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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, October 25, 2010

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 25, 2010

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

VACANCY

HAUTE-GASPÉSIE—LA MITIS—MATANE—MATAPÉDIA

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely: Jean-Yves Roy, member for the electoral district of Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, by resignation effective October 22, 2010.

[*English*]

Pursuant to subsections 25(1)(b) and 26(1) of the Parliament of Canada Act, a warrant has been addressed to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

It being 11:02 the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

The House resumed from May 31 consideration of the motion.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House this morning to participate in the debate on Motion No. 518, which reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize that improved competitiveness will continue to stimulate economic growth and create jobs for Canadians; and (b) continue to diversify and expand markets for Canadian goods and services by encouraging investment in Canada through lower corporate tax rates, maintaining a stable economy and the signing of free trade agreements.

I cannot imagine a better opportunity for debating the very different vision that we in the NDP have for the economy, for jobs and for fair taxation in our country.

Given the motion that is before us today and the successive government budgets and trade agreements that have been brought before this House by the Conservatives, it is abundantly clear that the

NDP vision for the economy is very different from the government's vision.

In our view, the primary focus ought to be the creation of jobs, decent jobs with decent family-sustaining wages. We need to focus on creating and building a strong domestic economy. We need to develop an industrial strategy that will build a sustainable economy for the future; an economy that fuels growth by investing in green technology, green jobs and renewable energy; an economy that is built on a commitment to the principle of fair trade, not free trade; and an economy that is built on a fair and just distribution of the wealth of our nation.

Clearly, that is not a vision shared by either the Conservative or Liberal Parties in the House but it is a vision that is increasingly shared by Canadians as they struggle to survive this recession. And, make no mistake, we are still in this recession.

The Prime Minister points to soaring bank profits and takes that as proof that the recession is over. For him, if his banking friends are out of trouble, everyone is out of trouble. However, Canadians see it differently. One and a half million Canadians are still out of work. Six out of every ten Canadians live paycheque to paycheque. Household debt is at record highs and life is more expensive than ever. Unlike the Conservative government, New Democrats will not declare this recession over until middle-class families are back on their feet. A true recovery must not leave anyone behind.

That is why we are working so hard to protect well-paying jobs, to make life more affordable for families and to maintain Canada's stimulus funding commitments so that cities like my hometown of Hamilton get the support they need and to ensure the protection of pensions and retirement savings.

Canadians are counting on us in this House to take bold and strategic steps and they are looking to us to have courage in the face of adversity. However, nothing that the Conservative government has brought forward to date matches the urgency or the depth required to protect working families in this economy. Let me be clear: our number one job is to protect Canadians during this economic crisis.

I have heard members speak about the need to stimulate the economy. Others have rightly pointed out that we do not just need to stimulate the economy but that we need to stabilize the economy. The difference is more than mere semantics.

Private Members' Business

However, the bottom line is that the economy and the market are not some supra-natural phenomena, neither were they created by divine law. They are man-made constructs and, as such, they are relationships that are governed by rules that we created. These rules create a framework for determining winners and losers and that makes it incumbent upon all of us to recognize that the economy is a moral issue. As Tommy Douglas used to say, "The economy is made for man, not the man for economy".

We have built economic structures that serve powerful global forces acting in their own interest, presenting profit as the chief spur to economic progress, free competition as the guiding norm of economics and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right. The sky was the limit and there seemed to be no concomitant social obligations.

We are all led to believe that governments are the problem and the market is the solution, and that is exactly what the motion before us today wants us to believe. However, if the current economic crisis has proven nothing else, it is that markets cannot do it alone. Yes, markets can bring prosperity but governments not only have a role to play but they have a responsibility to act.

Clearly, Conservatives see things differently. That is why they believe in shifting taxes from corporations to individuals and families and that is why they have continued the Liberal corporate tax cuts that began in the 1990s.

In the last budget, \$6 billion was allocated to further tax cuts for the wealthiest corporations. It is outrageous. The big banks just reported their profits for the first three-quarters of this fiscal year at \$15 billion. Did they really need an additional \$645 million in tax cuts?

• (1105)

What about Canada's top CEOs? The Conservatives would rather bail them out again than help hard-working Canadians and their families. Corporate profits may have been down last year, but shed no tear for their top executives. The average paycheque among Canada's top 100 CEOs was \$7.3 million, or 174 times what the average Canadian makes, which is \$42,305. By 1:06 p.m. on January 4, the average top 100 CEOs had already pocketed what takes the average Canadian all year to earn.

Anger over executive pay is brewing the world over. The British have upped taxes on bankers' bonuses. U.S. President Obama has capped pay for executives receiving stimulus funding, but our Prime Minister is protecting loopholes that let CEOs duck taxes by accepting pay as stock options, and that is on top of his corporate tax giveaway. That is what this motion is asking us to continue. Let us remember what it says. It says that we need even lower corporate tax rates to stimulate investment. It really is outrageous.

However, that is not all. The Conservatives gave an additional \$6 billion to the Governments of Ontario and British Columbia to bribe them into implementing the HST. That tax has resulted in a huge tax shift from corporations to individual Canadians who are already paying the majority of the costs of federal government programs. And, despite the rhetoric, it is important to point out that the HST certainly is not helping all businesses.

It would be good for members to remind themselves that the real engine of Canada's economy is not the wealthy corporations, but rather its small businesses. Therefore, let us look at this through the eyes of someone who runs a restaurant, drives a taxi or does home renovations. For them, the HST means asking customers to shell out more tax for their basic goods and services.

Their products used to be PST-exempt. For them, harmonizing the PST and GST is not about reducing paperwork. For them, it adds a major new tax on everything from food to funerals. The HST has added more tax to hundreds of products and services that are disproportionately delivered by small businesses. That is neither smart nor fair.

Instead of helping small businesses drive our economic recovery, the HST pits them against consumers who are already struggling. In the middle of a recession, it asks them to look these customers in the eye and say, "You have to pay more". The notion that small businesses were clamouring for the HST is simply false. It certainly is not what I was hearing in my riding of Hamilton Mountain.

I have risen in this House on numerous occasions to talk about building an economy that works for Canadians. We have talked about our plan to create jobs and build an economy that allows us to emerge from this recession by ensuring every Canadian who wants to contribute can have a well-paying, productive job. The economy is built on employment.

I have talked about our plan to build a green economy. I have talked about our plan to support and foster an educated, skilled workforce, which, I might add, enhances our competitiveness much more than corporate tax cuts or ill-conceived free trade agreements, such as the ones I have spoken to in this House on so many occasions in the past few weeks.

If we really want to be competitive, we need to ensure that every child, teenager and young adult has access to an affordable education so that we can build a country that can succeed in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century. That is how to build a modern economy in the world of today.

I also believe in an economy where no one is left behind. That is why my NDP colleagues and I always analyze every economic proposal by evaluating how it will affect the most vulnerable among us: seniors, children and the disabled. We know that the strongest chain is built by ensuring that we take care of the weakest link.

I wish I had more time to address each of these points in more detail. There are literally dozens and dozens of examples where the Conservative government has implemented policies based upon the principles outlined in the motion that is before us today, only to exacerbate the already growing gap between the rich and the rest of us.

Private Members' Business

For far too long now, our economy has failed to serve the needs and aspirations of the Canadian people. It is time to change course. It is time to build an economy where no one is left behind.

• (1110)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to support the motion. I would like to highlight a number of things the government has already done in making our country more competitive and innovative in order to have an economy that will lead to jobs today and tomorrow.

As set out in "Advantage Canada" and supported by Canada's economic action plan, in budget 2010, the government is committed to improving Canada's competitiveness and creating the economy of tomorrow. We have focused on building a long-term advantage based on competitive taxes, renewed infrastructure and skills, a tariff advantage, reduced red tape, openness in international trade and our strength as a global financial sector leader.

Even before the global recession, the government was making progress toward these goals and through our efforts we are emerging from the recession with a stronger economic advantage than before. Indeed, our plan is yielding results. Canada has returned to economic growth. Canada is leading our G7 peers in the recovery in the first quarter of 2010, and the growth is approximately 6%. The impressive job growth of 285,000 jobs since July 2009 truly is impressive.

In promoting competitiveness and innovation, we are advancing several objectives, including fostering an innovating and knowledge-based economy, improving and modernizing our marketplace framework policies and refining our approach in working with businesses to boost global competitiveness. Through these efforts, Canada will be even better positioned to compete globally.

A competitive business environment is a key to economic growth. As demonstrated by the government's commitment to improving competitiveness, last year we implemented key recommendations of the competition policy review panel. These reforms modernized the Competition Act and Investment Canada Act and reduced foreign investment restrictions on the air transport sector in order to increase our international competitiveness.

As part of a broader strategy to make the Canadian economy more competitive, we also announced the removal of existing restrictions on foreign ownerships of the Canada satellite system, allowing firms to access foreign capital and know-how and invest in long-term and new advanced technologies. This will allow Canadian firms to develop strategic global relationships that will enable them to participate fully in the foreign markets.

Our government also strongly reinforced the importance of small businesses and entrepreneurship in the Canadian economy. Given the role of small businesses as the engine of job creation and economic growth, the government has strengthened its support for this key sector. For example, budget 2010 provided \$10 million in new funding for the Canadian Youth Business Foundation. This builds on our past record of supporting success. Since 1996, the CYBF has invested in more than 3,500 young entrepreneurs who have created over 16,900 new jobs. This funding will help launch more than 500 businesses over the next 12 months, generating an estimated 2,500 new jobs in the coming year.

Beyond the competitiveness of our business environment, our government is active in improving the innovativeness of our economy. Science, technology and innovation are instrumental in forging Canada's competitive advantage in the international marketplace. Our government recognizes that research and development are key drivers of long-term economic growth. We know that the driver of this economic growth will come when we have discoveries stemming from research that help improve the quality of life for every Canadians.

Canadian talent in science and engineering is one of the most important resources. Our university researchers and students are second to none and our public sector research capacity is among the strongest in the world. Among the G7 Canada ranks at the highest in terms of expenditures on research and development in the higher education sector as a share of our economy.

Recently our government announced a \$350 million investment in natural science and engineering research council's discovery grant program. These grants support the ongoing work of more than 10,000 researchers based at universities across our country. In addition, \$122 million was announced for scholarships that would be awarded this year through the NSERC post-graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship programs and through NSERC's share of the Canada graduate scholarship program.

• (1115)

However, funding scientists and engineers is only half of the equation. We also need leading-edge facilities in which to work. Budget 2009 committed over \$2 billion over two years to repair and renew the R and D and training infrastructure of our Canadian universities and colleges.

Our government recognized that, in addition to academic research, increasing business investment in research and development would be critical for our long-term competitiveness. Accordingly Canada's economic action plan provided of over \$1.1 billion over two years to commercialize technologies advancements and encourage local businesses to invest in innovation. This included enhanced funding for the industrial research assistance program and funding to support clean energy and technologies research and the development of these technologies.

Private Members' Business

Government investments constitute one part of the equation. However, the real responsibility lies with the private sector to adopt and adapt these innovative technologies as strategies that can help advance their own business interests. Budget 2010 builds on the existing federal investments with over \$260 million in new funding to encourage Canadian businesses to invest in research and development and to commercialize these innovations into new products and services. New funding will be used to foster regional networks innovation across the country, through the National Research Council technology cluster initiative program.

On advancing innovation and driving competitiveness, one area that holds particular promise is the digital economy. Fostering the digital economy is a key component of our economic strategy moving forward and will underpin our competitiveness for decades to come. Canada can and should be the leader in the digital economy.

As we announced recently at the launch of our digital economy consultation process, in developing our digital economy strategy, the government will focus on enabling the ICT sector to create new products and services, accelerate the adoption of digital technologies and contribute to increased cybersecurity. Pursuing the strategy means fostering a culture of innovation in Canada supported by all sectors of the economy. This will require the concerted efforts of government, academia and business all working together.

In addition, our government is committed to ensuring the necessary digital infrastructure is available in remote and rural areas with the broadband Canada connecting rural Canadians program. It was recently announced that the first 52 projects conditionally approved under the funding of the broadband Canada program had been identified. These projects will bring the power of broadband Internet access, for the first time, to approximately 168,868 households located in nine provinces and territories.

Further, we have committed to modernizing copyright and intellectual property laws in order to encourage new ideas and to protect rights of Canadians whose research, development and artistic creativity contribute to Canada's prosperity.

We are attempting to create a climate to encourage business innovation and productivity. This type of climate is one that will allow us to innovate, to move up the global value chain and to compete globally. These measures will continue to fuel our recovery from the global recession, forge a competitive advantage, support growth and prosperity and help to create an economy of tomorrow.

Through this record of successes, we are making Canada's economy stronger, more vibrant, more innovative and more competitive.

• (1120)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 518 as brought forward by the member for Calgary Centre.

I would like to address the first part of the motion. I believe every member of the House recognizes the importance of strengthened competitiveness, the importance in terms of stimulating economic growth and of creating both the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow. This debate is not on whether we should work toward

greater competitiveness for the Canadian economy, but rather how best this can be achieved during a time of fiscal restraint and deficit.

Motion No. 518 proposes that the Government of Canada continue to lower corporate tax rates and to diversify and expand Canada's trading relations.

First, I take issue with the notion that the government, "continue to diversify and expand markets for Canadian goods and services". My contention is with the word "continue". If we look at the Conservative record of government, we see that Canadian trade has become less diversified since the election of the government and the Prime Minister. They have steered Canada into trade deficits for the first time in 30 years. This is not a record we want to continue in any way. I will have more on that later.

The desire for lower corporate tax rates and more diversified trade relations is a desire that, in general, the Liberal Party of Canada supports. In fact, the Liberal Party has a proud record of both lowering corporate tax rates and diversifying, expanding, and deepening Canadian trade relations with some of the fastest growing economies in the world. We implemented the largest reduction of Canadian corporate tax rates in history, reducing the corporate tax rate from 28% to 21%.

The difference between now and then was we were in a surplus. It was not on borrowed money. Today we are in deficit and we contend that this creates a very different calculation economically. The Liberal Party supported, believed in and implemented corporate tax cuts when in surplus. We do not believe that right now it makes sense to increase the federal deficit and deepen the federal debt to provide corporate tax cuts on borrowed money.

I will provide some context by contrasting the Liberal record, one of a thoughtful and prudent economic approach, with the record of reckless measures that have been put forward by this borrow and spend Conservative government.

As I mentioned before, the previous Liberal government implemented the largest corporate tax rate cuts in Canadian history, when we reduced the corporate tax rate from 28% to 21%. We did this while providing Canadians with 10 consecutive balanced budgets. We did this by maintaining prudent fiscal measures, including the \$3 billion annual contingency reserve.

In fact, the Conservatives inherited a \$13 billion surplus from the Liberal government, but by pursuing reckless fiscal policies, gutting our contingency measures and increasing spending by 18% in the first three years of its government, the Conservative government actually put Canada into deficit even before the economic downturn.

Private Members' Business

This is the biggest borrowing, biggest spending finance minister in Canadian history. He has missed every fiscal projection he has ever set. Now with the \$56 billion deficit, he has given Canada its largest deficit in our history. To suggest that Canada should continue with this kind of reckless policy and stay in deficit, in fact, deepen our deficit by cutting corporate tax cuts on borrowed money right now, is misguided at best. The fact is we need to return to balanced budgets.

Canadians get it when they look at their family budget. They know they are struggling to make ends meet. They want help with the rising cost of home care and education. They are worried about how they will save for retirement. They wonder what they will get for this record \$56 billion deficit.

Canadians see these borrow and spend Conservatives wasting their tax dollars with \$1.3 billion for a 72-hour G20 photo op and on \$10 billion to \$13 billion on American-style mega prisons to lock up unreported criminals as the crime rate actually declines.

•(1125)

They are concerned about spending \$16 billion on a bad deal and an untendered deal for stealth fighters. They are worried about a record \$130 million spent by the Conservatives on shameless self-promoting advertising for the Conservative government. They are worried about billions of dollars more for corporate tax cuts that we cannot afford right now.

Canadians want this reckless management and waste to stop. They deserve a government that will act responsibly with their hard-earned tax dollars.

These borrow and spend Conservatives must stop trying to delude themselves into believing that corporate tax cuts on borrowed money will somehow make Canada more competitive in the long run. Canadians get it. They know the difference between cutting corporate taxes while in surplus, which is defensible, versus cutting corporate taxes on borrowed money leading to deeper deficit and deeper debt, which is economically untenable right now.

Deficits are simply deferred taxes with interest. So by providing a corporate tax cut today on borrowed money, we will be forcing corporations and citizens in the future to pay higher taxes. That is morally and economically questionable.

The proposed corporate tax cuts do not come for free. We will be paying for them down the line as Canadians pay higher taxes. With Canadian debt levels dangerously high, we need to focus on eliminating the deficit and paying down the debt once again.

When we consider total government debt in Canada, our debt to GDP ratio is not the best in the G7, as the government likes to pretend. In fact when we consider the debt of all levels of government and compare it internationally, our debt to GDP ratio in 2009 was 81.6%. That is actually worse than Germany, France and the U.K. Now is not the time to be reckless and continue with billions of dollars of tax cuts we simply cannot afford right now.

On the issue of international trade, the Conservative record has been troubling. Last year the Conservatives oversaw a trade deficit of \$4.5 billion. That was the largest trade deficit in Canadian history and Canada's first annual trade deficit since 1975. This is an ominous

sign for a country like Canada, a small open economy that depends disproportionately on exports to create jobs and prosperity.

So far in 2010 Canada has a trade deficit of \$4.9 billion. That puts us on pace for an even larger trade deficit than the record trade deficit we saw last year. Not only are we seeing trade deficits but our trade is actually growing less diverse. We are becoming in fact more dependent on the U.S. economy, and we know the dangers of that, given what has happened the last couple of years with the U.S. economy and the decline of the U.S. economy and the rise of protectionism in the U.S. These are dangerous and ominous trends for Canada.

The fact is that the government spent its first three years with the Prime Minister being churlish with China and ignorant of India. The government has had four trade ministers in four years, denying any of them any opportunity to really build important sustainable relations with other ministers in other countries, trade relations, foreign relations or simply relations between people. Changing trade ministers almost every year is not good policy for defending Canadian interests abroad.

The fact is that a Liberal government would take a different approach. We would focus on global network strategy. A Liberal government would work in partnership with business, universities, civil society and private citizens in order to better leverage Canadian relations with the world.

We would harness our multicultural communities as natural bridges to the fastest growing economies in the world. We would return to the very successful team Canada missions focused on sectoral areas where we have a comparative advantage, like education and including clean technology and clean energy technology.

A Liberal government would clean up the fiscal mess that these borrow and spend Conservatives are going to leave. We would, once again, reduce corporate tax rates once the books are balanced and once we can afford it, but we have to balance our books first and get Canada into the black before we do that.

•(1130)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Motion No. 518, a motion from the member for Calgary Centre, taking up his private member's opportunity with a motion that basically tries to debate the continuing direction the Conservative Government of Canada is taking with its economic policy.

For one who, after five years in the House, is only getting his first private member's bill in front of the House for debate, I find it was a very large sacrifice on the part of the member for Calgary Centre to put forward a motion like this when he could have been doing something much more useful for his constituents.

Private Members' Business

Having said that, of course I am very pleased to have the opportunity to debate the issues within that motion. I note that our previous speaker from the Liberal Party did not dwell overlong on the corporate tax cuts in the history of the Liberal Party. Quite clearly the New Democratic Party has believed and continues to believe that the corporate tax cuts that were initiated in the 1990s and carried through to this day have fundamentally altered the tax system of Canada to a point where it is no longer recognizable.

The burden has fallen directly upon average Canadians, who when they do make a profit on their income, so to speak, would invest this in Canada. Certainly average Canadians take their dollars and put them directly into the Canadian economy. That is the case, and what is happening since we have moved the tax burden over to the individual is that those individuals do not have the same capacity.

What has happened within the system for businesses? The very best businesses do very well in Canada. Canada still has, if we look at it, a resource-based economy. Where businesses are doing well is in selling the natural resources, taking the natural resources out of the ground here in Canada and selling them to customers who require these resources in order to conduct their business in this country as well as in other countries.

We have an economy that is robust in its sale of natural resources. Those resources, of course, are finite and will eventually be extracted and be no longer part of the Canadian economic equation. That is a deficit that we are building within our natural resources sector.

Profitable companies and Canadian resources go hand in hand. Those are two things that go hand in hand in this country. So when we talk about reducing corporate income tax, we are talking about reducing the value to Canadians of the exploitation of their resources, to a large degree.

Whether it is in the financial sector where much of this money is made or whether it is directly in the resource companies, it is coming from virtually the same source.

Since the advent of free trade, we have seen a huge decline in our manufacturing sector. That will not come back with free trade because, of course, free trade encourages the movement of manufacturing to the lowest cost labour situation. That is exactly what has happened now.

