditions to their children. For Inuit that have been muted as their language has been stripped away from them. For Inuit children that suffer as their parents try desperately to learn to parent. For victims of suicide who had no resources to turn to in their communities. For Inuit men and women who sit in Federal Jails, thousands of miles away, because our communities lack the resources to help them. For Inuit shackled by the chains of addiction, because that has been the only way to cope with the desperation and hopelessness that they face. And finally for the Elders that have watched the capacity of our communities stripped and generational gaps grow into deep caverns...We need room and tools to address our challenges in ways that are designed by and for Inuit.

The Assembly of First Nations has been strongly calling for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to stay in place, to support first nations, Métis and Inuit across the country. It is calling for the government to work with them in the spirit of the residential schools apology.

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Again, I want to emphasize the fact that we are not talking either/or here. Health Canada does provide valuable services to many communities, but the Aboriginal Healing Foundation provides a unique community, cultural, grassroots experience. It is not driven top-down from a bureaucratic process.

Earlier, to another question in the House, I pointed out some of the things people needed to go through, through the Health Canada process, in order to access services. I know many members in the House have received letters from people who have had to pay their own dentist bills and pharmacy bills because NIHB, first nations Non-Insured Health Benefits, is so difficult deal with that dentists and pharmacists no longer want to deal directly with the department. People who have very little income have to pay those dentist and pharmacy bills themselves and submit the bills.

We know what is happening. People who need those services are not getting them. I would suggest that for many people, the bureaucracy of dealing with Health Canada, as good as those health workers are, is a barrier to people accessing services when they need it.

I also know many members in the House have spent time with residential school survivors and heard their painful stories and know often that when they reach out for help, that help has to be available for them right there and then, not four weeks later, not six weeks later, not two months later. Oftentimes that is a cry for help from people. They need to be able to go to their local people whom they understand and trust, who have the language, who have the cultural experience and who can provide that service right there and then.

An interesting thing to ask is what kinds of wait lists for services Health Canada currently provide and are in place. We know from many people there are simply not the services available to them.

I know people have quoted from the Health Canada website, saying that transportation is available to remove them from their communities if they need help somewhere else. That sounds like the residential school experience all over again, taking people from their communities. That is a legitimate experience for some people.

I would urge all members in the House to support reinstating the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

● (2200)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for the member. I would ask her to consider the kinds of things she is talking about, such as comparing giving transportation to a survivor who wants to go to a clinical setting somewhere, at his or her request, to residential schools. That is ridiculous.

I could ask her an open-ended question. How many communities on Vancouver Island, where she lives, have an Aboriginal Healing Foundation service provided in their communities. The answer is one. It is in Nanaimo, where she lives. That is it. What do the people in Duncan do? What do they do in Victoria? What do they do in Campbell River? What do they do in Sooke and so on? It does not all happen in one community.

In my riding, the 20 Stó:lō first nations in my riding do not have an aboriginal healing community. It is not an insult to them. I do not think the AHF has done a bad job. However, my people in Chilliwack do not go to Lytton for services. They go to Health Canada.

Right now in all of Vancouver Island, with a population as big as New Brunswick, there is one aboriginal healing centre, and that is in Nanaimo and it is providing great service. However, do not pretend that is providing the service required in the hundreds of communities across Vancouver Island, because it is not true.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I want to correct the record. First, what I said about the residential schools and transportation was for members who did not feel comfortable leaving their communities. I acknowledge that members who absolutely want to take advantage of it from Health Canada, it is there and it is available for them.

In terms of the aboriginal healing, certainly the minister is absolutely right. There is one centre, but there is another project at Tillicum Lelum. Therefore, there are other services available for people on the island.

However, again, I pointed out earlier in my speech that this had degenerated into an either/or. I did acknowledge that Health Canada did provide services for people, that it was available in many communities. However, there are other communities that have aboriginal healing fund projects in place and they want to maintain them.

Why do we have to make the division? We know that aboriginal healing funds projects are having some success and that they are accountable. The current government often talks about accountability and transparency. We have that. Why can the projects?

I would urge the minister to take a look at the successes of the aboriginal healing fund projects.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member asked a good question about waiting lists. We will be able to ask all those questions. As members know, I had a motion pass at aboriginal affairs committee, so we will be able to study this at length and ask a lot of questions about the government's intransigence.

I visited, with the member, the Inuit Women's Association. A woman brought this note to me to show how pervasive this was across the country. It stated, "The Native Women's Child Care of Montreal needs federal funding to continue its incredible work. As of April 1st, it will lose employees who help our women and children heal from any forms of injustice". Then in big letters "Help" and then "Please raise this in Parliament".

Why does the member think the government is cutting this program? Everyone who has spoken in the House of Commons tonight, and it is very rare that everyone is on one side, has said what a tremendous program it is. The Minister of Indian Affairs has said it. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs has said it. The last Conservative member who spoke said it was excellent.

If everyone in the House is in favour, why is the program being cut?

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• (2205)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Yukon for his very good work on the aboriginal affairs committee. It is a great question. Cutting the program makes no sense.

We acknowledge that a residential school apology situated us so we needed to move forward and ensure there were healing programs in place and all kinds of supports for residential school survivors and their families. We have an evaluation that says the program is an incredible program. It is getting good results. The evaluation itself says that Aboriginal Healing Foundation projects are different from Health Canada.

I can only presume the government is cutting the program for ideological reasons. Absolutely nothing else makes sense about it. Maybe it is because the Liberals instituted the program. I am not sure.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad of the opportunity tonight to speak in support of this very important program. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation provides resources that promote reconciliation. It encourages aboriginal people both individually and together with their communities to build and reinforce sustainable healing processes that address the legacy of physical, sexual, mental and cultural abuse in the residential school system, including intergenerational impacts.

In June 2008 the government stood in the House to formally apologize to former students of the residential school system. The Prime Minister acknowledged that policies of assimilation were wrong and “caused great harm, and has no place in our country”. Meaningful apologies are followed by concrete action. Actions that honour the concept of reconciliation with a focus on healing, building a sense of well-being and moving toward a stronger future are certainly called for in the wake of the residential school legacy.

It is clear that discontinuing this funding is in direct contradiction to the values that inspired that national apology. As we know, the intergenerational impact of assimilation and the residential school system are multi-layered and difficult to face. Violence, suicide, depression, increased probability of facing poverty, erasure of traditional parenting skills and loss of native language are just a few of the negative consequences of the institutional abuses suffered by aboriginal people throughout Canada.

Funding provided by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation directly and effectively addresses some of the intergenerational impacts of the injustices faced by those who attended residential schools. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation currently supports 134 programs that directly address the aftermath caused by the residential school system. This funding has helped organizations and communities offer restoration initiatives that support healing and well-being.

One such example in Thunder Bay—Superior North, the riding I have the honour to serve, is that of Gull Bay First Nation. This community is an example of strength and courage. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has funded a program called the Gull Bay First Nation healing program. It increases access to counselling, talking circles using traditional practices, information on abuse and other intergenerational impacts experienced by residential school survivors and their descendants.

The benefits of the healing program are real and they are pragmatic. Speaking with Chief Wilfred King of Gull Bay First Nation, it is abundantly clear that the funding from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has helped elders from his community reconcile their relationship with Canada. Chief King reports, “This is an excellent program that has met the needs of elders that were directly impacted by the legacy of the residential schools—this program has started to bridge the gap between elders and the intergenerational impact of the residential school system”.

Sixty individuals in that community alone have directly benefited over the last 12 months, but the overall effect has been even further reaching. The services made possible through this funding have helped elders who left Gull Bay reconnect with their home community, a central aspect of supporting culture and maintaining traditions.

The same is true in many first nations and other communities across my region such as members of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. In the neighbouring riding of Kenora, the first nations and communities of Lac Seul, Mishkeegogamang, Sandy Lake, Wapekeka, Cat Lake, North Caribou Lake, Sachigo Lake, Slate Falls and Bearskin Lake will all be negatively impacted. They find the support of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation absolutely crucial.

I will be watching with interest to see if the hon. member for Kenora fights to continue funding for these vital programs in his riding. I am disappointed he is not here for the emergency debate tonight. Not only should this funding be preserved, but it could be expanded to other communities who need it across northwestern Ontario. We have many first nations reserves and communities in Thunder Bay—Superior North and if any of them, including—

• (2210)

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you were distracted momentarily, but the member is making reference to members who are either present or not present in the House. It is most inappropriate to talk about members who are not present in the House. I would ask him to not do that, please.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary is correct that it is unparliamentary to make reference to a member's presence or absence, so I will remind the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North of that standing order and allow him to continue his remarks.

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, I was not aware of that. I now am and I withdraw that comment. I thank the hon. member opposite for educating me on that matter.