We see that free trade has caused an imbalance in the world's economy, with huge surpluses of capital in those countries that were most successful at harnessing their low-cost labour and applying it to products. So we see that China and India are very strong right now with their ability to influence the world economy and to do well in that. All the much better for them.

Getting back to corporate income taxes, what can we do in Canada to promote what we are doing better? Let us take a look at the Mackenzie Valley gas project. It is one that has gone through environmental assessment. It has gone through a process and has now come to a point where we in the north can support this project, because we have identified what has to happen with it and what can make it go well.

●(1135)

I had the opportunity to read more about this in the last few days, and one of the things that is clear is that we will not see the development of the Mackenzie gas project without investment by Canada. Where is the investment going to come from at a time when we have billions of dollars of deficit in our fiscal situation? Where is that money going to come from to do the things we need to do? Should it come from the average Canadian, to invest in an opportunity for a large corporation to move ahead with the further exploitation of our resources? No, I would say it probably should come from corporations, which will benefit in the end from those investments.

When we look at the investment there, we see quite clearly that we need infrastructure. The cost of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline is extremely high, yet it could be reduced to a huge extent by the building of the Mackenzie highway prior to the development of the pipeline. That would not take a very large investment on the part of government, whether it be our government in the Northwest Territories, which is still suffering from a borrowing limit lower than that of our major city in that territory, or it could come from the federal government if it chooses not to cut \$6 billion out of the budget through corporate tax cuts every year. Then we would have some money that we could see invested in things like the Mackenzie Valley highway, which would create the opportunity for the Mackenzie Valley pipeline to be built at an economical rate, much as we are competing with the Alaska pipeline project that is to be built along the Alaska highway.

We are in a situation in the Northwest Territories where we are trying to compete with a project that has better infrastructure than we do. So we need investment that will make corporations more money and they will be able to pay more taxes. It is a good situation. We are agreeing to the exploitation of the resources, but we need investment by the federal government in this type of activity.

Will the federal government have the fiscal capacity to put that into the Mackenzie Valley pipeline if the Conservatives continue with their rather poor policy of reducing the corporate taxes benefiting those that are in place already, that are wealthy already and are in a good position to exploit Canadian resources and to take profit from that?

No, we need the investment of government in order to make that possible. Right around the world, we are the one single country left that is an energy exporting country that does not have a national presence in the energy business. Where are we in Canada? Why are we taking this path rather than the path that every other energy exporting country around the world is taking? Why are we doing that? Why are we continuing to look at our economy in a fashion that rewards the very best and does not help out those who really need help?

Private Members' Business

The NDP in the last while has proposed that we look at the potential for reducing taxes on small businesses, which employ many Canadians, which give opportunities to Canadians to expand their local industry to work in their communities. That is where tax reduction will give the biggest benefit. So what we have is a situation where the government continues to favour the very large corporations and does not look at the economy in a holistic sense, does not look at how we can invest to ensure the best return to all Canadians. It thinks that by giving it to the corporations we are somehow going to get it back in a better fashion, and that just does not make sense.

• (1140)

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise with pleasure this morning to support Motion No. 518 by the member for Calgary Centre. I speak as a proud Londoner and a member of a government committed to doing what is necessary to bring opportunities to Canadians.

The Government of Canada has been capitalizing on every opportunity to tell the world about these and our many other competitive advantages. From natural resources and energy to digital media, life sciences and advanced manufacturing, the government is working closely with its partners, the provinces and the territories, to reach out to business leaders and investment decision makers around the world. We are proud to highlight Canada's competitive offering and eager to welcome them to look at growth and investment opportunities in Canada.

Last year, Canada's trade commissioners in 150 cities and markets around the world reached out to thousands of investment decision makers and influencers. They met with hundreds of high-potential investors and helped prepare solid business cases for making investments in Canada. These efforts by our trade commissioners abroad helped to attract more than 100 new greenfield and expansion investments in Canada last year, and created more than 3,500 high-value jobs across Canada. Our efforts also helped to generate a great deal of positive media coverage of Canada in the international press.

I commend my colleagues, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Industry, for their efforts to make Canada more competitive and attractive as a business destination.

In budgets 2009 and 2010, the government responded to recommendations of the Competition Policy Review Panel, reduced foreign investment restrictions in the air transport sector, introduced measures to make Canada's investment review process less restrictive and more transparent and to remove restrictions on foreign ownership of Canadian satellites, in uranium mining and to open the door to foreign venture capital. Investors took note.

Wherever we meet with global investors, we are proud to have such a great and compelling story to tell about Canada's advantages as a destination for business and investment. We are proud to tell them about our top-performing economy, about our excellent business conditions, about Canada's tax advantage, our world-class transportation, education and research infrastructure, and about the many leading-edge companies and industries in Canada.

That is a great story to tell, but even more rewarding is what we are hearing more and more from global business leaders. Many say they are most impressed with Canada's people advantage. In-

creasingly they see Canada as a great place to find capable, creative, loyal and supportive workers, so essential to innovation and to gaining competitive advantage in today's economy.

Canada's high quality of life is another advantage that is not lost on these business leaders. They see Canada's safe, family-friendly cities, beautiful natural environment and world-leading research and education institutions as providing a wonderful backdrop against which the best and most creative workers in the world can thrive.

In my own city of London, we have an exceptional workforce. The University of Western Ontario is a world-leading research institution, and along with Fanshawe College, we train a very sophisticated workforce.

No wonder the Economist Intelligence Unit ranks Canada as the best place to do business in the G7 over the next five years. KPMG has also confirmed that among industrialized countries, Canada leads in terms of business cost competitiveness. We enjoy a cost advantage over our American partners and offer the lowest research and development costs in the G7, in fact 12.9% lower than in the United States.

It is no wonder that people look to Canada first. Quite simply, Canada is a great place for foreign business and investors looking for a foothold in the North American market. Why would they not choose Canada? Why should they not choose Canada?

There is a lot of interest from around the world in Canada's offering: our economic stability, our commitment to innovation, our position in the North American marketplace, and certainly the excellence of our private sector and our superb workforce.

Since before the onset of the global economic crisis, and as reiterated again in budget 2010, the Government of Canada's economic action plan for Canada has been quite clear. Lasting economic recovery requires more trade and more investment, not less. For Canada and indeed the rest of the world, jobs, prosperity and opportunities are created when we keep the doors open to trade and investment.

Canadians have every reason to be optimistic and confident in the future. As a nation, we were well prepared for the global downturn, as challenging as that was around the world and for Canadians as well. However, the government acted quickly to respond to the crisis and today, our performance is world leading and we stand poised to emerge from the global downturn stronger than ever.

Private Members' Business

•(1145)

The Government of Canada is committed to giving Canadians every opportunity to succeed and prosper. This motion speaks to the heart of what defines us as a nation. I urge all members of the House to support Motion No. 518.

I would like to share with the House one more time what this motion says:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should (a) recognize that improved competitiveness will continue to stimulate economic growth and create jobs for Canadians;—

Can anyone in the House disagree with that? I think not. The motion continues:

—and (b) continue to diversify and expand markets for Canadian goods and services by encouraging investment in Canada through lower corporate tax rates, maintaining a stable economy and the signing of free trade agreements.

Can anyone in the House disagree with that? Many may, but as someone with 32 years of experience in business and understanding what it means to make this country succeed and our economy prosper, I say we must support the spirit of this motion. We must support this motion.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the debate this morning, in some small part to correct some of the government's statistics that we have been hearing.

It should be news to the Governor of the Bank of Canada, because earlier today a Conservative member rose in the House and tripled Canada's performance this year as compared to what the bank itself predicts for our growth, which is somewhere just north of 2%. The government believes it is somewhere north of 6%, which is remarkable news for the people on Bay Street. They should really get on this. The government must have access to new data that nobody else has, which puts it into some level of suspicion.

This motion is interesting to me and many of my New Democratic colleagues. It speaks not only to the current circumstances in this country in the midst of a recession, and the very serious threat of a double-dip recession, as the Canadian housing market has completely cooled off and is not pulling our economy back out of its flatline growth, but also, it is a great comment on the government's ideological underpinnings, its basic philosophy. The government continues to make decisions that seem to poorly fit with the ideas of Canadians and what this country actually needs, which is true investment and true development.

The government's philosophy speaks to a basic sentiment that we can cut our way to prosperity. As any sound businessperson would tell us, if a corporation is in any kind of trouble, one of the temptations is to cut its way to such a small, lean point that prosperity will return. However, the evidence in the corporate cycle shows us that is not true, that true investment is the way to attain, or re-attain in some cases, wealth generation and prosperity.

The government has never met any kind of tax cut it does not like, except when it raises taxes, which is another fond, yet strange, element. I represent a riding in British Columbia, one of the hardest hit ridings in this country with respect to the economy. In the midst of our darkest days, this government working in cahoots with the

Campbell government in Victoria, British Columbia, decided—and follow the logic if you can, Mr. Speaker, because it is a perverse one—to borrow money from future generations to bribe the province of British Columbia to raise taxes on those same taxpayers, to borrow money from taxpayers to bribe another level of government and then to raise taxes on the province. That is exactly what the harmonized sales tax does.

We are running the largest debt in Canadian history. I would like the Minister of Canadian Heritage to correct me on that one. Are we running the largest debt in Canadian history?

Hon. James Moore: No, not even close.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We are, Mr. Speaker. Second, the money borrowed for the HST is going to the Campbell government to bribe that government to raise taxes through the HST. Taxes will be higher for British Columbia residents. Perhaps the hon. member would like to counter that point. That somehow taxes will be lowered for British Columbians under the HST simply is not true. Taxes go up. It is an undeniable fact.

I know the government likes to portray itself as the slayer of taxes, but in this case, and in the case of EI premiums, it has in fact raised taxes on people. The government has raised taxes through the EI premiums on employers and employees. To suggest that is not true is a falsehood, and the minister knows that because he is a smart guy. When the government raises taxes on businesses, as the Conservatives have done, the effects are that businesses hire fewer people.

The ideology that we see underpinning everything else that the Conservatives do has been proven a falsehood. Canada just came through a generation of tax cuts which the Liberals made previously to the largest corporations. Companies only get to take advantage of these tax cuts if they are making profits. The companies that are actually suffering, the ones that are laying off employees, will tell us that a tax cut to a suffering company does nothing. If a company is writing off losses, it is not paying taxes, so an 18 point rate decreased to a 17 point rate means nothing. Real investment in education and infrastructure and all those other things that our competitors have done is really where the investments need to be for those struggling parts of our economy.

We have seen CEOs in the corporate banking sector take some of the largest windfall profits ever and at the same time also receive tax cuts from the government, as if that somehow would have made them more competitive.

•(1150)

I remind the Conservatives in the House that it was their party that fought for the mergers of banks, that fought to allow banks to sell insurance at the bank wicket. I can remember the current Prime Minister actually using the example of AIG in the United States, which is one of the largest banks in the world, saying that Canada needed an AIG.

We saw what happened to AIG. We saw what happens when we try to make things so big that they cannot fail. They become a destabilizing factor in the economy. Eventually, they start to fail, as they did in England and the United States. The secure Canadian banking sector, which was conservative in its planning, even though it wanted to merge, faced resistance in the House of Commons, particularly from New Democrats, who said the merger would make neither the Canadian banking economy nor the national economy more competitive. New Democrats resisted this.

At the time, the Conservatives favoured the merger. They wanted to let them get so big they could not fail. There is no such thing. These types of economic philosophies and policies have proven to be a failure.

If the corporate tax rate really triggered productivity, we would be more productive than our counterparts in the U.S. or the European Union. But we are not. Canada is not more productive than either of those places, even though we run far lower corporate tax regimes.

When one looks for evidence to support this lower-is-better philosophy, other than a knee-jerk response, it seems that we are asking the average citizen to pick up the tab that was previously paid for by corporations.

Good corporate citizens understand their role and do not mind paying for the benefits and services they receive: the road to their plant, the trained workers, the abundant energy resources, many of which came from public investment.

Many companies tell us they locate in B.C. to take advantage of the low energy rates, which resulted from public investment in the fifties, sixties, and seventies. They have better access to cheap renewable power. In Alberta, where energy was deregulated, it is a disincentive to investment. It pushes businesses away. When Alberta deregulated its energy sector, which was supposed to make it more competitive, better for business, power rates across the province went up \$750 million.

What did the genius Alberta government do? It cut a cheque for \$750 million and sent that around to individuals and businesses. They were happy to receive the money, because they were hard up. It was their own money. The government was cutting them cheques for their own money.

Mixing politics with economics leads to failure. It has proven to be a failure time and time again. A fair taxation rate requires corporations to pay their fair share.

The other day, I asked a corporate accountant how low a rate he wanted, and he told me zero. I asked him if he felt a duty to share responsibilities, to pay for all the great things we receive as Canadians, like health care and public education. He said he would be happy to leave that privilege to the employees. How generous of the corporate sector, to leave the privilege of paying taxes to the employees. That is wrong.

This way of thinking will do nothing to build this country, to give it a fabric we can be proud of. The way we manage our natural resources makes a difference. We see this in Skeena—Bulkley Valley in the northwest of B.C. We are deindustrializing right now, as we have been doing for the last 10 years. We lost 400,000

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manufacturing jobs in the recession. The government claims a certain number of jobs are back. Most of them are not in the industrial sector, and most of them are not in the value-added sector. Most of them are not well-paying jobs that one can raise a family on. These are more temporary jobs, lower-paying jobs without benefits.

That is not a recovery, but the government is going to flash out the number, try to pull the wool over our eyes, and tell us we are just the same as we were before the recession started. We are not. We have fundamentally changed.

Motions meant to enshrine this type of ideology into government policy are idiotic. Members have to take a calm breath and realize that to build this nation we must gather together and make up our minds to impose fair taxation rates on both corporations and citizens, rates that will help restore this country to its previous glory.

• (1155)

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 27, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[Translation]***TACKLING AUTO THEFT AND PROPERTY CRIME ACT**

The House resumed from October 6 consideration of the motion that Bill S-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in this debate on Bill S-9. As we already know, this bill is called An Act to amend the Criminal Code (auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime), or the tackling auto theft and property crime act. The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada moved second reading of this bill, which we have already started debating.

This bill would create offences in connection with the alteration, removal or obliteration of a vehicle identification number and would also create the offences of knowingly selling, giving, transferring, transporting, sending or delivering property that was obtained by crime. The term “knowingly” is very important, because it shows that the individual who sold, transferred or gave property—a vehicle—must know that it was obtained by crime. Lastly, the bill would create the offence of knowingly being in the possession of property that was obtained by crime, for the purpose of trafficking. The Crown would have the burden of proving that the person in possession of the vehicle knew that it had been obtained by crime for the purpose of trafficking.

This bill creates a separate offence for motor vehicle theft, proposes a mandatory minimum prison sentence of six months for a third or subsequent offence and gives the Canada Border Services Agency the authority to identify stolen goods and keep them from leaving the country.

We, the Liberals, are in favour of this bill. We want it to be sent to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights so that we can hear from witnesses and stakeholders who have thoughts and expertise on the goal of this bill, which we agree with.

We feel that this is a good beginning, even though it is not a comprehensive solution. We believe that some witnesses will also say that it is a step in the right direction and a good start but that it is not a cure-all and it will not fix all of the issues related to vehicle theft and trafficking.

The Liberal Party has always supported legislation that aims to effectively reduce crime and make communities safer. The fact is that vehicle theft rates are going down. The Liberals did not make this up. However, vehicle theft is still a major problem in cities like Montreal and Winnipeg. I am from Montreal, and I have colleagues and family in Winnipeg. So I know what I am talking about. I also had the opportunity, as justice critic in the official-opposition Liberal caucus in 2007-08, to speak with Manitoba's justice minister about this issue as well as youth criminal justice. The minister showed me studies indicating that Winnipeg was close to becoming the vehicle-

theft capital of Canada. He told me that this was a serious problem, one that led youth down a criminal path.

Bill S-9 is not perfect, but it is a good start because it updates the Criminal Code, which shows that the government is taking this issue seriously.

● (1200)

That being said, we will see significant reductions in crime rates only if the government invests substantial resources in evidence-based crime prevention programs.

Our party does not play political games with the Criminal Code. Unlike the Conservatives, the Liberals strongly believe that we must fight crime with good laws, not with crude slogans and petty political manoeuvring.

If the government really intended to tackle auto theft and property crimes, the Prime Minister never would have killed Bill C-53, which it did by violating its own fixed election date law in 2008, nor would it have torpedoed Bill C-26 by proroguing Parliament last winter.

This is the third time the Conservative government has introduced the same bill. After the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament in December 2009, it took the government five months to reintroduce exactly the same bill. The Liberals tried to speed it through the House before, and they will do so again this time.

As I said, we are pleased that the government, which torpedoed its own Bill C-26, has introduced Bill S-9, which is an exact replica of its predecessor. We are disappointed that it took the government so long—five months—to reintroduce it. There is no excuse for that.

We are pleased to see that the wording in this bill is harsher than Bill C-53, the first incarnation of this bill. The government has finally decided to add a separate offence for auto theft to the Criminal Code.

As I said, the first auto theft bill introduced by the Conservative government in 2008 did not create a new, separate offence for auto theft. At the time, Liberals, police officers, police corps and provincial governments—the Conservative government's counterparts—criticized this approach. They criticized the government for failing to create a separate Criminal Code offence for auto theft. The government has finally done so in this bill, and we are pleased that it has finally fallen into step with law enforcement in Canada.

Thus, with Bill C-26, the government created a separate offence for theft of a motor vehicle, and this offence is also included in Bill S-9. The mandatory minimum sentence for this offence is six months' incarceration for a third offence or in the case of an indictable offence.

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This is important because all studies show that motor vehicle theft in certain cities is quite well organized. The evidence from various police forces, including municipal and provincial forces and our national police force, the RCMP, has clearly indicated that to be the case. When someone is on their third such offence, it becomes quite serious. The criminal justice system must therefore send a clear message that this kind of criminal behaviour is unacceptable.

The new offences provide for a broad definition of trafficking. This would cover selling, giving, transferring, transporting, importing, exporting, sending or delivering property obtained by crime or offering to do any of those things.

●(1205)

Thus, the new legislative provisions would target all the middlemen involved in moving stolen property, from the initial criminal act through to the ultimate consumer. That is very important. Of course it happens in other cities, but we know that in Montreal and Winnipeg in particular, most motor vehicle thefts are committed by organized crime groups. This means there is a network of individuals whose only goal and mission is to steal cars. The orders often come from outside Canada, with requests for *x* number of certain models, for instance, Lexus vehicles from a given year, Chevrolets from a given year, specific models and colours of BMWs from another year, and so on. The crime of motor vehicle theft is driven by the network.

So, with these offences and this definition, if the proposed Criminal Code amendment successfully passes in both houses of Parliament, this would allow our police forces to pursue not only the person who committed the actual theft, but also all the middlemen who were knowingly involved in the transaction and allowed the sale, transfer or gift of property or a stolen vehicle, when that individual knew the property or vehicle was stolen.

Let us look at the two proposed offences. Both offences carry heavier penalties than the existing offence of possession of property obtained by crime. If the value of the item trafficked exceeds \$5,000, anyone convicted of this offence could face up to a maximum of 14 years in prison. If the value does not exceed \$5,000, there would be what is called a hybrid offence, which would carry a maximum prison sentence of five years on indictment or six months on summary conviction.

The bill also introduces a prohibition against the importation or exportation of property obtained by crime that would trigger the administrative enforcement powers of the Canada Border Services Agency, allowing the agency to bar the cross-border movement of stolen goods. In the case of auto theft, CBSA officers would be able to investigate, identify and detain imported vehicles or vehicles about to be exported and search databases to determine whether or not the vehicles are stolen.

I would like to add a few words on the statistics and data that we have on stolen vehicles in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, the number of stolen vehicles has decreased almost every year since 1996, by 20% according to 2006 data. Auto theft has major repercussions on car owners, on other victims, on law enforcement and on the insurance industry. According to the Insurance Bureau of Canada, auto theft costs insurance companies and the general public almost \$1 billion a year. That is big bucks.

I do not own a car, but some of my friends and family have been victims of auto theft. I can say that this can be quite disruptive to a person's life by the time they settle things with the insurance company, get a new car and so on.

●(1210)

In 2006, approximately 160,000 cases of auto theft were reported to the police, or about 438 per day. There tend to be fewer thefts in eastern Canada than in western Canada. According to data from Statistics Canada, Prince Edward Island has the lowest incidence of auto theft, while Manitoba has the highest. The incidence of car theft in Manitoba is almost three times the national average. Montreal, however, was the Canadian city with the highest incidence of auto theft and the lowest number of recovered stolen vehicles in 2007.

I am from Montreal and although I do not own a vehicle, I do know many people who do. Some of them have had their cars stolen. There are criminal networks in Montreal that steal cars for export, filling specific orders. Such car theft is a made-to-measure business.

Here is how a number of stakeholders have responded. The Manitoba Minister of Justice, Dave Chomiak, the mayor of Winnipeg, Sam Katz, and the Winnipeg police, all of whom I have met with, are in favour of this bill. The Insurance Bureau of Canada also supports it.

Mr. Rick Linden, a professor at the University of Manitoba noted that the bill was a good step, but that significant reductions in crime would only occur if we also invest significant resources in evidence-based crime prevention programs.

The Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers is against the bill because it believes it will restrict judicial discretion. The Canadian Association of Crown Counsel is also against it because it believes it will increase the workload of an already overburdened justice system. And yet, the government has failed to announce any new money for its implementation. This is a crucial point. The new offences created by this bill have long been awaited by the Liberals. We are in favour of the bill and its desired outcome. However, we realize that once these offences are passed and come into effect and the desired outcome is achieved, the government will have to allocate additional resources and funding to support the initiatives. The measures will ensure that the police and various stakeholders in our justice system can adequately deal in a court of law with those accused of having committed auto theft. Unfortunately, we have not heard the minister state clearly that the government intends to earmark new money in its next budget to cover these additional costs.

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I will conclude my speech by saying that this is a good start and a step in the right direction but not the whole solution. We would like to see the government set aside more resources in order to ensure that our law enforcement system can handle these new offences and that our justice system, courts and prosecutors have the means at their disposal to deal with them.

• (1215)

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Hochelaga for his encouragement.

I am very pleased to take part in this debate on Bill S-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime). As suggested in the short title, it will amend the Criminal Code to give it more teeth. Auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime are often related to gangs and organized crime.

Gangs in large Canadian cities such as Montreal and Toronto often make illegal, totally reprehensible profits from stolen vehicles and especially auto parts that are much sought after on illicit markets.

This bill is needed even though Statistics Canada data show that there has been a clear decline since 1996 in the number of vehicles stolen per 100,000 population. I printed out the 2006 Statistics Canada data by province on motor vehicle thefts per 100,000. There has been quite a large reduction since 1999.

The figures show that in 1999, there were 531 vehicle thefts per 100,000 population. In 2006, there were 487 thefts in Canada per 100,000. That is a major reduction. There were some regional disparities, of course. The extent of this illegal activity varies depending on the part of Canada. In Quebec, for example, there were 507 vehicle thefts per 100,000 population, while in Manitoba, there were 1,376. The regional disparity is obvious. This is related to the reasons why malicious people steal vehicles. The reasons are not the same in Montreal as in Ontario and Alberta. Some people steal cars for the money, while others want to go for joyrides, as the literature shows.

First, this bill includes targeted measures to improve the Criminal Code. It will help us get a better picture of all these illegal activities and the black market, whether in regard to exports and imports of stolen or illegally obtained goods or trafficking in them. It also imposes longer sentences. Minimum sentences are introduced in this bill, but I will get back to that later.

The Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-9. However, we should not focus simply on punishment but look at the source of the problem as well. We need to realize that the societies where crime is the lowest are often those that deal seriously with major social ills, such as poverty and inequality. Our provinces, municipalities and police forces should look at prevention as well. We need legislation and penalties, of course, but what we need most of all are preventive measures aimed at reducing inequality and poverty.

• (1220)

The new measures to reduce car theft have been debated in Parliament before, in 2005. At that time, the Liberal government had introduced Bill C-64 providing that altering the identification number would be an offence. The vehicle identification number,

referred to as the VIN, is used to identify vehicles and their parts. It provides each vehicle with a unique identifier. I will come back to this a little later.

The purpose of Bill S-9 is to extend the reach of the Criminal Code by tackling trafficking in, exporting and importing any property obtained by crime. It also clarifies and extends the reach of the Criminal Code. It provides minimum sentences after an individual has been convicted of motor vehicle theft for the third time. So harsher punishments have been provided for these illegal activities.

Section 354 of the Criminal Code already provided punishments for possession of property obtained by crime, but Bill S-9 clarifies those crimes. It creates an offence for trafficking in property obtained by crime, but it also provides a maximum sentence of 14 years. So this adds to the sentences available for these criminal activities.

But it must be understood that the reasons why individuals steal vehicles are not all the same, from one place to another and one province to another. There are regional disparities in the reasons why an individual steals a vehicle belonging to someone in Quebec or someone in Alberta. In Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the reasons for theft are described as “joyriding”. A vehicle is stolen there for amusement, while the situation is different in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. Quebec and Ontario, in particular, have become criminal hubs for stolen vehicles, because people want to profit from property obtained by crime in these cases.

We have seen organized rings becoming real hubs of organized crime. The indicator that enables us to identify these various types of theft is what is called the stolen vehicle recovery rate. The ability of the authorities to locate stolen vehicles varies enormously from one province to another. For example, the stolen vehicle recovery rate in Toronto is 75%.

• (1225)

When we come to cities like Montreal, part of which I represent in the House of Commons, we see that the stolen vehicle recovery rate is 56%. Obviously, the authorities are clearly having trouble locating stolen vehicles in Montreal, as compared to Toronto. The reasons are different. Why is it harder? Quite simply because these cities have in fact become organized crime hubs, as I was saying. These stolen vehicles are used for trafficking and exporting. We can see that there are various ways these individuals, acting with malice aforethought, decide to steal vehicles that belong to members of the public.

First, what does the thief do? They start by identifying the vehicle, based on where it is, whether in a private or public parking lot. Then, they steal the vehicle in a very short timeframe. The statistics tell us that the thief manages to steal the vehicle in 30 seconds to three minutes, depending on whether the vehicle has an auto start system and some kind of protection, whether an alarm or something else.

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In a trafficking scheme with crime hubs, where does the vehicle go? There are three activities that organized crime groups do to get rid of a vehicle and make huge profits. The first is that the vehicle is chopped, or stripped for parts. Much as a butcher would do, these organized crime groups dismantle the vehicle to take the most important parts. These parts are identified. They know exactly which parts to take from certain vehicles. They know which parts are worth a lot on the market, and this is determined by supply and demand. So, they strip the vehicle for the most important parts. Next, they immediately export the parts after stripping them, because the vehicle is often sent to underground shops, where mechanics strip the vehicles and identify the valuable parts. Then, the vehicles are exported.

Why are the recovery rates lower in areas like Montreal? Simply because Montreal and Toronto are prime strategic locations for organized crime groups that traffic in vehicles or vehicle parts, for two reasons. First, Montreal and Toronto, and particularly Montreal, are right on the border. As a result, it is a strategic location for organized crime groups to export stolen vehicle parts to the United States. In addition, Montreal and Toronto are near waterways. Second, in terms of strategy, as I said earlier, unlike in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, it is clear that cars stolen in Montreal and Toronto are not stolen for the purposes of joyriding; they are stolen to be resold.

The second way organized crime groups move a vehicle is to export it to where there is a clearly targeted market. Where are these markets, according to the Insurance Bureau of Canada? Essentially, these markets are in Eastern Europe, Russia, the Middle East, South America and Africa.

• (1230)

Resellers export car parts that are in very high demand to these markets by ocean freight. It is estimated that the sale of a Jeep Cherokee can directly generate \$97,000 for organized crime. For some organized groups, it pays to sell stolen vehicles. That has to be taken into consideration.

It is often thought that luxury vehicles are in demand in these markets. However, that is not the case. Quite often, the vehicles or parts in demand are not high-end but have a high resale value. In 2006, the 10 most stolen cars in Canada were the 1999 Honda Civic SiR two-door, the 2000 Honda Civic SiR two-door, Subarus, Acuras, Dodge Caravans, Dodge Grand Caravans, Audis and Dodge Shadows. Luxury vehicles are not necessarily the most frequently stolen. The two most stolen automobiles are plain Honda Civics because their parts have a resale value on the black market.

There are three types of operations: chopping for parts, exporting, and changing identification numbers of parts and vehicles. In addition, parts and vehicles are cloned. How is the identification changed? Organized groups find vehicles involved in accidents, obtain their vehicle identification number or VIN, and copy it onto a stolen vehicle. The identification is changed in the third step in the process, which is also when cloning takes place, once again using the VIN. For example, thieves will go to a shopping centre parking lot, obtain a VIN, and copy it onto a stolen vehicle.

That is how organized crime works and why the VIN is important and central to Bill S-9. We cannot simply create an offence for the

possession of property obtained by crime, which has been covered so far by section 354 of the Criminal Code. We have to have provisions covering the VIN. When the vehicle identification number has been altered, there must be better regulation and offences with minimum sentences. That is why we are supporting Bill S-9.

Cars are stolen for two reasons. The first is that there is a black market with well-targeted operations. The Criminal Code must have more teeth and prohibit tampering with the VIN. This would be one measure among others to reduce auto theft and fight this problem.

• (1235)

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech. In the spirit of that, I just want to go to one particular item and see how he feels about it, and that is the mandatory minimum sentence for a third offence on automobile theft. Does the member think this part of the bill is really necessary?

Certainly, as he is pointing out, when we differentiate the type of theft taking place, such as a joyriding offence, it may have some extenuating circumstances. It may be that in the crowd of people that young people are sometimes in, these offences could be taken a bit differently.

When the judge is looking at an offender who has stolen a vehicle for the third time for profit, would we not expect that the judicial system could come up with a decent sentence for that person?

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. In fact, I considered that issue before giving my speech in the House. As everyone knows, the Bloc has always been opposed to minimum sentences. We have always opposed them on principle.

The bill includes minimum sentences, but only after a third offence, not a first or second offence. At a certain point in time, we have to realize what is going on. There is a difference between stealing a car to go joyriding and stealing a car for other illegal purposes. If this bill included minimum sentences for a first or second offence, the Bloc would not support it. Because minimum sentences will apply only to a third offence, the Bloc can support this bill.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge some of the points that the member brought up, but I am going to raise a particular provincial issue.

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The former member for Winnipeg North, Judy Wasylycia-Leis, consistently raised issues in the House around the impact of federal legislation on provinces. In the province of Manitoba, the issue of auto theft was raised as a result of the good work of Judy Wasylycia-Leis. Winnipeg, at one time, was the leading car theft capital of Canada. In 2007, about 1,700 auto thefts occurred there. Manitoba did not wait for the federal government to act. It put a plan in place that has substantially reduced the number of auto thefts in the province.

One of the big challenges for many provinces is federal legislation that impacts provincial governments. There is little consultation with provincial governments, nor are there resources for them to implement some of the legislation, such as police officers, prisons and what not.

I wonder if the member would like to comment on what he sees as a potential impact on provincial governments with this kind of legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. The answer is in the explanations I gave in my speech on the motives that compel someone to commit this crime. In the province the member referred to, these offences are not associated with a specific illegal act or organized crime group, but rather with delinquency. The provinces have certain obligations when it comes to health services and social services.

As I mentioned earlier, in Quebec, this activity and offence is not related to joyriding, in other words, young people deciding to steal a vehicle for a day or an evening simply for fun. In Montreal, motor vehicle theft is directly related to organized crime. Thus, the federal government is responsible through the Criminal Code. Young people going through a delinquent phase must not be subject to the Criminal Code, quite simply because they are not planning to sell stolen car parts outside the country, in the Middle East or Africa, for example.

I believe it is important to distinguish between the two offences. One of them is often committed by young people for various reasons, and the other is usually committed by an organized network of criminals. In the first instance, the provinces have an important obligation in terms of supervision and reducing juvenile delinquency, particularly in cities like Winnipeg.

• (1245)

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to raise two concerns with the member. The first one is probably more a commentary than a question.

The government sitting across the way continually tells the House that it is tough on crime and that it is getting down to serious work, yet if we look at the history of this bill, the first time we saw it was in 2006. We saw it again in 2008. Then we had prorogation and we had to start all over again.

People in my community of Hamilton Mountain were upset about the prorogation for a whole host of reasons, but one of them was that we keep repeating the same work, over and over again, instead of finding the time to deal with the real economic issues that are so hurting our communities. We should be talking about job creation.

We should be talking about how to stop foreign takeovers. Yet what are we doing? We are debating the same bill for the third time.

Let me get to the question that I want to pose to the member.

I find the provisions in this bill with respect to mandatory minimum sentences troubling, and in particular, the fact that they would not kick in until after the third offence. I think we can think of a number of scenarios. When a person has been convicted for the third time, six months might be the mandatory minimum sentence. That is a ridiculously low sentence, especially if it involves individuals who are involved in organized crime and the theft of autos.

I wonder if the member could elaborate on his views both with respect to mandatory minimums in this bill and mandatory minimums in general.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we reject outright the principle of minimum sentences. However, in the bill, a minimum sentence of six months' imprisonment applies in the case of a third offence. A minimum sentence applies for a third offence because there are two reasons for committing such an offence. It may be committed by an organized crime ring for the purpose of selling parts abroad. Or a car may be stolen by 18- or 19-year-olds who want to go joyriding one evening.

The penalty and the sentence must fit the crime. The same six-month sentence cannot be handed down for an 18-year-old who decides to steal a car and for someone found guilty of trafficking cars. The sentences must be fair. The Bloc Québécois has always opposed the principle of minimum sentences because it wants judges to assess the situation of the accused who is brought to trial and sentenced.

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was listening closely to the member from Hamilton Mountain and I would like some clarification, although I am sure she might give some later on. She must have been telling the Minister of Justice and Attorney General that she was advocating the three strikes and you are out policy. If that is the case, then I am wondering why her party has not supported the crime and justice legislation in the past like we have. When we are trying to make amendments, make things tighter and respond to the call of Canadians on various issue, all of a sudden I hear this and it kind of shocks me.

I will now move on to speak to Bill S-9. I listened earlier to my Liberal colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine and her perspective on this legislation. I also listened very carefully to what the Bloc Québécois member from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie had to say. Some of the comments I heard from the Liberal speaker and the Bloc speaker were very constructive. However, some of the comments from the NDP puzzled and shocked me as to where it was coming from.

Government Orders

Bill S-9, an act to amend the Criminal Code (auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime), is important. I agree with the comments that were made earlier that this type of initiative was before the House back in 2006. Why it took so long is beyond us, but, of course, we did have prorogation and we did have elections that the Prime Minister called prematurely.

I and I know my constituents would have thought that one of the first pieces of legislation, along with so many other important pieces of legislation, would have been this type of legislation, seeing what the numbers are out there. We heard some of the numbers earlier today. When we discuss these numbers, it is very difficult to talk about where the numbers in auto theft are higher. I think every member who sits in this honourable House has great respect, whether it is in the provinces of Manitoba, Quebec, P.E.I., Ontario, or in my lovely city of Toronto, but at the same time we need to talk about these statistics, where they come from and where they are accumulated so that the resources could be attached to them as legislation will be applied.

For example, the member from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie gave us some statistics about the recovery percentages in Ontario as opposed to Quebec and how they were much higher in Ontario. Also, auto theft as a whole in Ontario is quite less than most other provinces. That just goes to take away the notion that Toronto has high crime rates. That is not the case in auto theft crimes and I want to put that on record.

Nevertheless, as we talk about crime in general, one crime is one too many, which is why, as my Liberal colleague said earlier, we want to support this legislation. I, for one, on behalf of my constituents in Scarborough Centre, in the city of Toronto and in the province, want to support this legislation. We want to see it go to committee because we believe some good work and good suggestions could be made in committee to fine-tune this bill so that we can finally get a bill out there to do the work that Canadians have asked us to do, which is to tighten up the Criminal Code.

I would like to point out what I think are faults with some of the suggestions in this bill.

The bill would make it a crime to alter, destroy or remove a VIN, vehicle identification number. The member spoke earlier of the significance of it, the role that it plays and how important it is. It would also make it a crime to knowingly sell, give, transfer, transport, send or deliver goods that have been acquired criminally.

• (1250)

We heard earlier today from other speakers about how people steal a car, take it apart and sell different parts or put a car in a crate and ship it abroad. They also can change the vehicle identification number with what was described as a makeover. The member talked about three specific areas: chopping, exporting and the makeover. The bill addresses those specific areas.

The bill would make it a crime to possess property known to be obtained through crime for the purpose of trafficking. For example, if people who need a door, a bumper or an auto part goes to an autobody shop to buy a door for x amount of dollars, knowing very well what the market price is, the moment they pay 30% to 50% less their antenna should go up. They should ask themselves why, if they

go to the depot and pay so much, this person is charging so little. Those people should immediately step away from that transaction because they will also be subject to a criminal charge if this legislation is passed.

If everyone who engages in that type of exchange avoids it, then hopefully there will be no market for it. In the early nineties, there was a huge underground cigarette economy. Revenue for the country was down because of loss of taxes and there was a free fall for everyone. I say quite proudly that when we took office we lowered the federal taxes on cigarettes and all of a sudden we eliminated that underground economy. How can we eliminate the selling or chopping of parts? We can do it through legislation and the notification to purchasers of said parts. If they know they could be fined and imprisoned, they will avoid buying, which means it would eliminate a market for that area.

The Canada Border Services has a very important role to play. We have seen documentaries where a car is put in a container on a boat and then shipped somewhere across the ocean. We need to be able to provide Canada Border Services with the right type of technology so it can monitor the containers. However, we must remember that not all cars in containers are put there illegally. Some Canadians may decide to get employment outside the country and they put their cars in containers and ship them to wherever their new job is.

However, along the way I think there is technology today that can help Canada Border Services do a better job in pre-screening to ensure that stolen autos leaving the country is addressed as well.

The Liberal Party has always supported legislation to effectively reduce any type of crime. This is one type of crime. My colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine has often talked about what is unacceptable and hurting, if I may say, is that when legislation comes forward on crime and justice issues, sometimes the Conservatives say that we Liberals stand for the criminals. That is not true.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: And they know it.

Mr. John Cannis: Of course they know it.

My colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, who spoke earlier today, stood and, over and over again, said that we must punish where punishment is warranted and we must protect when protection is warranted, but that we need to do it in the Canadian way, in a fair way. That is why, with the member's suggestion as the critic, and I agree, the bill must go to committee. I am confident some good ideas will come forward to make some changes.

• (1255)

Our caucus will not play politics with this type of legislation. We will move forward and support it but we will not stand for any slogans. For example, I remember the member for Portage—Lisgar on the gun issue. The other day we heard personal attacks on our colleagues who did not support the gun legislation.

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Last night I was watching a documentary on Lee Atwater and some of the tactics that he used during the Bush senior campaign when he talked against Dukakis and about how all criminals vote for Democrats and all good Americans vote for Republicans.

The one thing that hurt me a lot in the most recent debates on the gun legislation was that criminals vote for Liberals and police officers vote for Conservatives. That is just nasty, untrue and uncalled for. When we want to move forward to protect the nation, it is unnecessary.

We sit in committee to do the good work that we know we can do and that we are paid to do and should do for the good of Canadians.

I am glad this has created a separate offence within the Criminal Code. It was long overdue and it is necessary.

What I sometime find unacceptable is the people they use to sell or to participate in car theft, for example, young delinquents, young offenders as we might describe them. I might ask the committee to look into that because criminals could be stealing these cars, chopping them, trying to sell them or export them and the middle person, as he or she is often referred to, could be a young man who may be going through some difficulty in life and all of a sudden a few quick dollars are flashed in front of him and he is told to drive the car or chop off the VIN number and so on. We know very well what the Criminal Code is in reference to young offenders, and I am concerned. I am putting this on the table so that when the bill goes to committee it could possibly look into that as well.

I am pleased that since 2006, when the last data was brought forward, it showed that auto theft was on a decline, as overall crime stats were in a decline.

I remember very well in 1991-92, when I sought the nomination and won in the election of 1993, that one of the key issues was that we needed to address the crime issue and we needed to make our streets safer. I made a commitment to my constituents, and I am pleased to say that I have upheld that promise to this very day, that we would do whatever we could. We did make changes to section 745 of the Criminal Code.

Today, when an impact statement is allowed in the Williams case, that is because Liberal governments brought it forward. When there is an opportunity for a declaration of a dangerous offender, that was a Liberal initiative that brought it forward. Long term offender was also a Liberal initiative.

Do we know everything? I would say no. Does the Conservative Party have a monopoly on crime legislation? No. We all, in our own conscience, want to do the right thing. That is why I said earlier and our critic also said that we will support the bill and send it committee where some good work will be done.

I am pleased that under our tenure, under a Liberal government between 1993 to 2006, the crime stats as a whole were coming down. However, I am sad that in areas such as Manitoba and Montreal the car theft stats are up. However, I want to assure Canadians in Manitoba and in Montreal that we want to work together to address this issue and solve it, as the member from Bloc Québécois said earlier.