Quite often I am asked, in these difficult times, in northwestern Ontario what pathways I see for hope and optimism. I often say that the future of Thunder Bay—Superior North, northwestern Ontario and, indeed, the future of much of Canada is intimately tied to the future of our first nations people.

It is about empowerment and fairness. It is a matter of treaty rights and applying the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to all Canadians. It is also a matter of practicality. If first nations do well, we will all do well in Canada. If first nations people are not helped to succeed, it will adversely affect all of us.

Keep in mind that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation ensures that each and every funded project has a proven track record of sound financial management. Projects must have a broad reach, including women, youth and elders. Each project must deliver direct therapeutic services.

Even the department, INAC itself, and the chair of the Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission have praised the programs that are possible only because of the support of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. All of the projects are delivered by the people who live and work in each community, providing a grassroots approach to healing and community building instead of a top down approach, which leaves too much room for error, paternalism and waste.

This successful program is essential as it ensures that those communities which receive funding decide independently which services and programs are most needed by their own people. This community-based, grassroots approach is a strong and worthy method of addressing the healing process, building stronger communities, and increasing health and well-being. Community-based, culturally appropriate programs that inspire effective healing represent hope and a willingness to build a stronger future by moving together as a community.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has made a great start in the right direction. Instead of changing course and abandoning it, we call upon the government to continue its commitment to first nations communities in the spirit of hope and reconciliation, and in the spirit of following the national apology with concrete action by ensuring that Parliament extends the funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. It is a pragmatic and meaningful solution to a very difficult situation.

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North talked about an adjacent riding, which is the Kenora riding. The member for Kenora sits on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I know his background is nursing and that he has worked as a nurse in remote first nations and aboriginal communities, certainly on the British Columbia coast, northern Ontario, and likely other places as well that I am not immediately aware of. He is a tireless worker in representing his far-flung riding, in which there are approximately 60 first nations communities.

My comment is this. We cannot impugn other members and suggest in any way that they are not motivated to do the right thing in terms of this subject of healing.

• (2215)

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member. Just to reiterate what I said, I am going to be watching with interest in the hope that the hon. member he was talking about will, along with us, be fighting to maintain the funding for the communities in his riding.

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Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, everyone in the House is very interested in effective healing results. I will read something from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs about the consequences of closing the program. This is on page 49 of the document from the department. It states:

When asked what the consequences would be if their program were to end, many respondents became visibly disturbed at hearing the question and contemplating the loss of the program. The vast majority of respondents in case studies used words such as “catastrophic”, “disastrous” “a betrayal of trust”; “removal of hope” and other equally strong language to indicate their belief that ending the AHF healing programs at this point would have extremely negative consequences...as the healing is not yet widespread enough or firmly enough established...An Elder...said that “we had 100 years of abuse and 12 years of healing”.

If the member were told this, would he close that program?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, speaking for myself, I feel very grateful that I am well educated, was supported by a wonderful family in my youth, went through a good educational system, and am white in a country that sometimes favours those who are white.

I think we need to go an extra kilometre to help those who need our help. The New Democrats are about leaving no one behind and helping those who particularly need it the most.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, among the first nations chiefs I had the privilege of working with, one was Joe Johnson, the former chief of the Kluane First Nation. The many times I worked with him on his land claim, he told me stories of the trauma he felt from residential schools, how he suffered from having to work away from home in British Columbia, and how he wished that jobs could be provided along with healing services closer to his community.

He tried for many years to establish a healing centre and I am not sure if he ever managed. He just could not get the funding. I noticed that there is no money remaining for any healing centre in Yukon, only one in the Northwest Territories.

I am wondering if the member could speak to the need to provide healing centres close to the communities where first nations continue to work.

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, upon reflection this evening and listening to debate from all sides of the House, I am really persuaded that we not only need to maintain the funding, but we need to expand the funding and apply it to more communities.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am greatly pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the Aboriginal Healing Foundation this evening with my colleagues. I feel strongly that we would be remiss if we did not take the time tonight to acknowledge the difficult but critical work that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has undertaken over the last decade on behalf of Canadians.

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The foundation was established with a clear mandate in 1998 and all of those involved with this non-governmental organization should be applauded for their ongoing commitment and tireless pursuit of a better future through healing.

[Translation]

My comments this evening will outline the path our nation has taken over the past decade, recognize and highlight the foundation's accomplishments, and convey a message to the foundation about our hope that its transition phase goes smoothly.

• (2220)

[English]

As one of only a handful of nations who have apologized for how past generations treated aboriginal people, I am proud to be a Canadian.

Some of us may remember Australia's landmark apology to its native people in 2008, and all of us will surely remember that on June 11, 2008 the Prime Minister made an apology, on behalf of all Canadians, right here in the House of Commons.

I think we can all agree that the apology certainly represents a giant step forward toward reconciliation and progress.

National Chief Fontaine noted at the time of the Prime Minister's 2008 apology that it would benefit all Canadians because it opens the way to restoring public consciousness about the history of the first nations in this country.

An example of this kind of change can be found in the government's substantially revised and recently published guide to citizenship in Canada. The guide is a significant departure from the version crafted first in 1995.

Notably, the 2010 edition of the guide introduces the concept of three founding nations: aboriginal, French and British. For the first time, Métis leader Louis Riel is introduced to new Canadians. This important document, which communicates a summary of our history and culture, no longer skips over the history of our aboriginal people. Rather, it speaks the truth and duly notes the important role that aboriginal people have played, and continue to play, in our nation's cultural fabric.

I have learned that the act of listening and speaking the truth can play an enormous role in our nation's healing process. Dr. Judith Herman, whose book *Trauma and Recovery* is widely considered a landmark work on the social impact of psychological trauma and its treatment, states that "Recovery requires remembrance and mourning. It has become clear from the experience of newly democratic countries in Latin America, eastern Europe and Africa that restoring a sense of social community requires a public forum where victims can speak their truth and their suffering can be formally acknowledged. Like traumatized individuals, traumatized countries need to remember, grieve and atone for their wrongs in order to avoid reliving them".

It is this spirit of recovery that inspired long overdue discussions between key parties of our nation's historical landscape, and in the end through research, conciliation and negotiation, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was concluded with the

approval of all parties: the Government of Canada, former students, churches, the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit organizations.

Just as Canada's apology to its aboriginal people marked an historic international milestone, so too does the significance of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement extend beyond our borders.

[Translation]

This agreement is an important part of the reconciliation between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people. It is the first time that a country has recognized, in both words and deeds, the negative effect that its policies and actions had on its first nations.

[English]

As members heard this evening, it is important to note that the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement features five main elements:

[Translation]

a common experience payment; an independent assessment process; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada; commemoration activities; measures to support healing such as Health Canada's Health Support Program and an endowment to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

• (2225)

[English]

It is here in this last item, number five, measures to support healing, that we find the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation predates the agreement by nearly a decade, but this aboriginal-run not-for-profit foundation was established only after discussions were held with survivors, members of the healing community, the Assembly of First Nations, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis National Council and the Native Women's Association of Canada.

Strictly speaking, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's original mandate was to disperse a Government of Canada one-time grant of \$350 million starting on April 1, 1998. As explained in 2010-15 corporate plan, the foundation defines its role as follows:

We see our role as facilitators in the healing process by helping Aboriginal people and their communities help themselves, by providing resources for healing initiatives, by promoting awareness of healing issues and needs, and by nurturing a broad, supportive public environment. We help Survivors in telling the truth of their experiences and being heard. We also work to engage Canadians in this healing process by encouraging them to walk with us on the path of reconciliation.

Now as we come to the inevitable winding-down phase of the foundation, it is clear that the foundation's approach was indeed successful in achieving its objectives. I can say this with certainty because, as required in the settlement agreement, the government conducted an evaluation of the healing initiatives and programs undertaken by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

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The evaluation was tabled in the House of Commons earlier this month and underlines the financial and project management skills of the organization. It was a comprehensive evaluation that included the review of 108 documents and literature sources as well as all administrative files, such as annual reports and case studies, interviews with 35 key individuals from the foundation, relevant government departments, aboriginal organizations, project directors from foundation-funded projects and subject experts from across Canada, and a total of 8 community case studies based on 145 interviews with participants and key stakeholders at locations across Canada.

As hon. members may have noted, I referred to the winding down of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation as inevitable. This is the important point worth emphasizing. The foundation was never intended to be a permanent organization. The organization's annual report, corporate plan and initial mandate all make this perfectly clear.