●(1300)

The Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers is opposed to the bill as it believes it would limit judicial discretion. Quite frankly, I do not know. That puzzles me in some way. I need more clarification on what it means by that. I am not a lawyer, by education, so I will not pretend to know as much as the lawyers. However, I do know one thing. The average Canadian wants it in a very simple way. Maybe the council could explain, in a simple way, what it means by that so we can address its concerns.

The Canadian Association of Crown Counsel is also opposed to the bill. It believes it would add more work to an already overwrought system, without any mention or apparent intention to add resources to support the legislation. That was brought up earlier.

I also have that concern. Legislation is good. I will point out two things. It is good provided we enforce it and we provide the tools, but then we ask the judiciary, for example, to enforce the legislation. In order to enforce the legislation, we need the resources to do so.

Today, unfortunately, we are strapped with a \$56 billion deficit, but as high a record deficit as it is, it will go higher. The economy has not yet really kicked in to try to generate jobs, wealth creation and security. If we have a healthy economy, then people are occupied or preoccupied with work as opposed to committing criminal acts, such as auto theft, for example.

Yes, the deficits are going up. Yes, it is a burden. Yes, it is a cost. However, at the end of the day, we, as a civil society, have to find that money because we are trying to keep our streets, our communities and our cities safe. How much is that worth? In my humble opinion, we really cannot put a value on that. Part of this whole process of funds is also rehabilitation. It is not just charging people who committed auto theft or burglary. It is also taking them at the early stages and working with them.

When it comes to resources that were identified by the Crown counsel, I agree with them, and I am going to ask the government to try to find the means and the ways to address the financial needs.

Various mayors and other people who have supported the bill were mentioned earlier such as the Insurance Bureau of Canada. Another burden is the insurance costs. A young man or a young woman graduating from college or university needs a car to get to work and the insurance costs are high. Why are they high? Simply because of some of these thefts, for example, that impede the system, the recovery process and whatnot.

I am thankful for the legislation and any legislation that will help keep our streets safe. Issues such as these are not a monopoly to any specific party or any specific person. I always have believed, and will continue to believe, that these issues are important to each and every one of us, no matter from what part of the country we come. If one part of the country is having some difficulties, as was mentioned earlier today, Manitoba, Quebec, or Montreal, we have an obligation to step in and do what we can.

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•(1305)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I, too, am pleased to be speaking about Bill S-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime). As my colleague, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, so clearly stated just moments ago, the Bloc Québécois supports this bill. Bill S-9, just like Bill C-26, which went down the drain because of prorogation, and Bill C-53, which went down the drain because of the election, has the very specific goal of reducing vehicle theft. The bill's main measure, which is to create an offence for tampering with an identification number—which is also known as a serial number, just to clarify—is not new. In fact, it was lifted from Bill C-64, which was introduced by the Liberal government in September 2005.

However, Bill S-9 is broader in scope. It also targets the trafficking, export and import of any property obtained by crime and proposes a minimum six-month sentence for a person convicted of vehicle theft for the third time. My colleague, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, explained the Bloc Québécois' position well. Generally, we are against minimum sentences in justice bills because they tie the judge's hands and mean that no matter what happened and despite any exacerbating or mitigating factors, a minimum sentence of *x* number of months or years must be handed down to the person who committed the crime. This means that one person could receive the same sentence as another even though the crime they committed was not nearly as serious or they played a smaller role in the crime than the second person. The Bloc Québécois feels that is a problem.

However, it is said that when there is recidivism, organized crime is more likely to be involved. When teenagers steal a car and take it for a joyride, the hope is that there is not too much damage, because accidents can be caused by excessive speed. I imagine a person who commits this type of offence already has the makings of a criminal. However, in that case, there is not necessarily recidivism. Criminal groups make money by stealing cars, altering them, chopping them up to sell the parts, or shipping them overseas. If these people are caught more than once, they could receive a minimum sentence. The Bloc Québécois does not really have a problem with that in this particular case because of the way the legislation is drafted.

Bill S-9 is in all respects the same as Bill C-26 as passed, with support from the Bloc Québécois, by the House of Commons during the last session. Furthermore, Bill C-26, which the Bloc Québécois supported at third reading, was practically identical to the version introduced at first reading, which itself was similar to Bill C-53, introduced previously. We are in favour of sending Bill S-9 to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Unfortunately, as some hon. members have said and as my colleague, the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, said during a speech on the same subject earlier this year, this committee is overwhelmed because the Minister of Justice has piled on the bills.

Although we may be in favour of some of these bills, we must still study them carefully. We cannot pass a bill without having studied it and heard from witnesses. Sometimes everyone in the House will agree on a bill, because it is clear and well written and we know its purpose and all the ins and outs. In this case, the bill may be fast-

tracked, or passed very quickly. However, in most cases, we must study bills in much more detail and send them to committee to ensure that there is nothing fishy going on, and that we are on the right track.

•(1310)

The problem is that there is a lot of jostling in committee. There are bills that everyone agrees on, but members would like to hear from the witnesses. Some political parties want further information, and want to propose amendments. The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights is very busy right now. So it will be difficult for anything to happen with this bill. I do not know whether the House is unanimous on this bill, but based on what I have heard from the various parties, it seems that we will not have any trouble moving it through. The government needs the support of one party, and the Bloc is in favour of this bill.

A little later, I will give some interesting statistics. According to what I have read on this subject, the number of car thefts has been going down since 1996. Nevertheless, now is the time to act, because it still happens too frequently.

The social and economic consequences of these thefts are a heavy burden, both for individuals and society as a whole. Just think about the insurance companies that are faced with this problem. Insurance companies are no different from other businesses. When they incur costs by compensating people who have had their vehicle stolen, it is the consumer who foots the bill at the end of the day. That is the way things work. It is true that vehicle thefts affect everyone.

The cost of automobile insurance varies based on how often you use the vehicle and where you live. Central Quebec is known as a region with high rates of vehicle theft and possession of stolen vehicles. It is possible that insurance there costs a little bit more. Without repeating what was said earlier, I would say that Winnipeg is, unfortunately, Canada's vehicle theft capital. I am sure that people pay much more to insure a vehicle in Winnipeg than in other municipalities in Canada. Montreal and Toronto also have a high number of vehicle thefts because of the large number of vehicles registered there.

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Back when I was a local radio reporter in my region, I witnessed several vehicle seizures. Unfortunately, a number of criminal gangs had chosen Victoriaville and the surrounding area as a location for their illegal activities. Even some very modern garages that sold nice cars were raided, and police seized several vehicles. Charges were laid, and people were sentenced to jail for possession of stolen goods. I sometimes covered these events. Today, there are fewer such garages, no doubt because of those seizures. They may have set up shop elsewhere, or they may be more discreet. Still, we cannot bury our heads in the sand. The scourge persists in my region and all across Canada.

The Bloc Québécois agrees with the new trafficking offence set out in Bill S-9. The purpose of this provision is to curb trafficking in cars and car parts. Organized crime groups get rich by quickly dismantling cars and selling the parts. Some stolen cars immediately leave the country for sale elsewhere, but in general, cars are stolen for parts, so vehicles are stripped right away.

Judging by the list of most frequently stolen cars, thieves are not always after very costly or luxurious vehicles. Some groups put in orders for particular makes of vehicles.

● (1315)

I do not need to list those makes, but I can say that the most popular cars are the ones most frequently stolen. Many of them are compact cars that cost between \$20,000 and \$25,000. There are so many of these cars on the market that parts are in high demand. That is where possession of stolen goods comes into play. Fenders, engine parts, mufflers, wheels, everything goes. Everything gets recycled and sent to shady dealers for resale. Worst of all, these parts are not necessarily resold for a better price. Consumers who have been in accidents or who have defective parts in their cars buy these parts in good faith, not knowing that they are buying stolen parts. This is a very lucrative market for gang members.

This bill also tackles another problem: vehicle theft for the purpose of joyriding. I am not sure what the correct word for that is in French. Most thefts of this type are committed by young people.

For instance, this happens when someone stops their car in front of a convenience store and unfortunately leaves the keys in the ignition, perhaps even leaving the car running. Sometimes in the winter, people might leave their cars running while they run in to buy some milk. They get out of the car without locking the doors. Someone can walk by more or less by chance and steal the vehicle to go for a joyride. A friend of mine was the victim of this kind of theft and the police found his car in a ditch a few kilometres from where it had been stolen. The young people had simply abandoned the vehicle there, unfortunately with some damage, because they had gone for a joyride in a field. Not everyone commits this kind of vehicle theft for the same reason.

I mentioned statistics earlier. According to the most recent statistics from the insurer's organization, Groupement des assureurs automobiles, there were more than 38,800—that is nearly 40,000—vehicle thefts in Quebec in 2006. That is the equivalent of one motor vehicle theft every 14 minutes. That is a lot of theft. Insurance companies had to pay out \$300 million, which has a direct impact on all insurance premiums. Despite those high numbers, Quebec is far

from the worst. In fact, per capita, the figures are far lower in Quebec than in the western provinces.

Comparing the number of vehicle thefts in 2006, Quebec had 507 per 100,000 inhabitants and Alberta had 725. The worst rate—and I think some of my colleagues have mentioned this—is in Manitoba. Earlier we heard that Winnipeg was the car theft capital of Canada. In fact, Manitoba had 1,376 thefts per 100,000 inhabitants. This is rather frightening, especially if we compare it to the average across Canada, which is 487 per 100,000 people. In all of Canada, approximately 160,000 vehicles were stolen in 2006. As I said earlier, the rate has been going down since 1996, but the statistics show that we are still facing a very serious problem.

The situations in Quebec and the western provinces are different. In Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the majority of the cars are stolen for joyrides, simply for the fun of stealing a car and going for a ride. Sometimes cars are used during the commission of another crime. People steal a car to commit a holdup and then abandon the car shortly thereafter. In western Canada, auto thefts are committed by people who are not necessarily seeking monetary gain from this larceny. The purpose is a joyride. These thefts are committed for fun, on a dare, or to get a car to commit another crime.

In Quebec and in Ontario, even though people steal cars for joyriding in those provinces as well, most of the auto thefts are linked to trafficking in and possession of stolen vehicles.

● (1320)

The most commonly stolen vehicles are not the ones we might think. They are not just luxury vehicles with high resale values. The most popular vehicles are stolen for their parts. I have a list from 2006, but most of the media provide a list every year of the 10 most stolen vehicles in Canada. The list is even broken down by most stolen vehicle per province.

For the most part, we are talking about small cars such as the Honda Civic, Subaru Impreza and Acura Integra. The Acura Integra no longer exists, but people modify it. They like that model because it is a high performance vehicle and the parts are traded on the market rather easily. These are highly sought after parts. That kind of car is very popular. There are also the minivans used by small families; we see a lot of them on the road. Vehicles are stolen for their parts and not necessarily for their value.

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The Library of Parliament put together a very interesting document for the committee to use during its study of this bill. I remember some of the facts that were in it. The Insurance Bureau of Canada, or IBC, estimates that auto theft creates a financial burden in excess of a billion dollars a year. This estimate includes the theft of uninsured vehicles, costs related to health care, court proceedings, police services and legal services, and personal expenses incurred by owners.

Thus, vehicle theft costs our society about a billion dollars a year. There is a direct financial impact on consumers. Auto insurers figure out how much money they lose because of auto theft, and then they pass the cost on to drivers and vehicle owners. These costs also depend on where the vehicle is located and how it is used. For example, members of Parliament who use their cars a lot for work are more likely to have their cars stolen because they travel a lot and park in many places. Their cars are not sitting in garages. They put a lot of kilometres on their cars and are at greater risk of having their cars stolen.

In Canada, the number of motor vehicle thefts per 1,000 inhabitants dropped 15% in 2008, continuing the general decline we have seen since 1997. This drop is due to the fact that we opened our eyes and adopted certain measures. Since September 2007, Canadian auto manufacturers have had to install electronic immobilizers in new vehicles, which makes them more difficult to steal.

Insurance companies are also trying to reduce theft by offering better deals to owners of vehicles equipped with anti-theft devices. This may not necessarily be an alarm system; it could be a device with an intelligent key, which makes it more difficult for a thief to start the vehicle.

Luxury vehicles stolen and shipped overseas in containers to Russia, Africa and the Middle East, where they are in demand, as my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie mentioned, are often equipped with a GPS, which makes it easy to locate them.

I would be remiss if I did not mention certain municipal bylaws. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of theft in my region. In Victoriaville, there is now a municipal bylaw prohibiting drivers from leaving their cars running if they are not in them. Another bylaw provides for a fine if a vehicle's doors are left unlocked. If a vehicle is parked in the driveway and the doors are not locked, a police officer can give the owner a ticket. People are increasingly being made aware of the problem of auto theft. Studying this bill in committee will allow us to tackle the problem of auto theft.

• (1325)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his very interesting and informative speech.

I wonder if he could share his opinion on this kind of bill. This is the third time such a bill has been introduced. First, Bill C-53 was introduced shortly after the 2006 election. Then Bill C-26 was introduced before the 2008 election, when the House was prorogued. Now we are talking about Bill S-9.

Does the member think the Conservatives are simply trying to delay these bills? If the government had really wanted to, we could

have passed this bill a long time ago. In his opinion, why has the government not yet addressed this matter?

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very pertinent question.

It is odd; not too long ago, I was one of the MPs who supported the anti-spam bill. The government was responsible for delaying that bill. Several years later, we are still discussing it, even though this bill appeared to have unanimous support and would have had no difficulty being passed by the House of Commons.

It is the same thing with auto theft. The bills that came before Bill S-9, which my colleague mentioned, were exactly the same. Unfortunately, Parliament was prorogued. The government itself shut down the House of Commons, which meant that the bill died on the order paper.

Another time, we were looking at a bill to bring in fixed election dates, but the Prime Minister decided that he wanted to call an election, which meant that that bill also died on the order paper. This has been going on for years. I get the feeling that the ministers will tell the public that they have come up with a bill to reduce the number of car thefts. We hear that every time, but it is always the same bill. We must adopt it as quickly as possible, and agree to move on to something else. There would be no problem with adopting Bill S-9 quickly.

• (1330)

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill S-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime).

All of us here know of constituents who, or we ourselves, have been victims of individuals who have stolen cars. It is traumatic for the victims and their families. It is costly for insurance companies. Above all else, it is an incredible violation for those whose cars have been stolen.

We support the government bill. We want to work with the government to make sure it is an effective bill in the public interest, to ensure there is a continued decline in auto theft. What is interesting, along with most other crime in Canada, is that there has been a decline in auto theft. In 2006 there were some 430 vehicles stolen per day, which is a very large number, but the number of vehicles stolen continues to decline.

Government Orders

The Liberal Party will continue to support legislation that is effective and improves public safety. At one time the government had 16 bills on the order paper that were related to crime. We said that we would support 11 of the 16 bills immediately, but the government said that if we did not support all of the bills, it would not agree to 11 of its bills being supported in one block. That is unfortunate because this bill has been introduced several times in the past, due in large part to the Prime Minister's continual proroguing of Parliament. In doing that he has put the government's legislation back at square one. That is not in the interest of the public and is not a good use of taxpayers' money. It certainly makes this place work less effectively than any of us would like to see.

We certainly encourage the Prime Minister to work with us to ensure that the bills he is putting forward are good ones. We will work with him to ensure they are passed as quickly as possible. If a bill is not good legislation, we want to ensure that we can change it to make sure it works in the public interest.

This bill proposes to do three things. It makes it a crime to alter, destroy or remove a vehicle identification number. It makes it a crime to knowingly sell, give, transfer, or transport, send or deliver goods acquired criminally. It makes it a crime to possess property known to be obtained through crime for the purpose of trafficking.

In the past, my party put forth a number of bills relating to protecting children, to eradicate child pornography, to reduce violent crimes, to implementing minimum sentences for using a gun in the commission of a crime. We would certainly like to continue supporting good bills.

Auto theft is a national problem. It is particularly problematic in Montreal and Winnipeg. It has been endemic in those cities for a very long time. If the government wants to apply significant resources, it should do that in an evidence-based fashion. Rather than putting forth legislation that sounds good on the surface, we have to make sure that the legislation will make the public safer and will not waste the taxpayers' money.

The government has had a number of bills that will be exceptionally costly. If one sums up the cost of the government's justice bills, they will cost the taxpayer \$11 billion. We would support that if that \$11 billion was well spent, but the government is putting out a wide net that will capture people who should be in jail as well as individuals who perhaps have medical problems and should not be.

With this broad net, it sounds good for the government to puff up its chest and say that it supports the protection of Canadian citizens. Everybody in the House wants to protect Canadians. We are also interested in ensuring that those people who are inveterate criminals, repeat offenders and those who have committed violent crimes do pay the price and spend time in jail. However, the government has failed to look at both sides of the equation.

• (1335)

When I was putting myself through school, I worked for a while as a guard in a maximum security prison. I used to work there as a physician too. What I found, and this is the fact, is that 50% to 60% of people in jail have a combination of things. They could have fetal alcohol syndrome, now known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. A

good chunk of them have had brain injuries. Many of them have what we call a dual diagnosis, a combination of both psychiatric problems and drug problems.

The problem is there is not a coherent way to address this. There are ways we can prevent those problems from happening. It would make more sense to work with the provinces, which are the managers of the provincial institutions where people serve sentences of two years less a day.

In one of the jails in my riding, and this is a standard practice for provincial institutions, there is a huge lack of ability to treat people with problems such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which is the most common cause of preventable brain damage at birth, those who have substance abuse and psychiatric problems, and people who have brain injuries as a result of falls or other accidents. The jails are littered with these individuals. Would it not make more sense for the federal government to work with the provinces to ensure that people get the treatment they require?

Right now we see a revolving door syndrome within the provincial institutions. The police and the public are exceptionally frustrated because many people go on to reoffend. They become part of the revolving door syndrome. There are people in my community of Victoria whose houses have been broken into dozens of times. In Victoria proper more than 1,500 people are living on the streets. Sixty per cent of those people have dual diagnoses. They have a combination of psychiatric problems and substance abuse problems. Those problems cannot be shrugged off. They are medical problems that require medical intervention. The good thing about this is that there are programs that are effective in dealing with these problems. Let me give one example.

Dr. Evan Wood and Dr. Julio Montaner at the centre of excellence at the University of British Columbia have put forth programs such as NAOMI, the North American opiate medication initiative. This is a drug program for those who have intravenous injection drug problems, particularly with respect to narcotics. A group of people were given narcotics. Those people who had been committing crimes, stealing cars, doing break and enters and other actions to pay for their drug habits were given narcotics by a medical professional. Those people were brought into the medical system. The result was that a majority of those people moved away from engaging in criminality. They got the care they required. They were able to get skills training. They were able to get off the drugs, get back with their families and get their lives back on track.

It is a much less expensive intervention than throwing somebody in jail.

Members and viewers might be interested to know what it costs to keep one person in jail. For a federal maximum security institution, it costs \$240,000 a year for a man, and for a woman, it costs \$330,000 a year. In a medium security institution, it costs \$140,000 a year. Most Canadians could not hope to earn that amount of money in a year, yet it is taxpayers' money which pays to keep people behind bars.

Government Orders

By all means, inveterate criminals and people who commit violent acts need to be behind bars; that is in the public interest. However, there has to be a way to break the cycle of criminality and there are ways to make this happen.

I mentioned NAOMI. Why is every single city in Canada that has an intravenous drug problem with some of its citizens and wants a North American opiate medication initiative not allowed to have one? Why does the federal government not work with its provincial counterparts to enable people to get the drug rehabilitation and psychiatric services they need in provincial institutions?

Only by doing this, along with the skills training, will we be able to break the cycle of criminality. People will leave the provincial institutions and one day they are going to be convicted but they will not get sentences of two years less a day. They will get sentences that are longer than that. They will end up in a federal institution which means the federal government will be paying for that with taxpayers' money.

● (1340)

It is completely illogical and shortsighted for the feds only to look at the punitive aspects of criminality rather than to ask: Can this be prevented? Can some of these people be treated? Can the cycle of criminality be broken? Can our streets be made safer? Can the cost to the taxpayer be reduced? Can the judicial system be more effective? The answer to all of those questions is yes. Is the federal government doing that? No.

I would implore the federal government to pursue getting the justice minister and other senior ministers, such as the health minister and others together with their provincial counterparts to implement these solutions. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. The solutions are there.

There is a program which the current federal government axed. The program was put forward by a Liberal government. If an initiative reduced youth crime by 50% to 60% and saved the taxpayer \$7 for every \$1 invested, would that not be a good thing? Would that not be something to embrace? It would be a great investment. That initiative exists.

The early learning head start program has been assessed. Peer reviewed studies have shown very clearly that in the first eight years of life early learning head start programs have a host of social benefits from reducing youth crime by 50% to 60%, to keeping kids in school longer, to better educational outcomes, to more money earned and less dependence on social programs. All of those are winners. That program could be integrated in our schools if the federal government would simply take it upon itself to work with the provincial governments to adopt this.

When we were in government from 2004-06 a member of Parliament from Toronto, one of our hockey heroes, negotiated this with the provinces. All of the provinces signed on to it. They did not sign on because it did not work, they signed on because they knew it would work. Today, four years later, there is more evidence to show that this initiative works to reduce youth crime by 50% to 60%, saving the taxpayer \$7 for every \$1 invested. We know it works because we can peer into the developing brain. We know how the brain does and does not work. We know what bad things do to the

development of a child's brain. We know how that changes the trajectory of the child making the child more prone to leading a life of crime, to taking up substance abuse and to engaging in an array of activities that are not in the interests of society and certainly not in the interests of the individual as the child grows into adulthood.

I have been speaking about this initiative for 17 years. This is the 17th anniversary for those of us who were elected on October 25, 1993. Sometimes it feels as though I am talking into the desert breeze. This program actually works. I implore the ministers to look at this program. The evidence is compelling and exciting. It works.

Initiatives such as the North American opiate medication initiative, the head start program for children, and initiatives that reduce the incidence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder all work in the public interest and at a much lower cost for the taxpayer. That is something the government ought to be looking at.

For the interests of our police officers, I would implore the government to look at the McNeil decision that came down through the courts. That decision needs to be reversed. The decision is tying the hands of our police officers when it comes to prosecuting those who have been charged. Rather than putting the accused on trial, it actually puts police officers on trial. I would ask the government to review the McNeil decision. It is a very serious decision that is hindering the ability of the police forces across the country to do their job.

● (1345)

I would also ask that the federal government look at ways to ensure that our police have the resources they need.

When we were in government, we put forth a number of initiatives to enable us to have a much larger police force. We have an aging police force. There is a competition for police officers and for various jobs. Right now, police officers in my riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, our RCMP, are having a difficult time policing remote areas that have had some serious crime problems. The public is not served well by this. Our police officers are not served well by this.

I would ask the government to look at some of the work we did, to work with us to ensure that we have enough police officers. We need to deal with the current deficit in police forces across our country.

There is also the matter of how our police officers are treated, particularly the RCMP. There are some significant human resources issues surrounding how the RCMP officers and their families are treated. I would implore the government to work with the RCMP to ensure that this is being addressed.

A last thing I want to mention has to do with victims' benefits. When we were in government, we worked very hard with victims' groups to ensure that they had the resources they needed for the care and treatment of victims. This is a crucial issue in the execution of justice in Canada.

Government Orders

I see that the government has not used the resources set aside for victims. I would strongly recommend that it take a look at this and ensure that those citizens who are victimized in our country, particularly those who have been subjected to violent offences, receive the care they need. I think everybody in this House realizes that abandoning victims would be immoral. The government ought to ensure that there are enough resources to provide victims of violent offences with the care and treatment they require.

In closing, I want to say that we support this bill. We would like to work with the government to ensure that this an effective bill. We want car thefts to continue to decline. We want the government to work with us, not only on this bill but also on its other judicial bills, to ensure that our laws are in the public interest, that the moneys are spent wisely, and that we have safer streets for all.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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

* * *

• (1350)

FAIRNESS AT THE PUMPS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Tony Clement moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure this afternoon to speak to Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act. We are at third reading.

The bill is an important piece of legislation that goes a long way toward establishing fair business practices in industries that measure or weigh the products they sell.

It enhances consumer protection, something that is important to this government and to all Canadians. Bill C-14 promotes measurement accuracy, and encourages consumers and retailers alike to have confidence in a fair and competitive marketplace.

With this in mind, the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology heard from a wide range of expert witnesses: consumer groups, industry representatives, and civil servants. Their testimony contributed to lively and informative discussions.

I would like to take a few minutes to remind the hon. members that Bill C-14 is about fairness for both consumers and businesses, and it depends on the accuracy of the measurements of goods.

Every day Canadians make countless purchases based on measurement. With each transaction, these buyers, as individuals or as representatives of organizations and businesses, trust that the amount of produce they get at the grocery store, the amount of fuel they get at the gas pump, or the amount of milk they get from a farmer is precisely the amount they paid for. They trust that goods are measured meticulously and dispensed appropriately.

Under existing legislation, namely, the Weights and Measures Act and the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act, measurement inspectors conduct random inspections of measurement devices, and consumers have an avenue through which to file complaints of suspected measurement inaccuracies.

More stringent legislation is needed to maintain the credibility of Canada's market system and to ensure that the trust of consumers is well placed. More people are needed on the ground to validate measurement equipment. More inspectors are needed to detect non-compliance.

It is for these reasons that the bill before us today is of such vital importance. This legislation will encourage a fair processes and fair business transactions for Canadian consumers and businesses.

The hon. Minister of Industry is charged with ensuring that consumers and businesses receive fair and accurate measures of the goods they purchase. Although the importance of enforcing accurate measurements may sound obvious enough, experience has shown that only through a carefully monitored regulatory regime can Measurement Canada accomplish this task.

The proposed fairness at the pumps act provides the foundation for such enforcement. Bill C-14 amends the Weights and Measures Act and the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act. Specifically, Bill C-14 addresses weaknesses in existing legislation with three timely updates: first, mandatory inspection frequencies for devices subject to the Weights and Measures Act; second, increased fines and penalties for non-compliance; and finally, ministerial power to designate authorized service providers to assess the accuracy of measurement devices at check-out counters, gas stations, and everywhere else consumer goods are quantified.

Allow me to speak more on this last point. Authorized service providers will be private businesses trained and designated by Measurement Canada to inspect the accuracy of various measurement devices. They will provide private businesses driven by market forces to offer competitive rates and flexible schedules. They will be private contractors whose quality of work will be ensured through the public oversight. Measurement Canada's own inspectors will perform random follow-up inspections to make sure that authorized service providers evaluate equipment impartially, precisely, and reputably. Measurement Canada inspectors will also continue to respond to complaints from the public, to take cases in which non-compliance is detected, and to enforce actions as required.

• (1355)

As an added benefit of mandatory inspection frequencies, increased demand for authorized service providers across several trade sectors will create hundreds of jobs. It will create jobs for front-line workers who travel to the sites to inspect the accuracy of measurement equipment.

Designated authorized service providers must also be fair to retailers. Honest and fair-minded business operators, not just consumers, feel the sting when their less conscientious competitors inaccurately measure the products they sell.

The proposed fairness at the pumps act would help level the playing field for small businesses. Bill C-14 would ensure that all players in the retail petroleum, the downstream petroleum, dairy, retail food, fishing, logging, mining, and grain and field crops sectors are held to the same moral and business standards.

The industry's input has been invaluable. Consultations underscored the fact that retailers could also be victimized by inaccurate measurements, whether by their own inadvertent errors or their competitors' deliberate miscalculations. In fact, it was through our consultations that we saw a need for mandatory inspection frequencies and took action to bring these new inspection intervals into use.

Some businesses have implemented inspection frequencies voluntarily. They have seen solid benefits from inspections, because the companies know beyond a doubt how much they are selling. They face fewer inventory problems, and this streamlines their business practices and saves them time and money.

All consulted stakeholders, including consumer groups, reiterated that mandatory inspections are necessary to uphold the integrity of the industry and to help retailers remain competitive in high-stakes markets.

Consumers welcome this legislation as a means to re-establish the principles of fairness, honesty, and decency in commercial transactions.

Retailers welcome the legislation as a means to ensure that companies compete ethically to win the business of Canadian buyers.

As members of this House, we must welcome and endorse fairness at the pumps and in the marketplace. We must uphold integrity in transactions that depend on the measurement of goods. We must promote and protect the interests of consumers and retailers

alike. Canadians have done their part. It is now time for us to do ours. What is fair must remain fair. I call on all hon. members to vote in favour of Bill C-14, a bill whose time has clearly come.

I have one item I would like to add. As a past employee of an oil company, I audited gas stations. These audits included reviews of inventories. There was nothing more important to the gas companies than making sure that we had accurate measurements of inventory. As this product is held underground, it becomes an environmental issue if it is found to have gone missing. It is not only an economic issue but also an environmental one.

Gas companies welcome this government's approach to making sure that we have fair and accurate measurements at their pumps and at all scales across this country.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I must interrupt the hon. member for Burlington at this time as it is two o'clock. He will have 11 minutes remaining in his speech when the House returns to this matter.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

TEEN CHALLENGE FARM

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was recently my pleasure to visit the Teen Challenge Farm in my riding. This farm is part of an addiction rehabilitation initiative that was originally founded in 1958 and which now has 16 locations across Canada.

This organization offers a three-phase program of faith-based residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation and provides structured spiritual, academic and vocational training. This training equips individuals to return to society as responsible citizens.

On my visit I met several young men in different stages of the programs, some just new and starting out on their new life journey and some graduates of the teen challenge program who have stayed on as mentors. These mentors are examples of the success that can be attained through this program.

The positive outcomes and success rates at this facility reflect the hard work of these folks and the dedication towards a better life, and a better and safer society.

We thank the Teen Challenge Farm for what it does.

* * *

MEDAL OF BRAVERY

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the heroic actions of Shane Doucette, a resident of Port au Port West, a small community in my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's.

Statements by Members

It is because of the quick thinking and actions of Shane Doucette that his co-worker Jason Riggs is alive today. On August 18, 2008, while working for an oil company in Alberta, Shane discovered that Jason had fallen into a tank of toxic fluids.

Without hesitation, Shane placed his own life at risk and rescued Jason, who was unconscious when Shane removed him from the tank. Shane revived Jason by performing CPR. While Jason required a long stay in hospital, he did make a full recovery.

Because of his heroic actions, Shane was presented a Medal of Bravery on Friday by the Governor General.

I ask all members of the House to join me in recognizing Shane Doucette and congratulating him on this prestigious award.

Shane is the son of Gerard and Gertie Doucette of Port au Port West.

* * *

[Translation]

CLAIRE SAUVAGEAU-CHARTIER

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we celebrated Claire Sauvageau-Chartier's 100th birthday on August 22 in Champlain, Quebec.

A caring, dedicated woman, Ms. Sauvageau-Chartier, a mother of seven, always helped and assisted others.

A nurse by profession, this remarkable lady attended to everyone in distress who came to ask for her help, and she did so free of charge. In times when health care was often too expensive for most people in this farming region, she helped numerous women during childbirth.

For decades, she bandaged the countless cuts and stitched the many wounds of unruly children.

Her hospitality is legendary, and her sharp mind has not diminished, even at the age of 100. This amazing lady still lives in her own home, by herself.

I would like to wish Ms. Sauvageau-Chartier, my mother-in-law, all the best on her 100th birthday. May you continue to enjoy good health and the love of family and friends.

* * *

GENERAL JEAN V. ALLARD MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was quite surprised to hear that the General Jean V. Allard Memorial Library at the Saint-Jean Garrison in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu would be closing its doors on December 15.

The Conservative Government that boasted about revitalizing the Royal Military College Saint-Jean does not have much to boast about anymore.

It has decided to close a library, a jewel with 85,000 volumes serving 3,000 students, while the Minister of National Defence has decided to invest \$16 billion in F-35s.

With this government, it is not surprising to hear a public affairs officer at the garrison describe a library as something useless.

What about the Official Languages Act? Did the minister shelve it at the library?

It is unacceptable that linguistic works will no longer be accessible to soldiers who are not taking language training.

I am therefore calling on the government to reverse the decision to close the General Jean V. Allard Memorial Library.

* * *

● (1405)

[English]

BAHA'I COMMUNITY IN IRAN

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has condemned Iran's continued imprisonment of seven Baha'i community leaders. These individuals appear to have been imprisoned because of their religious beliefs. They should be released unconditionally and reunited with their families as soon as possible.

To quote the *Wall Street Journal*:

According to human-rights organizations including Amnesty International, executions have increased four-fold since [Ahmadinejad] became president in 2005, and Iran now executes more people per capita than any other country in the world. Iran also lifted its moratorium on stoning since [he] became president.

The Baha'i are a peaceful people who live in harmony with other faiths in countries around the world, including Canada. Our government stands four-square with the Baha'i people in their desire to have their rights respected and their freedoms upheld.

* * *

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS WEEK 2010

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, Canadians throughout the country celebrated Small Business Week 2010. The following individuals and businesses in Madawaska-Restigouche were recognized.

In Restigouche: L.C.L. Excavation (2006) Inc., business of the year; Hélène Bernard, community individual; Christine Côté, woman entrepreneur; Corey Jacques, student entrepreneur; Atelier Gérard Beaulieu, innovation award.

In Madawaska: Beaulieu Plumbing & Mechanical Inc., business of the year; Scott Philippe of 3D Innovations, young entrepreneur; Murielle Bourgeois of the Service d'aide à la famille d'Edmundston/Grand-Sault Inc., woman entrepreneur; Marc Francoeur, president of Focus Maintenance Inc., innovation award; Atelier des copains co-op ltée, Bob Connors award; Soucy Brothers Ltd., J.-Aldéric Daigle award; Gérald Dufour of Audiotek, Samuel E. Burpee award.

I congratulate one and all for their ongoing efforts to ensure the success of their business and their community. This is proof of the dynamism of the people of Madawaska—Restigouche. I am proud of them. I hope they will continue their good work.

*Statements by Members**[English]***BIG BROTHERS AND BIG SISTERS OF CORNWALL AND DISTRICT**

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday I had the pleasure of attending the 37th annual banquet and awards night for the Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Cornwall and District. Thirty-seven of Cornwall's finest citizens were recognized for their dedicated service to this great organization. Three special awards were also presented.

Cynthia Seguin received the Big Brother and Big Sister Service Award for her great contribution to the organization.

D'Arcy Grant was awarded Big Brother of the Year, the second year in a row that D'Arcy has been honoured with this award. He was also honoured for serving on the board of directors for 10 years and being a big brother for 15 years.

Cindy Latreille was the recipient of the Big Sister of the Year Award. Cindy has been volunteering with Big Brothers and Big Sisters for more than four years now.

It was an honour to be part of this wonderful evening. I congratulate Cynthia, Cindy, D'Arcy and the other volunteers honoured. I thank president Bill Makinson and executive director Amanda Brisson for including me in this great event.

* * *

*[Translation]***SAINTE-FOY OPTIMIST CLUB**

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am proud today to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Club optimiste de Sainte-Foy. I congratulate its members, who have done a great deal for the entire community over the years.

Since it was founded in 1960, the club has injected over \$1 million into the community. Year after year, the club has helped more than 50,000 young people through its various activities.

I would also like to congratulate Benoît Morin, a founding member of the Club optimiste de Sainte-Foy. Mr. Morin was honoured this weekend for his outstanding volunteer service and his altruism, which have helped make so many achievements possible.

Thank you to the volunteers, to Mr. Morin, and especially to the Club optimiste de Sainte-Foy, which continues to make a difference.

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*[English]***ITALIAN CAMPAIGN**

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this month marks the 66th anniversary of the Italian Campaign. Sixty-six years ago, Canadian troops played a vital role in this bitter and costly conflict, one of the longest and fiercest struggles of World War II. Of the more than 93,000 Canadians who served in this 20-month campaign, nearly 6,000 would lay down their lives.

They fought in Italy's rugged mountains, flooded rivers, and rubble-filled streets. They fought for peace, freedom and justice, the same values our military men and women continue to protect today.

The legacy of our veterans lives on in the brave Canadians who are serving today in Afghanistan and other areas of the world.

We honour this legacy by caring for the World War II veterans who are still with us and those who have come after them. We are committed to providing the care and support that veterans and their families need, where and when they need it.

Lest we forget.

* * *

● (1410)

GLOBAL SIAL D'OR AWARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I congratulate Island Abbey Foods of P.E.I. for its Global SIAL D'or award in Paris, France, the largest food trade show in the world.

Island Abbey Foods' Honibe "Honey Drop" beat out 270 products from 30 countries and was named as best new product for 2010 in the "sweet - grocery" category.

Global SIAL is considered the Oscars of the food world. This was a phenomenal achievement for an Island company. Having previously won the "Country Award - Canada" as the highest scoring Canadian product, Island Abbey Foods and the products they produce are a true representation of hard work and innovation.

Founded five years ago by John Rowe and his wife, Island Abbey Foods has now received the most prestigious award in the food industry. Their product, the "Honey Drop", is the world's first 100% pure dried honey cube. Members should try a little of that Island sweetness.

Congratulations.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance highlighted in the pre-G20 summit in Korea this week, Canada is leading the world in global economic recovery. This year our deficit is lower than projected and the lowest in the industrialized world.

With an economic and fiscal record that is stronger than other industrialized nations, Canada has responded to the recession with the economic action plan, which created jobs and protected families.

Through the economic action plan we have lowered taxes, invested in infrastructure and training, and boosted support for workers and families. Our action plan is working.

Since July 2009, the Canadian economy has created over 420,000 new jobs. However, the economic recovery is still fragile. There are still too many families struggling to make ends meet.

Statements by Members

That is why we will continue to implement the economic action plan to create jobs and to protect Canadian families.

* * *

THE BELLEROPHON

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was with great sadness and pride that I witnessed the decommissioning and final reunion of Canada's oldest Sea Cadet corps, the Bellerophon, chartered on November 25, 1918.

The Bellerophon has a long-standing history of service in the Welland community. It was an outstanding organization that made valuable contributions to the development of many young Canadians, who now epitomize the meaning of good citizenship.

A local organization both innovative and progressive in nature, Bellerophon, under Horace Cox and Ed Mason, introduced young women into the corps in 1919, even though they received no support or recognition from the Navy League.

This is a time of mixed emotions for Alan O'Neill, chair of the decommissioning committee, whose fond memories and long-lasting friendships are no doubt the silver lining to his noble efforts to save the Bellerophon, memories that include the Bellerophon Drum and Bugle Band, which continues to exist as the only Sea Cadet alumni band in Canada. Since its inception in 1993, the band has contributed over \$400,000 to Wellanders.

May the spirit of Bellerophon live on in every shipmate who had the privilege of being part of the oldest Canadian Sea Cadet corps, and may their distinguished history never be forgotten.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in his speech to delegates attending the G20 Seoul pre-summit conference, the Minister of Finance noted that Canada leads the global economic recovery.

Canada leads the recovery because its economic and fiscal situation is stronger than that of most other industrialized countries. Our deficit this year is smaller than anticipated and, in fact, is the lowest in the industrialized world.

Our government responded to the recession by implementing the economic action plan, which created jobs and protected our families. Thanks to this economic action plan, we lowered taxes, invested in infrastructure and training, and increased our support for workers and families.

Since July 2009, the Canadian economy has helped create more than 420,000 new jobs. However, the economic recovery remains fragile, which is why we will continue on with the economic action plan in order to create jobs and protect our families.

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HIGHWAY 175

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on August 22, 2002, the Government of Quebec entered

into a historic agreement with the Government of Canada regarding the twinning of Highway 175 between Quebec City and Saguenay. The announcement clearly stated that the cost of the work would be split 50-50.

Now the Conservative government is renegeing on that agreement and categorically refusing to pay its share of the cost overruns. For no good reason, the Government of Quebec is being stuck with two-thirds of the bill. This represents quite a windfall for the federal government, which, on top of everything, will collect taxes on the last phase of work on Highway 175.

Not only have Quebec and my region been duped, but the hon. members for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean and Jonquière—Alma seem quite comfortable with the situation. I wish they would stop their kowtowing and start defending Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean more vigorously.

* * *

●(1415)

[*English*]

TAXATION

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our low-tax plan has helped create over 420,000 jobs, while experts have said the coalition's high tax plan would kill nearly 400,000 jobs.

Unlike the NDP, we believe in lower taxes and leaving more money in the pockets of hard-working Canadians. That is why, since forming government, we have reduced taxes for families, seniors, small businesses and individuals, lowering the tax bill for the average family by \$3,000.

The NDP leader and his party have voted against Canadian families, opposing every sensible tax cut we have introduced, including cutting the GST to 5% on every purchase Canadians make, including home heating.

The opposition coalition are the group of characters who want to raise taxes and hurt Canadian families. We and Canadians disagree with their job-killing tax and spend approach.

* * *

UNITED NATIONS

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, states around the world celebrate the leadership role played by the United Nations to promote peace, security, global equality and human rights.

Canadians can be justly proud of the pivotal role Canada has played. From the first draft of the landmark Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 to the creation of the UN peacekeeping forces under Lester Pearson, our presence and contribution have embodied the highest ideals that brought the founding states together more than 60 years ago.

A recent poll showed that 70% of Canadians support the UN. Armed conflicts around the world have dropped by 40% since 1992, largely because of the 17 UN peacekeeping missions.

We all know what the UN means to Canadians, but how the UN sees us is equally important. The United Nations is us. All of us in this chamber today affirm, once more and with fervour, our dedication and support for the United Nations and its founding principles.