Given this reality, no one should be surprised that the Government of Canada chose not to allocate new funding to the foundation. For more than 12 years, the expectation has been that the foundation would begin a winding-down phase. We are not talking about any kind of cut to any kind of funding. In fact not only is the word "cut" misleading but it does a disservice to the excellent planning the foundation has undertaken in its wind-down strategy, as well as its prudent dispersal of substantial funds, a total of \$515 million since 1998, which the Government of Canada has allocated to it.

According to the foundation, the wind-down strategy is to take place over a period of three years. During this time, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation will fulfill the remaining work of its mandate through the publication of annual reports, corporate plans and newsletters as well as the production of five more major research projects. In addition, the foundation will begin to reduce staff and space at a gradual and planned pace.

The Government of Canada remains committed, as ever, to providing support to all of its citizens, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal. In fact, it is through an investment made by this Conservative government that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation will fund the operation of 12 healing centres across the country through to 2012. In addition, the Government of Canada will fulfill its continuing obligation to provide emotional and mental health supports directly to former Indian residential school students and their family members participating in the settlement agreement through a program operated by Health Canada.

● (2230)

The resolution health support program provides mental health and emotional support services directly to former students and their families as they participate in the various components of the settlement agreement. These include professional counselling services, paraprofessional services through aboriginal community-based workers, culturally appropriate supports through elders and transportation to access supports not available in the home community.

I reiterate that this government has also funded additional initiatives designed to provide support directly to survivors of Indian residential schools, and these include the national Indian

residential school crisis line and future care awards. Future care awards are provided through the independent assessment process outlined in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.

Through this assessment process, claimants may receive future care awards for treatment or counselling services totalling \$10,000 for general care and \$15,000 if psychiatric treatment is required. To date, the average independent assessment process award is \$125,000 and the average future care component is over \$8,000. It is also important to note, and members will know, that all of this support will be provided during a time of much-needed fiscal restraint. Although Canada has returned to economic growth following the deepest global recession since the 1930s, the global recovery remains extremely fragile, as the recent 2010 budget speech indicates.

Before closing, I believe it is important to summarize the government's commitments to date in cold hard numbers. The Government of Canada will invest more than \$5 billion to implement all components of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. Budget 2010 committed net additional resources of \$199 million toward the implementation of the settlement agreement, which will conclude in 2014.

The Government of Canada has provided \$515 million to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation since its inception in 1998. These funds include the endowment of \$125 million granted as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and have supported community-based healing initiatives. These numbers testify to the fact that Canada acknowledges that the Indian residential school system is part of the shared experience that is our nation and validates the important role that counselling plays in healing and in reconciliation.

The community-based work of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has not only been crucial to our vision of a just and caring society but has also successfully created a lasting and positive legacy out of a tragic episode. I am confident that my hon. colleagues will join me in committing all sides of the House to move forward and pursue a bright future for all Canadians.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will ask my question first and then I will comment. I would like to congratulate the member as the chair of the aboriginal affairs committee. I think he does an excellent job and I really enjoy working with him.

Does the government have a comprehensive plan to deal with all these various services in various departments and the survivors of residential schools and also the thousands of people left out in the cold because of closing the foundation? I will leave him a minute to think about that while I make my comment, and maybe the officials want to send in something from the lobby.

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The minister made a good analogy saying it was like a puzzle. There are more people who need healing and we heard there are all these healing areas, all the programs in the various departments, all like pieces of a puzzle. The huge piece in the middle is the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. In fact all of these pieces are going to have to swell a bit because the government said there is more uptake so there is more healing, so all these programs will have to get a little bit bigger.

What has been frustrating tonight is that we have heard speech after speech, which have been fine, describing all these pieces of the puzzle that are not being cut. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health made a great speech about all the health programs that are not being cut, that are going to stay there. So all these other programs will stay there and do their work, but no one has addressed the fact that this huge chunk, this huge piece, is coming out of the middle of the puzzle and as I said, one of the 134 projects affects thousands of clients, so that is thousands and thousands of clients across the country and that is what has been frustrating about this debate.

• (2235)

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his kind comments.

There is no doubt that this will require a substantial effort, and we have outlined that tonight in the form of the 1,600-odd workers with Health Canada. These are people from aboriginal communities themselves who are specifically trained and knowledgeable in delivering the kind of programs in the community at that level. We heard from the evaluations tonight that native and aboriginal people appreciate those programs and feel they are benefiting from them. Those programs will roll out.

In addition to that, Health Canada continues to support some \$200 million in programs that support other outcomes that come from the difficulties people experienced through this kind of reconciliation process and the hurt that has been caused by the residential schools episode.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. I do not know him well. He seems like a nice fellow. I assume he understands, because he said he does, the impacts that residential schools had on aboriginal people and continue to have to this day.

I am speaking in part out of the frustration of the people I know who have been involved in the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's work in the northwestern area of British Columbia, who I represent. They have been involved in the six programs that are in existence that have now lost their funding and their capacity to do the community-based work that has been seen as so crucial. It smacks of a certain hypocrisy of the government and a tragic sense of cynicism to say that a report that was sitting on a minister's desk for months, a report that we now know says the Aboriginal Healing Foundation worked and worked well, was released the day after the budget. It was done by Indian Affairs itself, saying how wonderfully this community-based system worked, a family-based system, delivered by first nations for first nations and that it was helping the healing process. The cynicism to cut that program in the budget and then release a report the next day that says what a fantastic program this was smacks of a hypocrisy to the first nations communities that I

represent and all across this country. The apology was meant to be followed up by action. That is what we asked the Prime Minister for when we all sat in this place and listened to the residential school apology.

First nations people, despite many generations of broken promises, took the chance and said they would give the Prime Minister the time, saying maybe he would follow up on this action and deliver and support aboriginal healing in this country.

Now we find out that all of these programs are being cut, programs that were working, and the government is saying that it is very interested in this healing process and wants to support it. The way the government can support it is to continue the funding.

To the last point about the so-called time of restraint, the government found \$250,000 to send to an asbestos lobby in Quebec to promote asbestos exports to other countries, while ripping it out of the walls of this place. That is \$250,000 that could be much better spent on aboriginal healing at a—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, the government stands squarely on the side of aboriginal residential school students and their family members who have experienced the tragedy of the episode that we now know so well. I say that because the measures the government has taken in the last several years are unprecedented in our history to cope with this segment, this part of our history.

The fact is that the program we are talking about tonight has been on a scheduled wind-down for years, since 2007. It is all right in the plans. It is right in all of the reports, in the 2010-14 report. In fact, the foundation itself has done a terrific job in putting that program in place. It will stay in place, by the way, until 2012. We will continue to do the work it has undertaken, but this is a scheduled wind-down and the work will continue to be taken up by the important programs of Health Canada.

• (2240)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Simcoe North for the speech that he has given this evening. Over the last number of years I have had the privilege of sitting close to him and getting to know him a bit. He is a very calm, cool, collected member of Parliament who is very much respected. I know he is also the chair of the aboriginal affairs committee.

It is close to 11 o'clock this evening. I have been sitting here through the debate tonight. One of the troubling points of the debate this evening is we have heard the word "hypocrisy" and a few other words like that used.

The opposition members tonight have come with the argument that the Canadian health care system is not sufficient. They have come tonight saying that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is needed because the Canadian health system cannot provide the proper services that would be expected or required.

I am concerned about that. The opposition members again have found themselves in this position of arguing one thing one night and another thing another night. Tonight we have heard them talk of deficiencies in Canada's health care system. I say shame on the opposition for that. Shame on the opposition for coming here with that message this evening.

My question is with regard to the accountability of the \$66 million that will be brought forward into Health Canada. Who is the responsible person in Health Canada who will oversee and provide accountability on the funds and on the programs that will be delivered universally through Canada's health care system?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, the member for Crowfoot, for his kind remarks.

He actually pointed to an important aspect of this discussion that perhaps has been overlooked and that is that the residential health support program is in fact an existing program of Health Canada. This is something which, as we heard tonight, through budget 2010 will receive an additional \$66 million over the next two years to undertake these important initiatives around the residential schools settlement agreement. That work is going to be undertaken by aboriginal people in many cases who are familiar with and understand and work with the community, elders, people who are integrally involved with the community. They are the ones who are going to be doing the work.

By the way, the importance here is that these are going to be skilled Health Canada workers who will actually be healing individually. Tonight we have heard the words "provide programs directly to families and residential school students". That is the key because they will work directly, virtually one on one with members of the community to make sure Health Canada is delivering the right programs.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, between the 1800s and the 1990s, over 130 government funded, church run industrial schools, boarding schools and northern hostels operated in Canada for aboriginal children. Many first nations, Métis and Inuit children attending the residential schools suffered physical, sexual and other abuses, loss of childhood, family, community language and culture.