Vive les Nations Unies.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, I attended a town hall meeting with nurses. They told me that the top priority for Canadian families is help for family caregivers, but the government is not listening.

Why is this government lowering corporate taxes instead of helping Canadian families and nurses?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government understands the huge priority Canadian families put on taking care of their loved ones when they get old and when they get sick. That is why our government has made an unprecedented commitment to health care, committing a 30% increase and delivering on that in just five short years.

There was another way done by a previous government that cut health care by \$25 billion. I know how passionately the Liberal member for Toronto Centre spoke out against those cuts. I completely agree with him.

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as usual, the Conservatives are rewriting the historical record. The \$40 billion put in by the previous Martin government deserves to be remembered. The Conservatives are still spending it.

The nurses at the town hall on Friday were not very interested in corporate tax cuts. They could not care less about stealth fighter jets or superprisons. They want help for Canadian families. They will get it from the Liberal Party of Canada.

Why are they not getting any help from the Conservative Party?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has constantly reached out to doctors, to nurses, to those providing treatment for cancer, to those providing home care, to those providing prescription drug coverage, to those who cannot afford it, and we have done so respecting provincial jurisdiction by increasing transfers to the provinces and territories by some 30% in five short years. This government has provided unprecedented support for health care.

We are very proud of that. We are committed to continuing that in the years to come.

• (1420)

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal-provincial health accords will come up for negotiation in the next couple of years, and the question that will

Oral Questions

have to be faced is: Who do we trust? Do we trust a party whose priorities are stealth fighters, superprisons and corporate tax cuts, or a party whose commitment over 50 years is unquestioned and wants to help that middle class family with home care?

Why has the government got so out of touch with the priorities of ordinary Canadian families?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Canadians have to look at who they can trust, they will look at this government's record with great admiration. They see our commitment to front-line health care in every corner of this country.

Maybe the Leader of the Opposition should look back at history. There were years when he was not in Canada when previous Liberal governments cut back health care by \$25 billion. That had a devastating effect on health care and health care delivery right across this country. That is something our Prime Minister would never do.

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PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in September 2007, one week before it closed, the request for proposals for renovation of the West Block north tower was amended and the qualifications needed to bid were dramatically downgraded. Experts in the construction industry have said this would have benefited only one bidder, LM Sauvé.

Who in the minister's office approved this amendment? Why were experienced contractors not required on a building as valuable and historic as the West Block?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has contracting laws, policies and regulations in place. Public servants are responsible for and manage this entire process, including the contract award.

As I have said repeatedly, if there is any wrongdoing with individuals or contractors, they will face prosecution to the full extent of the law, including under the Federal Accountability Act, and taxpayer money will be recouped.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I specifically addressed the issue of the West Block North Tower in the House on December 8, 2009, 11 months ago. The minister responsible at the time, who is now the Minister of Natural Resources, said that the opposition was “searching for Elvis in the department” and that “the process used was fair, open and transparent”.

Now that the police are investigating, does the minister still believe that the processes were fair and transparent?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the Government of Canada has contracting laws, regulations and policies in place, which must be followed by everyone. Public servants are responsible for and manage this entire process including the contract award. If the member does have further questions, they can be directed to the public servants who will be in front of the committee tomorrow to answer on the substance of this matter.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while being interviewed by the media a few days ago, the Minister of Natural Resources made some contradictory statements. He repeated that he had done nothing wrong by attending his party's famous fundraising cocktail party in Bourassa, which was also attended by a number of contractors who were awarded Parliament Hill renovation contracts.

If it was all right to attend, why did the Minister of Natural Resources state, in the same interview, that if he had to do it again, he would not attend? It is rather confusing, to say the least. What should we make of it? Can he explain these contradictory statements?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after years of Liberal scandals and the sponsorship affair, it was our government that, as a first step, adopted the Federal Accountability Act, the toughest anti-corruption law in the history of Canada. It is absolutely ridiculous to believe that a donation of a few hundred dollars could lead to political interference or could have resulted in the awarding of a government contract. That is absolutely ridiculous.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the ridiculous thing is to say that there was nothing wrong with attending the cocktail party, but if he had to do it again, he would not. We are trying to understand but it is difficult. There is something else I would like to know. The Minister of Natural Resources said that public servants should testify in order to clear up the matter. Yet, ministers repeatedly continue to claim responsibility for their departments.

Therefore, I will ask the minister the question. Will he appear before the committee himself to answer questions?

•(1425)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is very clear is that the minister answers questions and will continue to do so. It is also important to highlight the fact that all his department's officials were prepared to appear before the committee and that the Bloc can ask real questions to determine whether there was political interference in awarding these contracts. The real answer is absolutely not.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one week before the Conservative government put together the short list of contractors qualified to restore the West Block, the selection criteria were modified. Without this last-minute modification, LM Sauvé, a company that paid \$140,000 to a Conservative lobbyist, would never have obtained the contract.

How does the government explain this last-minute modification, which enabled a contractor, recommended by a Conservative activist, to obtain a generous \$9 million contract?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has contracting laws in place and regulations, and we expect that all individuals and contractors follow those. Public servants are responsible for and manage the entire process, in this case including the contract award. If there is any wrongdoing by any individuals or contractors, they will face prosecution to the full extent of the law including under the Federal Accountability Act, and we expect that taxpayer money will be recouped.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this situation reeks of favouritism. The selection criteria were modified to favour a construction company. This company obtained the contract with the help of a Conservative lobbyist. It organized a cocktail fundraiser and the Conservatives' lieutenant was there to pass the hat.

How can the Prime Minister turn a blind eye to this system in which money from government contracts ends up in his own party's campaign coffers?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have contracting laws, regulations and policies that are in place for the Government of Canada. Public servants are expected to adhere to those, and public servants are responsible and manage the entire process, in this case including the award of this contract. If there is any wrongdoing by individuals or contractors, they will face prosecution to the full extent of the law including under the Federal Accountability Act, and we expect that taxpayer money will be recouped.

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TAXATION

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another cold winter is coming and times are tight. The Conservatives have decided to hit Canadians where it hurts the most by imposing the HST on home heating. This country is struggling to emerge from the recession. The last thing Canadians want to see is higher home heating bills. That is why the NDP leader has proposed something to make life more affordable for Canadians.

Will the government agree to implement this practical plan and take the federal sales tax off home heating?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is our government that has a plan to create jobs across Canada. That plan is all based on low taxes.

Oral Questions

We have seen the benefit of those low taxes over the last four and a half years, the creation of some 400,000 jobs in the last 16 months. That is good news for Canadian families.

The difference between us and the NDP members is we actually believe cutting taxes is a good thing and they and their coalition partners absolutely believe that taxes are not high enough and they are going to take a bigger bite out of the family budget. We think that is wrong.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, please note that the member directly avoids the issue of the HST. The fact is families are already feeling squeezed and soaring home heating costs can only mean that things will get worse for them.

What kind of Canadian leader does not get that? Why are the Conservatives giving more tax breaks to the big polluters, while getting rid of programs to help people retrofit their homes? Why will they not choose to help ordinary Canadians by reinstating the eco-energy program instead of hiking the sales tax on home heating?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when our government was elected, one of the first orders of business that we brought before the House was a plan for Canadian families to cut their consumption taxes, not just on home heating fuel but on everything in their family budget. We brought that plan before Parliament and the first people to stand and criticize it, the first people to vote against it were the NDP members and their coalition partners.

The average Canadian family now has about \$3,000 extra per year in their pocket because of the actions of this government. That is something of which we can be very proud.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Conservative members voted to increase the tax by 8% in Ontario. The reality is that heating costs will increase. The reality is that people will be struggling this winter.

Why would the government increase the cost of living right in the middle of a recession? When will the Conservatives give Canadians a break this winter, starting by eliminating the heating tax?

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague across the way for raising, once again, another provincial issue. However, I remind the hon. member that Canadians actually have more opportunity because they have more dollars in their pockets. When this government took office, we decided we were going to cut taxes. We cut over 100 taxes. The GST cut saves every Canadian money and they choose to spend that as they wish.

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PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the facts about the West Block renovation are being revealed despite the government's stonewalling. It is quite a shocking tale of political interference in awarding contracts, unregistered lobbying, \$140,000

payoffs, questionable Conservative fundraisers and at least one RCMP investigation.

When did the Minister of Natural Resources, the former public works minister, first learn about this mess and what steps did he take to clean it up?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said repeatedly, the Government of Canada has contracting guidelines. We have laws and policies that must be followed and public servants are responsible for and manage this entire process, including the awarding of this contract.

If there is any wrongdoing found with individuals or contractors, they will face prosecution to the full extent of the law, including under the Federal Accountability Act, and we expect taxpayer money will be recouped.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government needs to tell Canadian taxpayers the truth. Who changed the requirements of the \$9 million contract awarded to LM Sauvé? How did a company that was clearly not qualified make the short list?

This is about one of Canada's national treasures. Will the government admit its political interference in these contracts has made a scandal of the West Block renovations?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said repeatedly, the Government of Canada has contracting laws, policies and regulations that public servants are responsible for and that they manage, including the awarding of contracts. If there are any wrongdoings found with any individuals or contractors, they will face prosecution to the full extent of the law, including under the Federal Accountability Act, and taxpayer money will be recouped.

I encourage the hon. member tomorrow that if he has any further questions to direct them to the public servants at committee.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources and the Conservatives' Quebec lieutenant now regrets having participated in a fundraising cocktail party for the Conservative riding association in Bourassa at the Da Enrico restaurant in January 2009.

We know that he has changed his version of the story three times since the beginning. On Friday, Paul Sauvé added to it by stating that they discussed construction almost exclusively at the party.

Can the minister confirm that he told Mr. Broccolini and others attendees to call his office, and not civil servants, for information?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have mentioned before, a fairness monitor oversaw these acquisitions and has tabled reports, which are now available online. In her summary report, the fairness monitor says:

—decisions [were] made objectively, free from personal favouritism and political influence, and encompasses the elements of openness, competitiveness, transparency and compliance.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems that one of the criticisms coming from certain entrepreneurs is that the bidding process was tampered with.

In the case of Mr. Sauvé, for example, the criteria were changed one week before the decision was made so that he could win the contract.

We are now learning that the contract won by Multivesco was not planned and that the fight should have been over the two contracts that were awarded to Mr. Broccolini.

Was the former public works minister, now the Minister of Natural Resources, aware of this third contract while he was speaking with Mr. Broccolini at the cocktail party? When did he approve this measure that no one was expecting? Who was he trying to please?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a fairness monitor oversaw these acquisitions and tabled her reports, which are now available online. I encourage the member to read them. She said:

—decisions [were] made objectively, free from personal favouritism and political influence, and encompasses the elements of openness, competitiveness, transparency and compliance.

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*[Translation]***OMAR KHADR**

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after eight long years in Guantanamo, Omar Khadr finally had to plead guilty. Had the government done its job, this young Canadian would never have been tried by an American military tribunal.

Will the government finally acknowledge that Canada has signed the child soldier treaty, and that the treaty should have applied to Khadr, who was young at the time of the incident?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Khadr pled guilty to murder in violation of the laws of war, attempted murder in violation of the laws of war, conspiracy, providing material support to terrorists and spying. According to the media, Mr. Khadr also confessed to being a member of al-Qaeda, to having placed roadside bombs, and to having knowingly attacked civilians. This matter is between Mr. Khadr and the Government of the United States.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to date, Canada has failed to fulfill its obligations under the child soldier treaty by refusing to demand that Omar Khadr be repatriated.

Now that young Mr. Khadr has pled guilty before a military tribunal, will the Canadian government at least demand that he be repatriated?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has the floor. We cannot hear him.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out to the members, this matter is between Mr. Khadr's lawyers and those of the U.S. government.

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CONTAMINATED WATER IN SHANNON

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an INRS study commissioned by the Department of National Defence has confirmed that the water in Shannon has been contaminated with TCE by the federal government since 1978.

Since it has been proven that contaminants used by DND have been found in municipal wells in Shannon, does the government intend to acknowledge its responsibility and compensate the victims accordingly?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, this government, as previous governments, has been engaged in this file for some time. There have been millions of dollars paid to the municipality of Shannon. We continue to be seized with this issue, but it is now a matter before the courts. Thus, it would be inappropriate to comment further.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, worse still, Robert Chapuis, a scientist with the École Polytechnique, believes that the speed with which contaminants can move through the groundwater has been underestimated, to such a degree that the residents of Shannon could have been exposed to the TCE used by DND as early as the 1940s. This long-term, constant exposure could explain the high cancer rates in Shannon.

Will the government stop playing cat and mouse, put the cards on the table and release all of the documentation it has on the contamination of Shannon's wells?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member would know, many of those same documents would form part of the court case in the ongoing litigation.

With respect to this government and previous governments, the matter is being taken seriously. How else could one justify having spent tens of millions of dollars with respect to the compensation of people in the municipality of Shannon?

In that regard, this government takes this matter very seriously and continues to engage. However, this matter is before the courts and I therefore can comment no further.

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OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have failed when it comes to protecting whistleblowers.

Here are the facts. The integrity commissioner has abruptly retired. Almost the entire staff of the office has quit in the last three years. The Public Service Tribunal is not functioning. One hundred and seventy people were brave enough to come forward to disclose wrongdoing, yet all were brushed aside. Thirty-nine months, some \$20 million and still there is no progress.

When will the Conservative government get serious about accountability? When can whistleblowers expect protection with a new commissioner?

• (1440)

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was this government that brought in significant protection for public service employees who previously, under the Liberal government, lived in fear of reprisals for the issues they were raising, especially with the sponsorship scandal.

Right now the Auditor General is looking into the concerns and the complaints that have been brought forward. The office of the commissioner, its staff and the mandate that it has is fully engaged, is there to protect those who are concerned and want to bring forward concerns. They will continue to do that. We have confidence in that. We also will be waiting for the report from the Auditor General.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that whistleblowers brought forward 170 cases of wrongdoing, and all of them have been brushed aside. The process is not working and, as a result, public servants remain unprotected.

“When a government starts trying to cancel dissent or avoid dissent is frankly when it's rapidly losing its moral authority to govern”. Who said that? It was the current Prime Minister.

When will the Prime Minister start living up to his own words?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to the absolute travesty of justice or lack of justice that was occurring under the previous Liberal government, we brought in a number of provisions to protect public servants.

That protection continues under this office. It has the mandate, the legislation and the people. The Auditor General is looking into this. The leadership of the office has now been assumed by the deputy commissioner, Mr. Joe Friday, as we announced on Friday.

Oral Questions

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are still in the dark about the secret deal struck between the Prime Minister and Nigel Wright.

In less than two weeks, Mr. Wright will have access to the most commercial secret material in Canada. He is on loan from Onex, a company doing business with almost a dozen federal governments. Ethics will require that Nigel Wright not work with any company that does business with the federal government for one year following his employment in the PMO.

Therefore, what is it going to be: a year off cooling period for Nigel Wright or Onex does no business with the federal government for at least 12 months?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to inform the member for Don Valley East that the Prime Minister and Mr. Wright have no secret deal.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not about Mr. Wright's resumé; this is about the Prime Minister's judgment. Conservative MPs at the ethics committee have been ordered to block a motion demanding the release of the secret terms of Nigel Wright's employment.

Why are the Conservatives so scared of releasing the terms of this secret deal? What do they have to hide?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that Mr. Wright may have the opportunity to discuss these issues when he is before a parliamentary committee.

It is so amazing that such a talented Canadian is willing to put aside a lucrative career and come to Canada's national capital to make a contribution to public life. This is something that all Canadians should celebrate.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Canada prepares once again to thank our veterans and active military at nationwide Remembrance Day ceremonies, I understand our Minister of State for Transport was out this morning to communicate the meaning of remembrance to Canadians and to inspire them to reflect on the sacrifices of our brave veterans and soldiers.

Would the Minister of State for Transport please tell the House about the newest circulation coin which was unveiled today?

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this gives me an opportunity, as minister in charge of the Mint, to remind people how thankful and honoured I was this morning to unveil the 25¢ poppy coin. This coin will be a pointed reminder of the thanks that we owe our service men and women for defending our Canadian values.

Furthermore, the Mint has created a Remembrance Day collector card and all of the proceeds from the sale of these cards will go directly to support our military families.

Oral Questions

As we approach the Day of Remembrance, I know that Canadians thank our veterans and our service people for their sacrifice.

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• (1445)

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nobody should be able to buy a government contract in this country but yet, days before the closing of the West Block contract, Public Works amended the tender to give special favour to one rinky-dink contractor who, by some happy coincidence, gave \$140,000 to a well-connected Conservative lobbyist. Now the current government seems open for business but only if one pays to play.

Who specifically ordered the West Block renovation contract to be rigged in favour of Sauvé construction and what Conservative minister ordered him or her to do so?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the Government of Canada has contracting laws, regulations and policies that must be followed. Public servants are responsible for and manage this entire process, including the contract award. If any wrongdoing is found with individuals or contractors, they will face prosecution to the full extent of the law, including under the Federal Accountability Act, and we will expect that taxpayer money will be recouped.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they changed the criteria to allow an ineligible company, which has since gone bankrupt, to obtain a huge contract, but no one is responsible. They appointed their campaign manager to the board that supervises government contracts, but that was a coincidence. All of the contractors doing business with them are involved in fundraising activities, but that has nothing to do with it.

When will the minister stop taking us for fools and acknowledge his responsibility?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has laws, regulations and policies in place governing all contracting and public servants are responsible for and manage this entire process, including the award of this contract. If any wrongdoing with individuals or contractors are found, they will face prosecution to the full extent of the law, including under the Federal Accountability Act, and we expect that taxpayer money will be recouped.

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[Translation]

GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a Quebec coalition led by the FTQ is calling for improvement to the guaranteed income supplement in order to provide immediate help to our least fortunate seniors. The president of the Fédération des femmes du Québec points out that many women work in unstable

jobs without a pension plan and that improving the GIS would help them directly.

Will the government finally decide to improve the monthly guaranteed income supplement benefits?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is something we did in the budget a few years ago. The hon. member may not have noticed, but we have done a number of things to help seniors.

In fact, we have increased the GIS credit from \$500 to \$3,500. That was to help seniors, especially those living in conditions like those described by the hon. member. He should have supported that measure.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister's response rings hollow because more than 40,000 seniors in Quebec are still not getting the guaranteed income supplement even though they are entitled to it.

The Conservative government should be ashamed of robbing 40,000 seniors of these last-resort benefits.

What is the government waiting for to automatically register seniors for the guaranteed income supplement?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are the ones who want to help seniors living in poverty. That is why we have made it much easier to register for GIS benefits. For example, when people turn 65, they need to apply only once and as long as they file a tax return every year, their claim will automatically be assessed. That is something we are very proud of.

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[English]

POTASH INDUSTRY

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has long been infatuated with the former right-wing leader of Australia, John Howard, even going so far as to plagiarize his speeches. Through family, business and politics, Mr. Howard is linked to BHP Billiton, the foreign company that is trying to take over the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan.

Last week, the Prime Minister gave PotashCorp the back of his hand, clearly showing bias in Canada's foreign investment review process. Is that because he is doing the bidding of his old friend, John Howard?

• (1450)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought it was beneath the hon. member to make unsubstantiated, ridiculous, false allegations against our Prime Minister. However, the hon. member has shown once again that he is perfectly willing to scrape the bottom of the barrel.

Oral Questions

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister dismisses potash as not all that important and not strategic. However, when one transaction shifts an entire Canadian industry into the hands of a single foreign buyer, when that industry is potash, vital to food production worldwide for generations to come, when 53% of the world's reserves are in Saskatchewan and they are about to be controlled forever from outside of Canada, and when it is the biggest resource sell-off in history with nothing of significance left in Canadian hands thereafter, why is that not considered strategic by the government?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will make our determination based on the net benefit to Canada test, which is found in the Investment Canada Act. I take the hon. member's suggestion seriously, although I would note for the House that he was part of a government that never said no to anybody.

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AGRICULTURE

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we are joined on Parliament Hill by farmers from the northern Alberta Peace region. They are here to ask why they are being denied federal aid to help them weather a 12-year drought.

While increased assistance was provided to farmers in the south hit by flooding, the government continues to ignore the pleas of Alberta's northern producers.

With the pittance offered in federal relief, farmers are forced to sell their herds and their lands to corporate enterprises.

When will the minister commit to provide this sorely needed assistance?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a great record of working with farmers across this great country, regardless of what they are up against, whether it is market variations or the weather itself. Certainly discussions are ongoing with the Province of Alberta, our partner in this particular enterprise, and those assessments are under way.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the minister is aware, the relief program is based on the last few years of farm income. These farmers have suffered huge losses in the past three years because of drought. The truth is that they are getting no relief. Worse hit are our struggling young farmers.

If the government truly values the contribution made by our family farms to the Canadian economy, will the minister finally give these producers the help they so desperately need and deserve?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these farmers are well aware of this government's record in helping them in whatever their situation is, dire or otherwise.