In 1996 the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, RCAP, stressed the urgency of addressing the impacts of residential schools. I remember being there on January 7, 1998 at the Native Friendship Centre in Toronto. It was my first smudge ceremony, and the then minister of Indian affairs and northern development, the hon. Jane Stewart, issued a statement of reconciliation and unveiled "Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan".

The federal government announced at that time a grant of \$350 million for community-based healing of the physical and sexual abuses that occurred in the residential schools, and on March 31, 1998, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was created.

The vision, mission and values of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation were:

Our vision is of all who are affected by the legacy of physical, sexual, mental, cultural, and spiritual abuses in the Indian residential schools having addressed, in a comprehensive and meaningful way, unresolved trauma, putting to an end the

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intergenerational cycles of abuse, achieving reconciliation in the full range of relationships, and enhancing their capacity as individuals, families, communities, nations, and peoples to sustain their well being...Ours is a holistic approach. Our goal is to help create, reinforce and sustain conditions conducive to healing, reconciliation, and self-determination. We are committed to addressing the legacy of abuse in all its forms and manifestations, direct, indirect and intergenerational, by building on the strengths and resilience of Aboriginal peoples.

It is clear that the mission, vision and values stated "all who are affected". It is so clear to all in this House tonight that we have only just begun to achieve that vision.

The reporting principles were clear. It had to have clear context and strategies, meaningful performance expectations, performance accomplishments against expectations, and fair and reliable performance information reported. It is very clear by the evaluation released the day after the budget that it worked. The government was getting value for money and putting our aboriginal people back on the road to recovery.

There is no question that the biggest challenge in Canada is closing the gap in the health status of our aboriginal people. The role of residential schools was horrific in their history and to the already damaging effects caused by colonization.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was one of the outcomes of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and probably the most important, the very first entity created and customized to meet the needs of aboriginal peoples, with the flexibility to build upon the cultural aspects of optimal healing and health.

In so many ways, the healing journey has just begun. For some communities, there have been huge successes. For others, awareness has opened wounds that we have the responsibility to ensure have the best possible support for their healing. Other communities that were unable to secure programs have watched the successes of neighbouring communities and have now expectations that they too should be able to participate in their healing journey.

There is no question that the most successful programs were the antithesis of western medicine that the member for Crowfoot needs to better understand. It is irresponsible to close these programs and return to the medical model that has always failed our aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal ways focus on family and community, in positive, culturally sensitive ways. Focusing on the individual has never worked.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation attracted the best and the brightest of our aboriginal peoples and inspired many aboriginal youth to enter the healing professions. The formal evaluations have shown great work and successes. The cancelling of these funds is a tragedy and an embarrassment to Canada.

The government's job is to fund what works and stop funding what does not work.

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• (2245)

The evidence for this program is solid. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has had a tremendously positive impact on the healing journey of our aboriginal peoples. It deserves to be funded until the work is done, as it says in the mission, vision and values, until all of those affected have had access to appropriate care and the best possible results.

Of the probably 86,000 survivors alive today, first nations make up 80%, Métis make up 9%, Inuit make up 5% and non-status make up 6%. Almost 300,000 people have been intergenerationally impacted. Of the estimated 205,000 participants in the Aboriginal Healing Foundation projects, only 33% of those have engaged in any previous healing activity. Almost 50,000 participants were in the foundation's funded training projects.

Mr. Speaker, I forgot to mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Etobicoke North.

The impact of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's funding has shown that 36 months is the minimum time to move through the needs of identification, outreach and initiation of therapeutic healing. Less than one-third of all projects received funding for 36 months or longer. Only 55% of the total target population and intergenerationally impacted have received healing services. Fifty-six per cent of the projects could not meet healing needs and 36% still maintain a waiting list.

The foundation-funded projects identified that almost 76,000, or 37%, of individuals have special needs, such as severe trauma including alcohol abuse and suicidal behaviour. The projects tell us that healing is a long-term process and that healing occurs in stages.

The impact of these foundation-funded activities in the communities, including the level of understanding, awareness of the legacy, level of team capacity and number of participants in healing, are as follows: 20% of the communities are just beginning their healing, 66% of the communities accomplished a few goals but have much work remaining and 14% of the communities accomplished many goals but some work still remains.

Fifty-seven per cent of the participants told us that their goals changed over the course of attending the foundation-funded activities. The commonly cited changes were improved self-awareness, relationships with others, knowledge and cultural reclamation. The majority felt better about themselves because they found strength, improved their self-esteem and were able to work through their trauma.

They evaluated the effectiveness of the healing activities including those that were elder driven, ceremonies, one-on-one counselling, healing and talking circles, traditional medicine workshops, conferences, legacy education, land-based activities, life skills, residential treatment, parenting skills, family counselling and alternatives. Western therapies came absolute last in every single way we would measure it. We cannot send these people back to the medical model. It has never worked before.

Finally, there are aboriginal-led and culturally sensitive modalities that are working. The government claims to want to fund projects that work. This works. It is irresponsible to cut the funding.

An average of 10 years is required for a community to reach out, dismantle the denial, create safety and engage participants in therapeutic healing. Progress and duration of healing is affected by the level of community awareness, the readiness to heal in its individuals, the availability of organizational infrastructure and access to skilled personnel.

Responses to surveys indicated that healing goals are best achieved through services by aboriginal practitioners and longer involvement in counselling. In the big research report given to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, they finished the stories that tell harsh truths without flinching, that honour the resilience of individuals and communities who are restoring balance in their lives and that give evidence of a commitment on all sides to transforming relations. They have a chance of becoming part of the grand narrative of Canada.

If the government refuses to fund this exceptional program, that narrative will change. The narrative will be of doors closed again, of dark days and of hopes dashed.

• (2250)

I implore the government to build on the successes of the foundation and make good on the promises that were implicit in the apology in the House, lest that apology be not only judged on the past actions of the Government of Canada but on the future actions of the Conservative government.

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before, during and after AHF we will continue to have programs and services available that are aboriginal led at the community level. Why does the member for St. Paul's continue to perpetuate that that is not the case?

We have explained this multiple times this evening. No one has refuted what we are saying. There has been just a complete absence of recognition that we have said something positive. I do not understand it at all.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the Government of Canada has ever had a series of projects that have been this well evaluated and successful. It is the obligation of the government to fund what works and stop funding what does not work. If the government can show me another series of projects that actually have had the same outcome, I would like them to be tabled in the House. This is the best set of programs we have ever had in this country.

By applying the Law Commission of Canada's economic model on the effects of child abuse, we would find that those intergenerationally impacted cost Canadian society \$40 million per year in incarcerations, social services, special education and health.

One little project, the Hollow Water Community Holistic Circle of Healing, indicated that funding for healing is an alternative to incarceration, is cost effective, lowers recidivism and for every \$2 spent on a CHCH program, federal and provincial governments save \$6 to \$16 in incarceration costs. We need to get on with this. It is the right thing to do. It is a whole of government approach. We must do the right thing by our aboriginal peoples.

• (2255)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I suppose what we are hearing from the government tonight is that we should trust it because it has a replacement plan in place. It has not shown us the plan and there are no papers or descriptions to the aboriginal communities, to the 134 projects that are ending tomorrow and, more important, to all the people they are servicing, counselling and have built up a trust relationship with over these most incredibly sensitive topics.

We are talking about abuse at a very early age. We are talking about people dealing with addictions. We are talking about folks having a hard time in life that have built up a rapport with this organization, which, everybody agrees, works very well. The government's own report says that it works excellently. My hon. colleague has said that it is one of the best programs the government has ever run.

This foundation works well and is functional but instead the government tells us to trust it because it will let Health Canada do it. Health Canada does not do this kind of work, does not have this relationship and has no rapport with those aboriginal communities we are talking about. It will be doing it on an individual basis when we know from aboriginal communities across this country that while individual counselling is important, community-based and family-based counselling is one of the things that has made this aboriginal program so successful. Now it will undo that very tenet and tell us to trust it but it will not tell us the plan or show us the plan.

Does the member agree that it is possible to trust the government on this issue and how can aboriginal people—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for St. Paul's.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member. The director of the program from the Minister of Health's riding, Marie Ingram, said that in her Cambridge Bay Community Wellness Centre in Nunavut her staff are panicking. The centre provides a plethora of programs, including services to offenders of anger management and drug counselling. She went on to say:

We saw 190 clients here last month and we won't see next month. Just because our funding stops, the needs don't stop. Right now, I'm just trying to find funding, anywhere and everywhere. ... People should be telling their government that we need this money. They created the social problems here. They should know they take a lot longer to fix.