What they are really concerned about is that particular party and its constant voting no against money that would flow to new programming ideas. What that party wants to do is go back to the future. No one in Canada wants to live on old MacDonald's farm

anymore, especially this government. We want to see people move ahead.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in these volatile economic times, our Conservative government is squarely focused on protecting and promoting the Canadian economy. Whether it be by opening new markets for our exporters through new free trade agreements or attracting new investment with our very low tax rates, we are committed to creating jobs and growing the economy.

The Minister of Finance was in Korea this past weekend standing up for Canadians from all corners. Would the parliamentary secretary inform the House on the minister's actions at this pre-G20 meeting?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again today, we hear the opposition coalition talking down Canada's economy while the finance minister is promoting Canada's strong economy throughout the world. He is working with the G20 finance ministers to help secure the global economic recovery. He is telling the world that Canada is projected to lead the G7 in growth in 2010 and 2011. He is telling the world that we are lowering taxes for Canadians.

While the opposition coalition continues to talk down the economy, our government is standing up for Canada.

* * *

● (1455)

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada was nowhere to be seen at the Sommet de la Francophonie, and in deciding to remove five of the poorest countries in Africa from CIDA's priority list for international aid, the Conservative government abandoned some member states of La Francophonie.

How could the Prime Minister have the nerve to appear before these countries, considering the fact that he did not fulfill his responsibilities to the poorest countries in the world?

[English]

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently the member has missed what we have actually ended up doing. We were the first G8 country to double our aid to Africa. We doubled our aid to Africa before we were required to and before any other G7 nation. We are now at \$2.1 billion. On top of that, at the conference the Prime Minister came up with some new money again for the African nations because we recognize that they do require our support.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on October 13, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans finally announced new measures to help lobster fishers weather the effects of plummeting market prices. While this announcement is a good first step for the fishers in the Magdalen Islands, it ignores the fishers in the Gaspé who have also made efforts to conserve this resource.

Will the government modify the program's criteria so that it helps all the fishers affected by plummeting lobster prices?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the long-term sustainability of the lobster industry has been a focus of our government and we are well on our way to achieving that goal. We have announced \$10 million over the last year in marketing moneys, over \$8 million in short-term support and, in addition, over \$50 million to the long-term program. All areas of the lobster fishery are eligible for funding.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Omar Khadr's circumstances have little to do with guilt or innocence and everything to do with politics.

Under the terms of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Omar Khadr was a child combatant. The Conservative government's refusal to repatriate him has been an unqualified international embarrassment and now, at the last minute, Khadr has accepted a plea deal to save himself from a life sentence in Leavenworth Prison.

What steps has the government undertaken with the American government to bring that Canadian home?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Khadr pleaded guilty to murder in violation of the laws of war, attempted murder in violation of the laws of war, as well as providing material support for terrorism and spying, as well as conspiracy. The media are reporting that Mr. Khadr also publicly acknowledged that he was a member of al-Qaeda, that he planted roadside bombs and that he knew he was attacking civilians.

The matter is between the U.S. government and Mr. Khadr's lawyers and we have no further comment.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were profoundly shocked at the revelation that veteran Sean Bruyey had his information shared inappropriately by bureaucrats at Veterans Affairs Canada.

Would the Minister of Veterans Affairs tell the House what steps are being taken to address this profoundly serious issue?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I have

offered our government's sincere regrets to Mr. Bruyey and anyone who may have gone through the same situation.

I wish to report that the Government of Canada is immediately undertaking an expedited mediation procedure in this case. As I said, we will be co-operating with regard to the in-depth audit being conducted by the Privacy Commissioner and we will take action and follow up on the results and recommendations.

Meanwhile, I have already taken measures and actions to ensure that the privacy of veterans is protected.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Prime Minister has made a number of diplomatic blunders on the international scene. First came the humiliating loss of the UN Security Council seat, then the government was nowhere to be seen at the Sommet de la Francophonie.

When will the Prime Minister take on a leadership role on the international scene, and when will he start behaving like the representative of such a major player as Canada?

● (1500)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, Canada's leadership on the international scene has been outstanding. Moments ago, my hon. colleague booed Canada's role abroad. She seems to have forgotten what this government did for the people of Haiti. She seems to have forgotten even though these people are close to home for her. This government has been strong and has shown leadership. It has done much more in that area than the previous government, and we are proud of that.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Finance is scraping the bottom of the barrel, the government is missing out on billions of dollars in unpaid taxes because of its own turpitude. It is all well and good to try to recover the money hidden in Switzerland by white collar criminals, but charges also need to be brought against them, so their crimes do not go unpunished. If pinching is stealing, then hiding is defrauding.

Can the minister guarantee us that all those who use foreign bank accounts to evade taxes will be criminally prosecuted?

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of National Revenue, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking very aggressive action to crack down on any moneys being hidden in offshore bank accounts. Just last year, over \$1 billion was uncovered in unpaid taxes, nearly 10 times the amount that was uncovered in the last year the Liberals were in power.

In terms of the penalties, I can say that fines, penalties, interest and jail time are all part of the package.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after the softwood lumber sell-out, the shipbuilding sellout and other sellouts, the government is now throwing everything on the table in a desperate act to sign the worst possible trade deal with one of the best possible partners, the European Community.

Why will the minister not reveal to Parliament the specific costs and negative impacts of this deal now, on government procurement policy, on Canada's supply management sector, on the lives of Canadian farmers and on concessions to big pharma, to name but a few?

Will the minister come clean now and reveal these costs and impacts, and end the secrecy so Canadians can know what is at stake?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, the hon. member knows the answer before I give it. In this time of economic uncertainty, our government is working to open new doors for Canadian businesses and help create jobs.

The economic agreement with the European Union has the potential to generate a \$12 billion boost to our economy and increase bilateral trade by over 20%.

We will continue to work closely with all of our partners, including the provinces and the territories, and we are pleased to have found a way to involve them in this negotiation.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to clarify the record.

In response to a question from the Bloc member from Quebec, I referred to compensating the people of Quebec. I should have used the word "assist", as the support actually went to the municipality as opposed to directly to people. This is the matter of a court case, so I wanted to clarify the record.

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 19th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on Chapter 5, "Acquiring Military Vehicles for Use in Afghanistan" of the fall 2009 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the 19th report.

● (1505)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in relation to Bill C-473, An Act to protect insignia of military orders, decorations and medals of cultural significance for future generations.

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

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

In accordance with the order of reference of Monday, October 4, 2010, the committee has considered Bill C-22, An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service and agreed on Thursday, October 21, to report it with amendment.

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates in relation to the request for a 30-day extension on Bill C-429, An Act to amend the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act (use of wood).

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(3)(a), a motion to concur in the report is deemed moved, the question deemed put and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until Wednesday, October 27, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

* * *

HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS ACT

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-584, An Act to amend the Hazardous Products Act (plastic bags).

Routine Proceedings

She said: Mr. Speaker, today it is my privilege to table a bill that is the product of a contest, “Create Your Canada”, that I sponsored to engage our young people in the political process. I want to thank all those who entered. I also want to thank the five judges from across our community and to VIA Rail for providing transportation to Ottawa for the students.

This bill would ban single use, non-biodegradable plastic bags in Canada. The authors of this private member's bill, students Hannah DeBoer and Miranda Van Rooyen, have joined me today in the House of Commons.

Research done by these students revealed that single use plastic bags harm or kill 100 million sea animals annually, use up non-renewable petroleum resources and clog our landfill sites. Less than 1% of the 55 million single use bags distributed in Canada every week are recycled.

These students believe that Canada needs a law to prevent the harm caused by single use plastic bags. I would sincerely hope that the members of this House and the community will listen and make the effort to hear and respectfully consider ideas from young Canadians.

I am very proud of Hannah and Miranda. They have decided to be active participants in our political process. They are not only the leaders of tomorrow but the leaders of today.

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

* * *

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-585, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (CPP payments).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to introduce this bill on behalf of all Canadian seniors who are receiving the guaranteed income supplement.

As I have mentioned in this House before, when seniors receive a cost of living increase in their CPP, part of that increase is often clawed back from their GIS in the following year. In fact, each July my constituency office in Hamilton Mountain is flooded with calls from seniors who do not understand why they are getting less money in July than they were receiving from January to June.

Clawing back pension increases makes a mockery of the very purpose of cost of living adjustments, which is to keep pace with inflation. My bill will end that practice by ensuring that the GIS can no longer be reduced when the only increase to someone's income is a CPP cost of living adjustment.

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

* * *

● (1510)

PETITIONS

PASSPORT FEES

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition that calls upon the Canadian government to negotiate with the United States government to reduce the U.S. and

Canadian passport fees. The number of American tourists visiting Canada is now at its lowest level since 1972. It has fallen by five million in the last seven years, from 16 million visitors in 2002 to only 11 million in 2009.

Passport fees for multiple-member families are a significant barrier to traditional cross-border family vacations, and the cost of passports for an American family of four can be over \$500 U.S. While more than half of Canadians have passports, only a quarter of Americans have passports.

At the recent Midwestern Legislative Conference of the Council of State Governments, attended by myself and more than 500 elected representatives from 11 border states and 3 provinces, a resolution was passed unanimously and reads as follows:

RESOLVED that [the] Conference calls on President Barack Obama and [the Canadian] Prime Minister...to immediately examine a reduced fee for passports to facilitate cross-border tourism; and be it further

RESOLVED, that [the Conference] encourage[s] the governments to examine the idea of a limited time two-for-one passport renewal or new application;

To be a fair process, passport fees must be reduced on both sides of the border. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the government to work with the American government to examine a mutual reduction in passport fees to facilitate tourism and, finally, promote a time limited two-for-one passport renewal or new application fee on a mutual basis with the United States.

INTERNATIONAL PLANNED PARENTHOOD FEDERATION

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here from members in my riding calling upon the Government of Canada to stop all funding of the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

It is said that the establishment has abortion as an international human right and that the Planned Parenthood Federation lobbies aggressively to impose permissive abortion laws on developing nations.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also have another petition from the residents in my constituency, petitioning the House of Commons to amend the animal transport regulations under Canada's Health of Animals Act, to be consistent with the findings of the EU Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare, to reduce transport times for pigs, poultry, horses, calves and lambs to eight hours, and to twelve hours for cattle, sheep and goats, and to ensure adequate enforcement of the regulations.

They ask that these amendments be passed quickly.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again I rise to present a petition that has been signed by many people in my riding around the areas of Twillingate Island, New World Island and Fogo Island, primarily working in the processing fish plants of Notre Dame Seafoods as well as the Fogo Island Co-op. What they would like is for substantial EI reforms, to bring respect back to seasonal work.

We went through the process of having these pilot projects, which gave a lot of credence to seasonal work. One of those was the best 14 weeks option. The current government decided to extend them for only a few months, up until June, and therefore they will collapse. What these people are asking is that this program be made permanent, as it is an essential part of the program because, without it, it is a disincentive to work.

Therefore the plant workers, as well as the employers, are asking for these programs to be made permanent, and I humbly submit this petition on their behalf.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present this petition on behalf of constituents from a variety of communities across the country.

The petition is in support of Bill C-544. It calls upon the House of Commons to bring forward and put into legislation this bill, an act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act, thus prohibiting the importation or exportation of horses for slaughter for human consumption, as well as horsemeat products for human consumption.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present a petition signed by people from New Brunswick, Ontario and British Columbia.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament to enable prosecution of those who encourage or counsel someone to commit suicide, by updating the Canadian Criminal Code to reflect the new realities of 21st century broadband access, and also to fund education programs that will empower people who experience depression and mental illness and Canada's vulnerable youth to protect themselves from online predators and find appropriate community support resources.

Speaker's Ruling

● (1515)

SEEDS REGULATIONS

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by a number of people from the Kitchener-Waterloo area, calling on Parliament to enshrine in legislation Bill C-474, an act respecting the seed regulations.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today. The first one is from over 200 residents of the Okanagan area of my province.

These residents are concerned about genetically modified or engineered seeds. They are saying that the contamination from GE crops can result in economic hardship for farmers as a loss to uncertain markets and lower prices and new costs for testing and cleanup. Of course, they cite the example of flax this year.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to enshrine in legislation Bill C-474, an act to amend the seed regulations to require that an analysis of potential harm to export markets be conducted before the sale of any new genetically engineered seed is permitted.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is in support of Bill C-544.

The petitioners are saying that because horses are ordinarily kept and treated as sport and companion animals, are not raised primarily as food-producing animals, and are administered drugs that are strictly prohibited from being used at any time in all other food-producing animals destined for human supply, they are calling on the House of Commons and Parliament to bring forward and adopt into legislation Bill C-544, an act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act, thus prohibiting the importation or exportation of horses for slaughter for human consumption, as well as horsemeat products for human consumption.

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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.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-442—ADMISSIBILITY OF AMENDMENTS MADE AT COMMITTEE—
SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence on October 20, 2010, concerning amendments contained in the third report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities on Bill C-442, An Act to establish a National Holocaust Monument, presented in the House on June 9, 2010.

*Speaker's Ruling**[Translation]*

I would like to thank the member for Eglinton—Lawrence for having raised this important matter. I would also like to thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the hon. member for Mississauga South for their contributions.

[English]

In raising his point of order, the member for Eglinton—Lawrence noted that the bill had been adopted by the House unanimously at second reading on March 3, 2010 and reported from the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities on June 9, 2010. The member for Eglinton—Lawrence drew to the attention of the Speaker three of the amendments contained in that report. He pointed out that the chair of the transport, infrastructure and communities committee had ruled all three of these amendments inadmissible, judging them to be beyond the scope of the bill as approved by the House at second reading. Each of these rulings was appealed and overturned in the committee by a majority vote, as is reflected in the minutes of proceedings of the committee at a meeting held on June 3, 2010.

Let me briefly remind the House of the nature of the amendments that are in dispute. The first amendment, to clause 2 of the bill, provides the minister with the authority to require that the National Holocaust Monument Development Council constitute itself as a legal entity.

[Translation]

The second amendment, to clause 7, provides that the council's role in raising funds for the construction of the national Holocaust monument be expanded to include fundraising for maintaining the monument and for the council's own costs. I should note here that, as provided for in clause 5 of Bill C-442, the council members are unpaid and must apply for their positions.

The third amendment, to clause 8, allows the minister to delegate his responsibilities for overseeing the planning and design of the monument, for consulting the public concerning the design and site of the monument and for the construction and maintenance of the monument to the council.

● (1520)

[English]

In his comments on the point of order, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader contended that the amendments in question were consistent with the principle of the bill as well as within its scope. In his view, the amendment to clause 2 served only to clarify the definition and did not constitute a substantive amendment.

He argued that the amendment to clause 7 was similarly best regarded as a clarification of the source of funding for expenses entailed by the bill. He noted that the member for Eglinton—Lawrence had himself introduced an amendment to the effect that the minister's responsibility included both the construction and the maintenance of the monument and that this amendment was not found to contain any procedural defect.

[Translation]

With respect to the amendment to clause 8, the parliamentary secretary went on to state that it served to elaborate on concepts already contained in Bill C-442 and did not attempt to introduce a new concept. On the contrary, he contended that since clause 8 followed immediately upon those clauses which set out the minister's responsibilities, it was completely appropriate to deal with the delegation of those responsibilities in clause 8.

[English]

In summary, the parliamentary secretary argued that the three disputed amendments were matters of clarification and elaboration, that they were within the scope of the bill and that they were therefore entirely acceptable from a procedural point of view.

[Translation]

In his remarks, the member for Mississauga South reviewed the procedural principles on which the Speaker should base his ruling. He pointed out certain differences between the bill as introduced and as reported from the standing committee and supported the position of the member for Eglinton—Lawrence that the amendments objected to were inadmissible.

[English]

As hon. members will agree and as has been frequently pointed out in the past, the Speaker's responsibility is clear in cases concerning procedural irregularities in a committee's consideration of a bill. As Mr. Speaker Fraser stated in a ruling in reference to amendments adopted by a committee after the committee chair's rulings on the amendments were overturned, in the Debates on April 28, 1992, at page 9801:

[Translation]

In cases in which the Chair is asked to rule on the admissibility of committee amendments to bills, any modifications which offend a basic principle in the legislative process are struck from the bill.

[English]

With reference to the three amendments contested by the member for Eglinton—Lawrence, I have examined the third report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities carefully, as well as Bill C-442 both in its first reading version and in the reprint containing the committee's amendments. I have also consulted the minutes of the proceedings of the committee related to its clause-by-clause consideration of the bill.

[Translation]

Bill C-442, as stated in the summary to the bill, "requires the Minister responsible for the National Capital Act to establish and work in cooperation with a National Holocaust Monument Development Council to design and build a National Holocaust Monument to be located in the National Capital Region".

[English]

The amendment to clause 2 of the bill empowers the minister to require the council to "form a legal entity", by amending the definition of Council contained in the bill. In committee, it was ruled inadmissible on the basis that it constitutes a substantive amendment to the bill by way of a modification of the interpretation clause.

Government Orders

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Second Edition, at page 769, states:

The interpretation clause of a bill is not the place to propose a substantive amendment to a bill. In addition, an amendment to the interpretation clause of a bill that was referred to a committee *after* second reading must always relate to the bill and may neither exceed the scope of nor be contrary to the principle of the bill.

I can see nothing in the bill as amended by the committee which requires that such a power be provided to the minister. It appears to me to be a new concept and on that basis to constitute a substantive amendment to the interpretation clause of Bill C-442.

[*Translation*]

Clause 7 of the bill originally required the council to spearhead a fundraising campaign for the sole purpose of funding the construction of the monument. The amendment added the additional purposes of funding the planning, designing, installing and maintaining of the monument, as well as “any other costs incurred by the Council”.

• (1525)

[*English*]

While certain of these elements may constitute an elaboration or clarification of the purpose for which the council was to raise funds, I do not regard the maintenance of the monument as an aspect of its construction. It seems to me that it is only once the monument has been constructed that maintenance may be required. Further, there do not appear to be any grounds on which the original bill might be said to allow money raised for construction to be used for the costs of the council, whatever they may be. Therefore, it is my view that these two elements are clearly beyond the scope of Bill C-442 and were rightly judged inadmissible by the chair of the transport, infrastructure and communities committee.

The amendment to clause 8 of the bill authorized the minister to delegate to the council certain of his responsibilities. In particular, this delegation would include the planning and design of the monument, its construction and its maintenance. There are no provisions in the bill as adopted by the House at second reading for any delegation of the minister's responsibilities. As such, this notion of delegation seems to be a new concept that is beyond the scope of the bill. Indeed, the delegation of the minister's responsibilities to the council seems to be directly contrary to the principle of the bill, which requires the minister to design and build the National Holocaust Memorial Monument, in co-operation with the national council, rather than have the national council do it in his stead.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to take this opportunity to clarify a certain confusion which appears to exist concerning the ruling that the amendment to clause 8 was offered at the wrong place in the bill. As I noted, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons felt that an amendment to delegate powers was appropriately placed if it followed those provisions which set out the powers to be delegated. While that is a reasonable position, it is not the point that is at issue here. Clause 8, in its original form, read:

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada may assist the Council in the performance of its functions under this Act.

[*English*]

A provision for the minister to delegate powers to the national council seems to me to be well beyond the scope of clause 8, which deals with the role of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Clause 8 is not the appropriate place to attempt the insertion of such a provision, even if it were otherwise admissible.

For all these reasons, I therefore rule that the amendments to clauses 2, 7 and 8 of Bill C-442 are null and void and no longer form part of the bill as reported to the House. In addition, I am ordering that a reprint of Bill C-442 be published to replace the reprint ordered by the committee.

I would like to once again thank the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence for having raised this important matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

FAIRNESS AT THE PUMPS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: When this matter was last before the House the hon. member for Burlington had the floor and he has 11 minutes in the time allotted for his remarks. I therefore call upon the hon. member for Burlington.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have completed my formal remarks on the bill and I would be happy to move to questions and comments.

The Speaker: Questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Westmount—Ville Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot really say that I am pleased to be debating Bill C-14 because, in actual fact, the bill has very little substance.

Let us be frank: as it currently stands the bill is not very credible because it is a bare bones proposal in response to something the Prime Minister himself observed during the 2008 election campaign. If he believes that consumers are being totally ripped off at the pump, why wait two years? The fact is that the government is acting grudgingly, and so the bill, as it currently stands, is mere window dressing and will simply shift the financial burden of the rising cost of gas onto retailers.

The Conservatives are on a witch hunt and are cracking down on independent retailers who, in their eyes, are alleged fraudsters. It is nothing but smoke and mirrors. Why does the bill not contain measures to support healthy competition rather than volume-based measures that would be extremely expensive for consumers?