The Minister of Health has 12 projects in her own riding. What is she going to say to the directors of all these programs? What are the executive directors going to say to their clients, that the funding is not there and there will be no programs and whatever obfuscation the government members are putting forward? Individual people in the midst of their healing will be facing a shut door this spring. This is not fair and it will cost lives.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few weathered crosses scar a barren field. The old man who tends to

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them remembers coming with the religious leaders to bury the small boxes. He has spent a lifetime trying to come to terms with what happened at residential schools, how they shattered his family and how he spent decades trying to rebuild ties. The stolen children, who lay beneath his feet, many friends, never had that chance. Sadly, no one actually knows how many are buried, hundreds if not thousands, their names or how they died. They are the voiceless.

The white crosses paint a bleak picture of a terrible tragedy: children poorly fed, poorly clothed, with little medical help and ideal conditions for the spread of tuberculosis.

One woman remembers being sick along with three other children for days before the religious leaders called for help. When the child came to, the other three beds were empty. The only words, "You are the lucky one. You pulled through".

I rise today to urge the government to honour the Prime Minister's 2008 apology for the federal government's role in the Indian residential school system with real action, namely to continue funding the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which has been very successful at both achieving its objectives and in governance and fiscal management.

In the 19th century the Canadian government believed it was responsible for caring for and educating the country's aboriginal people. Ideally, children, who were easier to mould than adults, would pass along their new lifestyle of Canadian customs, Christianity and English to their children. Aboriginal traditions would diminish or be abolished in a few generations.

About 150,000 first nations, Inuit and Métis children were removed from their communities and forced to attend schools. Children were discouraged from speaking their language, and if they were caught doing so they would experience severe punishment. Children rarely had opportunities to see examples of normal family life as brothers and sisters rarely saw one another due to gender segregation. Children were away 10 months of the year. All correspondence was written in English, which many parents could not read.

When children returned to the reserve they often found they did not belong and were even ashamed of their traditions. Frequently they did not have either the skills to help their parents or to function in an urban setting as the skills they learned were often substandard.

As a result of residential abuses suffered in the past, aboriginal people today endure many effects of unresolved trauma, including alcoholism, depression, lack of capacity to build and sustain healthy families and communities, lack of parenting skills, violence, poverty, suicide and weakening or destruction of cultures and languages.

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Today some 30% of first nations people have felt blue, depressed or sad for two or more weeks. A statistical profile on the health of first nations in Canada for the year 2000 showed that suicide and self-inflicted injuries were the leading causes of death for first nation youth and adults up to 44 years of age, and first nations youth committed suicide about five to six times more often than non-aboriginal youth.

Tragically, the suicide rate for first nations males was 126 per 100,000 compared to 24 per 100,000 for non-aboriginal males. For first nations females the suicide rate was 35 per 100,000 compared to only 5 per 100,000 for non-aboriginal females. Suicide rates for Inuit youth are among the highest in the world, at 11 times the national average.

Former national chief, Phil Fontaine, has said, "The memories of residential schools sometimes cut like merciless knives at our souls".

First nations people and Inuit face other serious health related challenges, such as high rates of chronic and contagious diseases and shorter life expectancy.

• (2300)

Compared to the general Canadian population, heart disease is 1.5 times higher, and type 2 diabetes is 3 to 5 times higher among first nations people, and rates are increasing among the Inuit. High rates of diabetes are linked to key health determinants, such as education, employment levels, income, social conditions and access to health care, all impacted by the residential school experience.

While it has been more than 100 years since the former chief medical officer at Indian Affairs sounded the alarm over horribly high rates of tuberculosis in residential schools, TB continues to be a major concern in aboriginal communities. Aboriginal people in Canada face a third world risk of the disease. The tuberculosis rate among status Indians is 31 times higher than that of non-aboriginal Canadians. The rate among Inuit is 186 times that of Canadian born non-aboriginals, equivalent to the rate in sub-Saharan Africa.

Although not the subject of this debate, the rate of tuberculosis among Canada's aboriginal peoples is an embarrassment that demands a real government strategy, the what, by when and how, and resources. We must call upon the Prime Minister to take immediate action on this 100% preventable disease.

After over 100 years of abuse and neglect, churches implicated in abuse apologized. The United Church of Canada formally apologized to Canada's first nations people in 1986 and offered a second apology in 1998.

Archbishop Peers offered an apology on behalf of the Anglican Church of Canada in 1993, stating,

I am sorry, more than I can say, that we were part of a system which took you and your children from home and family.

Four leaders of the Presbyterian Church signed a statement of apology in 1994 stating:

It is with deep humility and in great sorrow that we come before God and our Aboriginal brothers and sisters with our confession.

In 2009, the Pope expressed his sorrow to a delegation from Canada's Assembly of First Nations for the abuse and deplorable treatment that aboriginal students suffered.

The Government of Canada finally apologized in June 2008. The government recognized that the assimilation of aboriginal children was wrong, and "has caused great harm and has no place in our country".

The school's policy and legacy includes social problems that persist in communities today and was profoundly damaging to the language and heritage of aboriginal peoples.

Most important, the Prime Minister said, "We apologize for having done this", and asked for forgiveness.

Words are not enough. Words must be backed up with action and particularly engaging in a meaningful way with aboriginal community leaders, former residential school students and their families.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation provides resources that promote reconciliation and encourage and support aboriginal people and their communities in building and reinforcing sustainable healing processes that address the legacy of cultural, mental, physical, sexual and spiritual abuses in the residential school system, including intergenerational impacts.

In December 2009, INAC released a report that stated,

The Government of Canada should consider continued support for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, at least until the Settlement Agreement compensation processes and commemorative initiatives are completed.

Will the Prime Minister honour INAC's recommendation and continue the healing so all those who seek healing can access it, so some mothers can build self-esteem, can teach their children and in some cases end the cycle of abuse and addiction?

These programs must be ongoing. It is impossible to erase 150 years, the generations and unspeakable abuses against children without healing. A mistake has been made. Will the government do the morally right thing and restore the funding?

• (2305)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member gave us a very moving account of the result of the residential schools that still actually have continued with aboriginal people for generations until today. As she said earlier on, the Prime Minister recognized that in his speech, and I have no reason to doubt that when the Prime Minister made that speech in the House of Commons, he did not mean it with his heart.

What I am suggesting as a physician, and I know the hon. member for St. Paul's is a physician and I know this hon. member has done work with epidemiology in the past, is that if we want to improve healing among aboriginal communities, we would look at what works. We have heard here in the House all evening that in fact transferring our programs into other community-based programs and into Health Canada is going to deal with the issue.

I just want to give some indicators very quickly from a report from the department, INAC, itself. This report came in December 2009, so it is only about three or four months old. It is not an ancient report.

It said the referrals from other health institutions, that is physicians, hospitals and ministries of health in other provinces, to this particular fund has risen 65%. So major institutions are referring to the fund, and there has been a 65% increase in those referrals. We also see, in fact, 40% increased use of the program and that the program has a 15% overhead cost.

Does the member think she can find anything more cost-effective?

• (2310)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I think we all agree that this is such an important program. It is evidence-based, it is cost-effective, and there is almost unanimous agreement among those canvassed that AHF has been very successful at both achieving its objectives and in governance and fiscal management.

The Native Women's Shelter of Montreal held a policy meeting with the leader of the official opposition to call on the federal government to reinstate its support for AHF. The shelter depends on AHF for funding.

The executive director said:

We have been receiving funds from the AHF for the last 10 years, and it goes toward our healing program, and the basics, a roof over the head and food to eat...A lot of people are out of work, and we are going to be grasping at straws now to try to meet the needs of the women.

According to an MLA in Nunavut, many of Nunavut's health and social problems, such as addictions and suicides, have improved. He says:

The momentum towards healing in our communities has begun.

Why take away this program?

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her moving speech and her message about how important it is for all of us, and calling on the government to save the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Given the member's speech and the words that we have heard from so many in this House, not just given the good work that we have heard of but to go to the challenges that so many people face in communities across Canada, survivors, their families, young people, if we lose this kind of programming, which after midnight tomorrow will be gone, what will happen to the people who depend on that programming? What will happen to the young people who only have that program to go to in communities in Nunavut? What will happen to the elders who only have that program to go to in their community to share their pain? What will happen to those people, and what will the government say when those young people have nowhere to turn to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Etobicoke North.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I will start by saying again that a mistake has been by the government. Will the government do the morally right thing and restore funding?

I will talk again about the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal. The executive director explains:

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Your mother didn't go but your grandmother went [to residential schools], so she couldn't raise your mother. It trickles down, and it has resulted in loss of dignity, loss of parenting skills, loss of community, loss of traditional ceremonies.

She states that the people who have suffered these losses cannot be helped by traditional Western healing. She says:

If you carry a lot of grief, your doctor won't prescribe a sweat lodge. But we do, and the women who participate can speak their traditional language and sing traditional songs. It's about releasing the pain in a healthy environment. They come back—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to address the important issue of federal funding of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

My hon. colleagues have already spoken to the legacy that the Indian residential school system has left in Canadian history. Only by working together can Canadians come to terms with our past and create a better future.

Our Conservative government is committed to a fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of Indian residential schools.

Four years ago, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement earned the approval of all key parties: the Government of Canada, former students, churches, the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit organizations. The agreement was the culmination of an exhaustive process of research, conciliation and negotiation.

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement features both tangible and symbolic elements. It provides financial compensation, counselling and support services, along with commemorative activities.

The implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement is continuing and all Canadians should take pride in this progress. More than \$1.5 billion in common experience payments have been made, and more than 99,000 claims have been received.

The independent assessment process has achieved similar success. This out-of-court process aims to resolve claims of physical and sexual abuse suffered at Indian residential schools. So far, more than 15,000 claims have been received, and victims have received more than \$270 million in compensation.

Of course, no amount of money can ever hope to compensate for the damage caused by Indian residential schools. All we can do is hope that these funds enable individuals to move forward with their lives and that reconciliation brings aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians a little closer together.

Remember, there is no precedent for such a large-scale reconciliation.

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As acknowledged by our Prime Minister, individuals and communities affected by Indian residential schools have been working on recovering from the impact of the residential schools legacy. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has played a leading role in that effort, and for that role we thank it.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was established in 1998 in response to the recommendations arising from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation funded projects to help aboriginal individuals, families and communities to address the effects of abuses and cultural losses suffered as a result of attendance at Indian residential schools.

The Government of Canada appreciates the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's valuable contribution. It is precisely for this reason that the parties to the settlement agreement negotiated an additional \$125 million endowment for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. These funds effectively extended the organization's mandate through March 2012 and supports the operation of the foundation's 12 healing centres until that date.

In all, the Government of Canada has contributed a total of \$515 million to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation since 1998. The work of the foundation has been significant, providing healing programs and services to address the experiences of survivors of Indian residential schools, their families and communities.

The Government of Canada's decision to fund the Aboriginal Healing Foundation beyond its original mandate demonstrates a commitment to accountability for the legacy of Indian residential schools.

The good work of aboriginal organizations funded by the foundation forms the reconciliation with aboriginal peoples.

● (2315)

The government continues to ensure that the appropriate supports are in place throughout the duration of the settlement agreement. This includes \$199 million over two years in budget 2010 for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Health Canada to address the increased demand for services due to the common experience payment and the independent assessment process. The bulk of this money, \$133.2 million over two years, will cover the greater than anticipated cost of implementing the agreement.

These funds will help Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to manage the independent assessment process and common experience payment. The remainder of the money, \$65.9 million over two years, has been allotted to help Canada's Indian residential schools resolution health support program. These programs provide mental health and emotional support services to former students and their families as they participate in the various components of the settlement agreement, such as the independent assessment process and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

It is important to note that this is new money. Budget 2010 does not reallocate funds once allotted to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. It is also important to note that these funds enable Canada to fulfill its ongoing legal obligation to provide emotional and mental health supports to former Indian residential school students and their family members as they participate in the various components of the settlement agreement.

Through the resolution health support program, Health Canada provides access to over 1,600 service providers, including professional counsellors, community-based aboriginal workers, elders and traditional healers in every province and territory, in communities throughout Canada. It also provides assistance with the cost of transportation to access services not available in the home community.

This is not a cookie-cutter approach to programming. We recognize the diversity of needs and are responding accordingly. We understand that western-style counselling is not always a preferred service. In fact, while it is important that there is access to psychologists and other counsellors, we are also aware that former students often request to spend time with aboriginal workers from their community or elders who can assist them in their traditional ways.

The resolution health support program is designed to meet these diverse needs. It provides access to community-based cultural and emotional support, as well as professional counselling.

Cultural support services are provided by local aboriginal organizations. Through them, elders or traditional healers are available to assist former students and their families with specific services determined by the needs of the individual and include dialogue, ceremonies, prayers or traditional healing.

Emotional support services are also provided by local aboriginal organizations. Through them, an aboriginal community-based worker who has training and experience working with former students of Indian residential schools will listen, talk and support former students and their family members throughout the settlement agreement process.

In addition, the Government of Canada also funds two other initiatives designed to provide support to survivors of Indian residential schools: the national Indian residential school crisis line; and future care, which provides additional funds for counselling of eligible former students. Future care is linked to the independent assessment process. Claimants can apply for funding to cover costs of future treatment or counselling services worth up to \$10,000 for general care and up to \$15,000 for psychiatric care. To date, the average independent assessment process award is \$125,000, and the average future care component is more than \$8,000.

The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is intended to promote reconciliation among all Canadians at both the national and community levels. The creation and preservation of a complete and accurate historical record of the Indian residential school system and its legacy will allow Canadians to confront the past and build a better future. The commission will honour the experiences of former students and their families, pay tribute to their experiences, assign responsibility appropriately and foster healing across the nation.

● (2320)

Further, \$20 million has been allocated for ceremonial activities that will promote awareness and public education about the residential school system and its impacts.

Our Conservative government remains committed to a fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of Indian residential schools. This government recognizes that bringing closure to the legacy lies at the heart of reconciliation and renewal of relationships between aboriginal people who attended these schools, their families, communities, and all Canadians.

This government will continue to promote reconciliation for the legacy of Indian residential schools by supporting the settlement agreement. This government also continues to support a range of programs and initiatives that aim to improve the quality of life experienced by aboriginal people in this country.

Canada continues to make significant progress on a broad range of issues that prevent aboriginal people from sharing in the full prosperity of this nation. From specific claims and drinking water to education and family services, a variety of reforms and initiatives are under way.

Tripartite agreements with provinces and aboriginal groups will increase access to programs that are more effective and that respond directly to specific needs. The implementation of a comprehensive northern strategy has generated opportunities for aboriginal people and northerners. Legislation supported by Parliament establishes a specific claims tribunal and extends the protections accorded under the Canadian Human Rights Act to residents of first nations communities.

It is vital that my hon. colleagues consider the issue of Aboriginal Healing Foundation funding in this larger context. This government continues to support a host of programs, initiatives and activities that benefit aboriginal people, including those affected by the legacy of Indian residential schools.

• (2325)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the saddest points in the debate tonight for me was when the minister said that we have to look at the fiscal situation of the country when we are cutting this program.

We judge a government by how it deals with the most vulnerable in the country, and why not? What is more important for our government to do, because if not the government, who else? The government should be dealing with those who are frozen in life by the trauma of residential schools, those who cannot continue in life because they have not healed enough to complete their education and therefore cannot raise their families, those who are on the verge of entering the dark world of crime, those on the precipice of falling into the crippling pain of substance abuse, and those who are on the edge of ending their own lives.

Every single member in the House tonight has spoken about this great work for the vulnerable of this country. The most vulnerable should be the highest priority of the government, but the sad thing tonight is that they have been shown to be the lowest priority. This is a terribly bad error in judgment. It is a very sad day for the vulnerable people of this country, and I hope the member will work to rectify that situation.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to my hon. colleague that this agreement was started in 2007 and had a five year program in place for aboriginal healing. I would like to point

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out that in addition to that, the Government of Canada has provided another \$199 million over the next two years to provide services to aboriginal people. I would also like to point out to the hon. member that we are also continuing the healing centres, 12 of them across the country, and they will continue until 2012. I hope he understands that we are not giving up on this. We are continuing to support this healing process.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, keeping 12 out of 134 programs going is a concern to many of us on this side, simply because many of these centres are located in remote and sometimes hard to reach communities. The government has suggested that a 1-800 line is going to compensate for the loss of local counselling, which of course, anecdotally and intuitively, makes no sense whatsoever.

I am not sure if my hon. colleague would have the capacities to answer my question, but I am going to try anyway.

The government oftentimes suggests that it does a cost analysis of any program it either runs or cancels, to understand what the savings would be to Canadians or how it is going to benefit the country. I am wondering if he is aware of any assessment that has been done by his government, by Indian Affairs, Health Canada, the Prime Minister's Office, any department, to study what the cost impacts are going to be on communities when these programs are shut down.

One of the things we have heard, which is in the government's own report, and this is why this is important. The government itself knows that part of the success of the aboriginal healing program has kept people away from some of the more costly government programs such as prisons and addictions services.

Has his government done any assessment at all that he is aware of, assessing the costs to Canadian taxpayers, never mind the human costs but just the costs to Canadian taxpayers, by cutting this program? Is he aware of any such analysis?

• (2330)

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to my hon. colleague across the way that, in fact, the government has put over \$515 million into this particular program of settlement, and that has been very beneficial to the aboriginal people in allowing them to certainly be able to grieve, to set up and talk with elders as well as professional help throughout this country.

We are continuing that by providing another \$66.9 million to Health Canada in order to ensure that people can continue to have access to the grieving process and to help them in that process.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across has joined in with his colleagues who, one after the other, have expressed a plan as to what the government is going to do, and that we have heard for the first time.

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Not only that, but with speaker after speaker, that plan shifts, whether it is the 1-800 number that is going to be in all the languages, whether it is the transportation that is going to take people to we do not know where, whether it is the NADAP workers who already exist and are already overtaxed with the work that they have in their communities, or the notion that every community has Health Canada employees that do this kind of work, which is patently not the case. Representing 63 communities in northern Manitoba, I can tell members which communities have NADAP workers and which do not.

There is much comfort that the Conservatives are trying to give us with these plans. Where is it in writing? Where is the Minister of Health to tell us this? Where are these answers and how are these answers going to be given in fact form, on paper? When will they be given to first nations, Métis and Inuit people who, after tomorrow, will be left out in the cold, thanks to the government?

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague across the way for her comments—

Mr. Steven Blaney: Her rant.

Mr. LaVar Payne: —or her rant or tirade, whatever it happens to be.

However, I would like to point out that our hon. parliamentary secretary has responded to these questions on several occasions and provided the answers that she is looking for. We are continuing to work with the aboriginal community, as well as Canadians right across the land, to help resolve this whole issue of residential schools that has created a bit of a problem for everyone in this whole country.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the question was very direct. Apparently the Minister of Health is seizing the day and will take charge of this whole thing but she could not bother to be here for any of the multiple hours of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I anticipate that the parliamentary secretary is rising on a point of order that it is unparliamentary to make reference to a member's absence or presence. I will remind the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley again to refrain from doing that.

• (2335)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, it is important not to mention when members have been absent from a debate that they apparently care so much about that they could not bother to show up to. I will make sure I do not do that again. I suppose the understanding that we have—

Mr. Randy Kamp: Come on.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: You want this to be an opposition day.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: NDP and three people all night long.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This is a remarkable moment actually, Mr. Speaker, to hear the vitriolic words of my colleagues. I would ask my colleague to restrain himself—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will allow the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley a few moments to respond. I will just point out that his reference to the absence or presence of a member and then the way in which he atoned for that mention certainly did cause a great deal of disorder. It is not helping him put

his question to do things like that. I will allow him a few moments to finish his question.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It is fascinating, Mr. Speaker, that the ire of the government has been raised by a parliamentary procedure and yet it is cancelling the funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation when, by its own assessment, it is doing vital work. This is baffling. In one breath the government says that this was one of our most successful programs, that it worked and that it was cost effective, and in the second breath said that it needed to cancel it and replace it with something else that will not work as well.

Before my colleague gets the speaking points from the centre here, did he manage to do any cost assessment of what cancelling this program means to the Government of Canada—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Medicine Hat has less than a minute.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, I certainly am impressed with my colleague across the way with his ranting and raving and his declaration that Health Canada does not seem to be able to provide service to Canadians of all aspects.

I would also like to point out that this agreement was signed by first nations. It was a five year agreement so we are not actually cutting funds. We are actually adding additional funds in the 2010 budget and another \$199 million to help this. Part of that money will go to Health Canada to help aboriginal peoples through this process, and I—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Resuming debate. The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I will be splitting my time with the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

I am very glad to be rising in the House tonight, even at this late hour, to participate in this emergency debate. The first thing I would like to do is to thank the member for Churchill who applied for this emergency debate, which was granted by the Speaker, and to thank her for bringing this forward so that we could actually participate in this really critical discussion tonight about what is going to happen to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

When the member for Churchill led off the debate at the beginning of the evening, I remember her speaking about the fact that she was not in the House when the historic apology took place on June 11, 2008. I am sure she, like others across the country, was probably in her community with many people who were witnessing that historic occasion.

I remember being here in the House that day. It was a beautiful sunny day. People were gathered outside. I remember hearing the apology. I remember hearing the first nations representatives who came on the floor of the House and spoke. I remember phoning back to my riding of Vancouver East that night and talking to people in the downtown east side who had gathered at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre at Hastings and Commercial.

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I remember feeling what they had gone through to some extent. I was not there. I was here. However in talking to people, I heard about the pain that people went through listening to that apology, and the grief, the sense of loss, anguish and trauma that it brought forward.

I also heard from people that they had a sense of hope about what that apology meant. By the fact that it was given by the Prime Minister, the Government of Canada and all parties, it carried this historic weight of something very important.

It is ironic that not quite two years later we are back in this House debating, in an emergency situation, whether or not the Aboriginal Healing Foundation will be able to continue. In fact, it will not be able to continue under the current state of affairs because of the loss of funding.

It is further ironic because the day its funding ends will also be the 50th anniversary of voting rights being extended to aboriginal people in this country.

What is going on here feels totally wrong. We have heard the arguments from the government that all these other programs are going to continue. I have listened to people in my community, people like Jerry Adams who is a very wonderful aboriginal leader in East Vancouver from the Circle of Eagles. He wants to know how anybody can open the doors of pain and not follow up with a healing plan to make it better for the families involved, and how the 400-plus page study that was given to the government about the importance of helping the residential school survivors can be of no importance now.

He went on to say other things as well, but it just struck me that he really has hit the chord there. When we look at the evaluation of community-based healing initiatives supported through the Aboriginal Healing Foundation that was done not very long ago, on December 7, 2009, we see it is a very strong and uplifting evaluation.

The evaluation found that the programs delivered through AHF are cost-effective, in demand, successful in contributing to the "increased self-esteem and pride", to the achievement of higher education and employment and to prevention of suicide among survivors of residential schools, and more recently in the broader aboriginal community.

It seems really quite incredible that, with the apology that happened not quite two years ago and this kind of program evaluation, we are now in a place where this is all going to shut down.

How many times has this happened before? I was just looking back at my own files of letters we have written.

Whether it is about funding that is potentially being lost for the National Association of Friendship Centres and letters that were written to the ministers, whether it is the Lu'ma Native Housing Society and the fact that they were ready to close their doors and lay off staff because the government would not commit to renew their funding under the national homelessness initiative, whether it was letters we wrote in February of this year to Minister of State for the Status of Women about the fact that the Sisters in Spirit from the

Native Women's Association of Canada were left in limbo over their funding, or whether it was that the more than 130 groups delivering these programs through the AHF had to find out through the tabling of the budget, on February 4, that their funding would not be renewed by the end of month, again we have to write another letter.

● (2340)

We keep coming back to this place. It challenges the credibility of that apology. This is why we are now facing such a serious situation in terms of what is happening to aboriginal people across the country and the fact that they are living in appalling conditions.

I find it difficult to talk in the community about this place, the House of Commons, the Canadian Parliament. We all talk about the commitment to what needs to be done. We raise it in question period and we hear about the commitments from the government. Yet we keep coming back to funding losses, cuts and programs that are going to be discontinued, even when they are shown to be successful.

It seriously undermines the belief of not only aboriginal people, but all Canadians in the credibility of their government standing for what it believes in, what it says it is willing to put forward. It stretches the credibility and undermines the legitimacy of the work we do when these promises get broken year after year.

I represent the community of Vancouver East, which includes Downtown Eastside. I have seen first-hand the impact of colonialism, the oppression of aboriginal people through the residential schools system. I have seen the devastation it has had on lives of people, successive generations and the community as a whole.

Each year I participate in the missing women's march on the Downtown Eastside. The 19th annual missing women's march was held on February 14. Many women have gone missing and are presumed murdered, many of them aboriginal.

The whole trauma and horror of what has taken place has manifested in this community. There is an impact on people's lives, whether it is through addiction, homelessness, deepening poverty that is made worse by serious cuts in programs, services and income support. Many people in my community live with that and try to survive day by day. I, as their representative, and other representatives try to deal with that.

Even with that kind of tragedy, I have also seen incredibly powerful initiatives come out of the community. For example, right now at the National Arts Centre is a very amazing play called *Where the Blood Mixes*, which speaks about the residential schools experience. We are seeing incredible creative expression as people try to engage in a healing process and speak to the broader Canadian society about what has taken place.

I have seen organizations, such as Vancouver Native Health Society, the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society or the women's centre, that have taken this issue on and have provided support and services to people. People like Gladys Radek or Bernie Williams walked 4,000 kilometres across Canada in a Walk4Justice to raise awareness about the missing and murdered women.

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Incredible expressions come out of the community of healing, of reconciliation and of people claiming their place and voice. The very least we can do is ensure the Aboriginal Healing Foundation can continue its mandate to provide the resources at the grassroots to the amazing projects that have taken place across the country.

We either get this or we do not. Either we follow through on these commitments or we have betrayed the aboriginal people of our country. That is a very serious question for the government to consider. I am glad we have had this debate tonight. We hope the government will reflect on this and restore the funding that is needed.

• (2345)

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after five and half hours of debate at the end of a lengthened day, we have been witness to some high level debate and some debate that was not so high level. However, I think we have served a public interest.

At this time, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the speakers, the questioners, the interested members and the people who have continued to watch all or part of this debate. They have seen a clear demarcation of positions but good will all around.

With that, I will say thanks to all and let the member for Vancouver East handle that in the way she is so good at.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, that was not really a question. It was a comment. I guess the question I have is this. What will come of it? That is what is going to be left hanging in this room tonight as we approach midnight.

We have had some fine talk. The member said that some of it was high and low. Whatever it was, we had this debate. What will the consequence of that be? What are our party and other members have said tonight is the government has to rethink its position. It has to see the support for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. It has to recognize the evaluation that was done has real meaning and real weight.

It is never too late to say that a second opinion is okay, or that a different decision is okay. Maybe a good decision to continue the work of the foundation will come out of this debate. I think all members of the House would applaud that.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every member in the House spoke in favour of this tonight. All the Conservative members have spoken about how good and successful the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has been. I hope they are able to change the government's mind and reverse the decision as the member suggested.

However, if they are not, this will continue. I put forward and had passed a motion in the aboriginal affairs committee that we would study this in depth. If they have not believed the letters we have read tonight, they will see these witnesses and hear their heartfelt testimony of the devastation that this will cause.

Has the member been as frustrated as I have been tonight in the debate, not with the members opposite, but with the propositions that have been put forward? I think the parliamentary secretary put it best when he said that they do not understand. As the minister said, there

are pieces of a puzzle and each piece is some healing. There is Health Canada. There are the suicide programs. All of these programs are continuing. They made that point. They are continuing on in their role, which is wonderful.

The speeches written by the departments described all these pieces of the puzzle that will still be there because they will not be cancelled. Unfortunately, the big chunk out of the middle, a unique healing program with thousands of clients, is being cancelled and there has been no description of what is going to happen to them. That is what has been sad and frustrating about the debate.

• (2350)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I want to know whether Healing Our Spirit BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Society in east Vancouver, will be able to continue its work. That is as real as it is. It is doing incredible work. It is working with people. It has the expertise, the support and the support in the community. However, as of tomorrow, it will be unable to do that work.

I know this issue is not going to go away. I know the member knows that and we will continue to raise it. However, there is an opportunity here for the government to rethink its position, do the right thing and ensure that the mandate, funding and work of this foundation continues.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that it is a pleasure to engage in the debate but unfortunately the circumstances are not ideal because we are talking about something going away that I think there is general agreement worked and was effective, and that was the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

I found myself caught up in the passions of this conversation and frankly the anger I feel about this because I am thinking about the human impact about what we are here talking about tonight.

We are meant to speak to these things in civil tones with one another, understand each other's points of reasons and debate the rhetoric and yet the human side of this conversation cannot be ignored. What will happen to people starting tomorrow when they no longer can find the services that for some folks were what were keeping them alive, that were so vital and able to continue a healing process, of something that we as a country have officially admitted was a devastating impact on an entire culture, an entire people?

In the northwest of British Columbia where I come from there are six service centres operating over a range of 300,000 square kilometres. It was not like we were tripping over them while walking around the northwest of B.C. They were servicing huge areas, some of them as big as a country, and these centres will be closed. The folks who were going to these centres trying to get their lives in order and trying to work through things will not be able to do that anymore.

We have heard from government members that there is some program out there that they cannot produce or show us. It says that it exists but no one believes it because it is a simple trust exercise.

One can forgive the first nations people of Canada for lacking a little bit of trust in the government and, frankly, any government. The simple "trust us" will not cut it.

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I really hope the parliamentary secretary takes this back to the Minister of Health who engages with the first nations communities and actually presents them with a plan, shows them where the centres will be and where the resources will be for people. Otherwise we will drop them and, if we drop them, that is worse than anything else.

I hear members saying that it is all there. Where is it? We are looking for the plan, the dates, the spending and the services that will be there so I can tell my constituents, the people who have been going to these service centres, where they go next when those doors are locked tomorrow morning. Where is the service? If it is not there, then the government should be ashamed.

The government should only hope and pray that it has evaluations on its programs, like the evaluation it received on the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, an evaluation that came back and said, "Great work, effective, taking on a difficult problem, a challenging problem of how to heal a people, not just at the individual level", which the government says is the only cure, "but at the family and community level", which first nations have said time and again that this is the path forward and have asked that we listen to them. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was a program that did this.

I am not sure if there are many hon. members here tonight or have been engaged in this debate who have actually attended an Aboriginal Healing Foundation forum. This is a powerful, moving and humbling thing to go through when one stands side by side with somebody who day in and day out listens to difficult, tragic, impossible stories and yet goes to work the next day to help folks out.

In the strangest of ironies, the day the Prime Minister stood in his place here, that in my riding, in my region it was the Aboriginal Healing Foundation that hosted forums for first nations people, feasts and discussions to talk about the apology, to discuss it and in fact to celebrate it, despite all the years of evidence showing that the Government of Canada may not be trustworthy.

We all remember that when the Prime Minister stood up, a circle was made here with the leaders of the first nations, Inuit and Métis communities of Canada. The Prime Minister sat with them in the circle along with the Leader of the Opposition and said, in words that felt sincere, that we apologize and that we are sorry. When the apology came forward it was an honest and normal expectation for people to have who were affected by this that there would be action to follow.

My friend from Vancouver East read out the many accolades for this program, The government spent money on this program and it did an assessment of the program. The assessment came back showing that the program was cost effective and was helping to reduce the amount of suicides in a community. The natural inclination for any government, right wing or left wing, it should not matter, should be to say that a cost effective program that is keeping people from killing themselves should be supported and continued, regardless of what was said in 2005.

• (2355)

It is working, and tomorrow it stops working.

I am thinking of the people who go to those programs, the people who attend those sessions. They do not have anything else. That is the point.

Members of Parliament can talk all they want about protocol and discussion and civility, but they should go out into the communities and sit in the villages. I represent communities with 85% and 90% unemployment. It is devastating. My colleague from Vancouver Island faces similar circumstances. If the city of Ottawa were in a similar circumstance, I would give it three months before there was chaos, before there was a tragedy. Can we imagine Ottawa, Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal having 80% unemployment? Yet the communities are somehow managing to survive, despite extremely difficult financial circumstances and social circumstances, some of which was put upon them, such as the residential schools. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation is meant to be a mark of that.

This Truth and Reconciliation Commission is going across the country, including to some of the communities in my riding. The idea is that is going to open things up. Part of the idea was to support the healing that was going to be required once these truth and reconciliation meetings happened. The community-based, family-based counselling is simply not going to be there.

I think we can stand together on certain things. Oftentimes in this place people look to right and left, but oftentimes there is right and wrong. Tonight we are faced with a question of right and wrong.

We have a program which, by the government's own admission, works. It is effective. For the life of me, I will not be able to explain to the constituents I represent, the people who are attending those programs, who are getting the help that they need, that their government has a plan in place but it just does not seem to have it ready. How will I explain to them that the counsellor they have been working with for years and with whom they have developed trust, support and safety is just not going to be there? The government said that yes, the program worked and yes, it was effective, but it did not want to release the report until the day after it cut its funding.

I am sorry, but it is difficult to tell Canadians that this is some sort of circumstance of timing and a date on the calendar, that we held this report for so many months, this report that said this was effective, but we had to wait until we had the budget and cut the funding to that program in order to tell people about it. Come on. We can do better than that.

At the end of the day, the dignity that first nations people present themselves with, the struggles they are going through on a community-by-community basis, on a family-by-family basis, they need support. They are willing to work with us. They are willing to trust again and again and again, but it is difficult when a government comes forward with a program that works, by every admission, a program that is effective and then turns to the aboriginal people and says, "Trust us again. We cut this out from under you. We are going to replace it with a 1-800 line and some program that we haven't articulated, but you have got to trust us. We will be there for you".

It is a bit difficult and it is a bitter pill to swallow for first nations people from coast to coast to coast.

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The government must reconsider this position. It must reconsider what it has done. It can afford this. We can do this. We can continue this program and effectively service aboriginal people who are dealing with the most trying circumstances. I implore the government to see reason.

The Deputy Speaker: It being midnight, I declare the motion carried.

Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until later this day, Wednesday, at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 12:00 a.m.)

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