The bill does not appear to deal with the real problem. There are few documented cases of retailers tampering with gas pumps, and they have no incentive to do so.

Government Orders

Let me share a few telling facts with you. The oil sector is ranked second when it comes to playing by the rules. So why would these kinds of measures apply only to this sector and not others? Are my colleagues aware that losses due to meter issues are in the order of \$8 million, not \$20 million as the government asserts? Currently, Measurement Canada inspects 34,000 gas pumps nationwide every two years, which accounts for a quarter of the 130,000 pumps across Canada. Enforcing this bill would mean hiring some 300 additional inspectors under contract to retailers. This would cost independent retailers between \$50 and \$200 per pump. Who will the bill be passed on to?

● (1530)

[English]

Most gasoline retailers are small, independent businesses, which in fact operate on very small margins, as we know. The additional cost of these inspections would certainly hurt their bottom line. In switching the onus of inspection to the retailer, the demand for private inspectors would increase drastically. I and many of my Liberal colleagues are concerned that retailers in northern and rural communities may not have access to the private inspectors required to ensure that they can stay within the letter and the spirit of the law.

[Translation]

If the government wants to keep going in this direction, would it not be better to review the way in which the law is enforced in order to ensure that the cost is not simply passed along to consumers? The ideal would probably be to increase the resources at Measurement Canada's disposal. We need to face facts. Does the government have the resources or the money necessary to implement a measure like this? Independent retailers and consumers should not have to pay for this bill.

We will also have to ensure that it is uniformly enforced. My fear is that the penalties could be arbitrary, and that is why the inspectors should be trained according to very specific guidelines. The inspectors should definitely be under a very clear code of practice.

There is another point. In order to reduce certain difficulties for retailers, why not provide a 30-day grace period, as suggested by my colleague from Pickering—Scarborough East? The equipment these retailers use is not infallible, and sometimes they may not know that the readings are faulty. They should not be considered automatically guilty.

[English]

If the government were truly concerned with helping Canadians at the pumps, it could turn its attention to any number of issues, such as refinery closures and the anemic state of competition at the refinery level. In fact, when it comes to higher gasoline prices, the Prime Minister himself has said that there is nothing the government can do to help Canadians.

In the three elections since the Prime Minister has been leader of the Conservative Party, he has made no less than three specific commitments to help Canadians with ever-increasing fuel prices. Members will remember that in 2004, lest we forget, the Conservatives promised to eliminate the GST on gasoline prices above 85¢ a litre when they came to power. I do not think that

happened. In 2008, they promised to lower the diesel excise tax. I do not believe that happened either.

I think the real reason behind the legislation being introduced right now is so the government can pretend to be helping consumers while they complain that prices are rising.

At this stage and in its current form, I see the fairness at the pumps act more like the Conservative farce at the pumps act.

● (1535)

[Translation]

A responsible government that really had Canadians' interests at heart, including the price of fuel, would focus in particular on the competition among the refineries and look at the Competition Act. The important thing is to make the market more effective and competitive, as the Liberal government proposed in 2005.

How is it that despite the increase in prices and the industry's claims that supply is very low, we see refineries closing? Why does the Conservative government remain impassive in the face of such a situation?

It is in the interests of Canadians that the House review whole parts of this bill and tailor them to deal with the real problem, which the Conservative government is trying to hide.

[English]

When a sampling was done of the gas pumps in this country, it was discovered that 94% of them were within specifications and only 6% were out of tolerance. Out of that 6%, one-third, or 2%, were actually delivering a little too much fuel to the consumer. The other 4%, in other words, 4% out of 100%, were delivering a little less fuel and a little outside of tolerance.

In terms of the devices that Measurement Canada is responsible for monitoring, measuring and inspecting, gas pumps are among the most reliable devices in this country. The question is why the government felt that it needed to legislate, through Bill C-14, the need to measure pump accuracy when the numbers were certainly extremely respectable. My guess is that the government wanted to do some grandstanding. It even gave it the name, "fairness at the pumps act", which sort of left a hint that somebody was being unfair. Unfortunately, the retailers had to wear that name when, in reality, the situation was really very respectable.

From my point of view, the government has created a bill and has put us through the hoops when in reality there was very little need to create such a bill as Bill C-14. In the end, it has smeared retailers and will end up costing Canadians additional sums because of all the inspectors required to carry out the aim of this legislation.

Government Orders

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech was very well done. I appreciated his parallels to what I would consider to be typical retail politics. I think fairness at the pumps act is the title and, quite frankly, if we bore down to the depth of this, there is not a lot to it in my opinion. Some of it may be fair but only in a small, sparse way. Therefore, unfortunately, when it comes to retail politics, we are dealing with dollar store legislation.

In the meantime, if it is the fairness at the pumps and the weights and measurements, I do want to address one of the issues he raised which had to do with the effect on rural areas. In some communities we may find in a radius of maybe 200 kilometres that there is only one outlet that provides gasoline. Therefore, it becomes problematic when these people are compelled to do the measurements and weights and they need to rely on the private sector to do this. Not only is it the fee for doing it, they have travel costs, they need to bring the person in, pay their wages and so on and so forth, and that takes time to do and therefore lineups are created and it causes lots of problems when they are the only retailer in a large area.

I would like the hon. member to comment further on that, please.

• (1540)

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, the issue of northern or remote communities is a particularly acute one in terms of being able to respect the letter of the law in the case of Bill C-14 and yet there is a reality here, which he has very eloquently outlined, which is that in order to conform to the letter of the law there need to be inspections. The challenge there is to get the inspectors and the inspectors need to be available in order to do inspections of the pumps within a certain period of time.

This is problematic in and of itself in the case of certain communities but it is also a fact that these independent retailers who provide a very essential service often have very slim margins of profit and the additional burden of having to pay for the inspections that will need to take place at their one or two or three pumps is one they can ill-afford. It is a particularly acute problem for those independent retailers who are outside the large centres in this country.

Mr. Scott Simms: I will make this somewhat brief, Mr. Speaker. I remember during the last election that the price of fuel was a huge issue at the time. Many people in the House used this issue to torque it in certain ways. One of the ways of doing this, and to say it was shallow is being somewhat generous, was that there was a commitment to reduce the amount of diesel by 2¢, which came from the current government.

I have looked through the order paper but I cannot seem to find it. However, I was wondering if the hon. member would know where that policy went, perhaps out the pump, as it were.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises an extremely good point. I seem to remember hearing about the 2¢ on diesel but I have not seen it enacted. I am forced to conclude that perhaps it was one of those many promises, including the 85¢ promise, which goes back about six years, whereby if gasoline went over 85¢ the GST would be removed from the price of gasoline.

Perhaps the government might be able to shed some light on what happened to those promises, which would have served the consumer a great deal more than Bill C-14, which is nothing but a sorry excuse for the government to try to look like it is on the side of the consumer.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member has to do with ambient temperatures.

A number of years ago, I had a constituency complaint and the basis of the complaint was that people got more gas in their tanks in the morning when they filled up because the temperature was poor, whereas, in the afternoon, because gas expands with the heat, people got less when they filled up.

I wonder if the member can answer as to how that will impact the ambient temperature issue as far as the measurements that the inspectors are planning to take, because there has to be some kind of reconciliation here between ambient temperatures and how the gas is measured.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, the whole delivery in terms of volume of gasoline is predicated on certain conditions. In terms of temperature it is based on 15° centigrade. Therefore, if it were 15° centigrade at sea level, there would be a certain volume, but unfortunately most of the time the temperature is not 15° centigrade. In fact, on average in the country it is minus 6° or something like that. Therefore, there has to be a compensation that is done and that compensation is based on temperature and it is supposed to adjust the volume. As the member quite clearly said, when liquids or gases get cold, they compress and when they get warm, they expand, so that changes the volume.

One can only hope these pumps are making that correction based on the actual temperature. This assumes that is part of the process.

• (1545)

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend my hon. colleague for his views on this legislation. I would like to ask one question. It might not be related, but when we talk about gasoline, it gets everyone's emotions up and running.

When we look at regulations across the country, it is different from province to province and region to region. Sometimes it is unfair that one part of a province or a region has to pay a certain price and then it is totally different in another place.

Could he comment on regulation and how we could address some of these concerns?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, regulation is a complex issue that touches both the provincial and the federal. On the federal component, for example, on the excise tax, we will remember that a far-sighted Liberal policy was enacted some time ago under Prime Minister Martin to take some of that excise tax and use it for infrastructure projects. That was applauded by many Canadians.

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Regulation is an area for which the federal government has a responsibility. One of the concerns it should have is to deliver the best and lowest price to the consumer. It is not entirely within its responsibility, but it is part of its responsibility. As I mentioned in my presentation, things like the competitiveness of refineries to again stimulate greater competition are the kinds of issues the federal government should look at so ultimately the consumer is the one who benefits from it. This bill tries to suggest that retailers, to use the Minister of Industry's wording, and I cannot remember it exactly, are somehow out to gouge the consumer, which is not the case.

There is some constructive work that the federal government can undertake to make the price of gasoline as low as possible, and I would encourage it to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the Bloc Québécois industry critic, I had an opportunity to follow progress on Bill C-14 in the spring and to hear testimony at the committee meetings.

Bill C-14 amends the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act.

Although the bill has not generated a lot of controversy, nonetheless, overall, it could have gone a lot farther.

In fact, that is why my colleague from Shefford introduced Bill C-452. That bill is particularly important given that Bill C-14 still does not allow the Competition Bureau to conduct inquiries on its own initiative.

My colleague therefore introduced Bill C-452 to give the Competition Bureau more teeth, so it can initiate inquiries on its own initiative.

It still has to wait for a complaint before undertaking an inquiry. This is a classic response from the Competition Bureau: a complaint has to be filed in order for an inquiry to be started. As a result, Bill C-14 still does not address one of the major issues, the appearance of collusion in the oil industry.

Although the Bloc Québécois expressed support for the bill, as I said in my last speech in the spring, that does not mean that it is sufficient. Moreover, the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill did not result in many amendments. The amendments that were made related more to secondary issues. Personally, I think that even though the bill does not have as many teeth as we would have liked, it is hard to be against motherhood, particularly when we are trying to provide better protection for the public.

Even though we think it is in fact high time to make changes to the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act, Bill C-452 could give the Competition Bureau tools for battling companies that might want to profit from their dominant position in the market to rip off consumers.

The good thing about Bill C-14 is that from now on, the onus will be on the trader to prove they are not guilty. As well, there may be additional penalties if the trader continues to operate in violation of the law.

But what is more important, to my mind, is that the law will allow the names of offending businesses to be posted and announced publicly. In an area like gasoline sales, if a trader is convicted, we can bet that the retailer will want to remedy the situation quickly. Information moves fast in social media and neighbourhoods, and there are also service stations in various locations, on almost every corner, and so it will be easy for consumers to switch from one business to another when they see that the retail price of gas is higher in one location.

In addition, the amendment to the Weights and Measures Act will allow for much higher fines for offenders. Under the new provisions of the act, inspectors appointed by the government will be authorized to enter premises that they have reasonable grounds to examine and to seize or detain anything in the place, to use any computer or communication system in the place and to prepare a document based on the data. They may also prohibit access to the place and require that faulty equipment be shut down.

● (1550)

Bill C-14 is not intended to instill fear in traders, but rather to make improvements to legislation that no longer meets modern standards. It is quite appropriate in 2010 for inspectors to ensure that consumers are not being shortchanged.

In my last speech in this House on Bill C-14, I remarked that in committee certain questions would be asked regarding things that we would like to see included in this bill.

It is a tremendous opportunity for us as parliamentarians to give the bill some teeth and allow the Competition Bureau to launch inquiries of its own accord.

For a number of years, we have also been calling for a petroleum monitoring agency, which would closely monitor gas prices and tackle any attempts at collusion or unjustified price hikes. The Bloc Québécois is not coming up with anything new here. For years now, we have cited the recommendations in the November 2003 report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

The federal government has never done anything to assist consumers in this area, and it has to some extent let the opportunity to institute a petroleum monitoring system slip by. In spite of this, I reiterate that this is a step in the right direction.

Setting aside Bill C-452, the Bloc is convinced more than ever that the industry must contribute its fair share. With the skyrocketing rise in energy prices and oil companies' profits, we are witnessing a real across-the-board economic bloodletting for the benefit of the oil companies. The overly generous tax benefits for oil companies must end.

We need to be prepared because by 2012, 11 car manufacturers intend to put about 30 fully electric or rechargeable hybrid models on the market. These cars will be more reliable and fuel-efficient and cost much less to operate than gasoline-powered cars.

I do not want to stray from the objectives of Bill C-14, but for the Bloc Québécois, any discussion on oil consumption absolutely must include a genuine plan and restructuring of the sector that focuses on achieving the following three things.

So once again, here are the three steps that must be taken in order to have legislation that truly has more teeth: first, the oil industry needs disciplining, and this can be achieved by way of a tougher Competition Act. Second, the oil industry must contribute by being made to pay its fair share in taxes. Lastly, we need to reduce our reliance on oil by, for instance, providing incentives to consumers to encourage them to buy electric cars.

We must be prepared, because electric cars will be available soon enough. So we should offer assistance for municipalities to install charging stations. We should also do further research on the batteries of these future vehicles so that they keep their charge longer.

We must implement better measures to prevent fraud, as proposed in Bill C-14. Having measures like these and a comprehensive action plan will enable us to come out on top.

• (1555)

In conclusion, I will briefly present the position of the Bloc Québécois.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-14 in principle. However, this bill does not directly address the problems of collusion, such as the problems that recently came to light in Quebec, nor does it provide ways to effectively predict sudden increases in gas prices.

Therefore, the Bloc Québécois believes that we still need to look at ways to effectively address rising gas prices through Bill C-452, which we introduced.

In addition, the Competition Act still does not allow the Competition Bureau to conduct inquiries on its own initiative. A complaint must be filed, because if there is no complaint, the Competition Bureau does not take action, does not do anything.

The Bloc Québécois is also calling for the creation of a petroleum monitoring agency to closely monitor gas prices and to deal with attempts to collude and with unjustified price hikes.

That is the Bloc's position. I want to repeat that in principle, we support Bill C-14, which we are debating today.

• (1600)

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak to Bill C-14. The short title is the fairness at the pumps act. One would presume that fairness at the pumps refers to consumer protection and that we are talking about fairness to consumers generally.

Although there are some good measures in the bill, I would say that, generally speaking, consumers are at risk in any number of areas. The NDP has consistently called for a number of initiatives to protect consumers more broadly. These initiatives include having a minister responsible for consumer affairs; strengthening the Competition Bureau, tackling credit cards independently, not just through voluntary measures that credit card companies put in place; putting health and safety measures in place that protect consumers

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from imported goods; and finally, improving labelling so that consumers know when they are buying genetically modified products.

With respect to fairness at the pumps, I think this is a small measure to adopt in attempting to protect consumers.

I want to place the reason for this legislation in context.

Back in May 2008, an article called “Hosed at the Pumps” appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen*. The article said that the federal government was aware that there were any number of violations at the pumps. It stated, “A *Citizen* investigation shows that between Jan. 1, 1999, and Aug. 28, 2007, nearly 5% of gas pumps tested in Canada—about one pump in 20—failed government inspections by dispensing less fuel than they should”.

This relates to consumer fairness in that Canadians were going to the gas pumps and paying more for the product, because they did not receive the amount that they should have received.

The article goes on to state:

And while some faulty pumps give out more fuel than they charge for, more often than not it is consumers—not the retailers—who get hosed, government inspection records show.

The problem of faulty pumps appears to be an industry-wide phenomenon. About 30% of all gas vendors tested have had at least one pump flunk an inspection by shortchanging consumers, according to the inspection reports.

There is a lot more detail here, but I want to go on a little further in the article. It said that sometimes consumers are shortchanged, sometimes they get a benefit; there are fluctuations, and there is a limit set for acceptable fluctuations.

The article further states:

The small fluctuations might be less of a concern if the measurement errors evened out. In theory, consumers who come up short on slow-running pumps should be balanced by those who benefit from extra gas from fast pumps.

But the inspection reports reveal a puzzling trend: Canadian consumers are squeezed by faulty pumps far more often than vendors. When a gas pump fails a measurement test, 74% of the time it is the motorist who is disadvantaged by the error, and not the retailer, according to the inspection data.

Odder still, the results of pump inspections in the U. S. seem to run counter to the Canadian numbers. Newspaper reports on state government inspection of gas pumps suggest that consumers and retailers in the U.S. tend to be affected by pump errors in roughly equal proportion, with motorists getting a slight advantage in some states.

Not so here in Canada. Here, consumers end up on [the] short end of the nozzle three times as often as retailers. “There is no realistic possibility of these errors being so slanted against consumers just by chance,” said Richard Shillington, a statistician with the economic consulting firm Infometrica, who reviewed the numbers on behalf of the *Citizen*.

“It’s off the scale. It’s one in billions,” he said of the odds of this happening. “But that does not mean,” he adds, “that the errors are necessarily attributable to unscrupulous vendors. There could be procedural or mechanical reasons that would make more pumps run slow rather than fast.”

In the article's conclusion it states:

By using the most conservative figures, pumps that fell outside the tolerance zone would have shortchanged consumers by at least \$17 million annually if projected across the entire industry. At the same time, however, fast pumps would give out \$8 million in free gas. On the small percentage of pumps outside the tolerance zone, consumers would come out about \$9 million behind.

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That was in 2008.

• (1605)

We are now at the end of 2010, and we are still looking at legislation that addresses fairness at the pumps.

I want to touch on the response to that report. The article refers to government inspections carried out between 1999 and 2000. For a number of years, government inspections continued to demonstrate that Canadian consumers were being short-changed at the pumps.

It is 10 years later, and we are talking about these old numbers, and we are finally dealing with legislation in the House. That is unacceptable.

I want to acknowledge the good work that the member for Windsor West has done on this. He has been on this file for a number of years. Whether it is gas prices or the unevenness of measurements at the pump, he has been looking into what is required for consumer protection.

Bill C-14 is an act to amend the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act. The short title is “fairness at the pumps act”. According to the legislative summary, the aim of the bill is to amend certain provisions of the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act to provide greater protection for consumers from inaccurate measurements at gas pumps and other measuring devices.

The bill seeks to achieve this objective by introducing administrative monitoring policies for contraventions under the acts, increasing maximum fines for offences, introducing a new fine for repeated offences, introducing mandatory inspection frequencies for measuring devices, and proposing the appointment of non-government inspectors to be trained and certified by Measurements Canada to conduct mandatory inspections of measuring devices.

I want to talk a little about the administrative monitoring policies. Many see this as progress. The administrative monitoring policies allow for a more flexible and proportionate response to instances of non-compliance. There are varying degrees of these classifications, from minor to serious or very serious, with specified maximum penalties for each level. It allows for a rapid response to these violations, as opposed to having to go through the process of laying criminal charges.

Bill C-14, proposes to increase the accountability of retailers for the accuracy of their measuring devices by requiring them to have their devices inspected at regular intervals. Mandatory inspection frequencies, which are common in the majority of industrial nations, for example, France, Germany, and most U.S. states, are proposed for measuring devices used in eight trade sectors: retail petroleum, downstream or wholesale petroleum, dairy, retail food, fishing, logging, grain and field crops, and mining. Other sectors will be added to this list in the future, depending on the results of stakeholder consultations.

There is much more in the bill; this is a brief summary of some aspects of it.

I want to touch on the use of authorized private sector service providers. We are going to see a shift as a result of having private-

sector inspectors carry out these inspections. The government has said that this is partly because it is going to increase the number of inspections required.

The NDP feels strongly that inspections need to be done in house with government workers. In this way, we have an arm's-length, non-interested party performing these inspections.

Under this fairness at the pumps act, the Minister of Industry will have the ability to appoint non-government inspectors of authorized service providers to perform inspections. This will allow Measurement Canada to use its resources strictly to enforce its mandate.

The mandatory inspections could be conducted by authorized service providers. The Measurement Canada inspectors will continue to assess marketplace performance through independent inspections, respond to complaints of suspected inaccurate measurements, and perform follow-up inspections of authorized service providers to ensure that they are doing their jobs correctly.

The Measurement Canada inspectors will be solely responsible for enforcement actions. Fees for the independent inspection services would be determined by market forces, ensuring that there is competition in the marketplace and that retailers will be charged fairly for these services.

It is estimated that the number of annual gas pump inspections would increase from 8,000 to approximately 65,000.

• (1610)

Although there would be more inspections, they will be carried out within the private sector and one would question the impact on the retail sector itself at having to pick up the cost. According to this, these fees will be determined by market forces. That sounds like something that could cause some problems for some in the retail sector.

The NDP has raised a couple of problems with the bill. I know the member for Windsor West attempted to make some amendments at the committee stage of the bill and was not successful. The problems the member for Windsor West has identified are the privatization of the inspection service by mandating frequent inspections that must be carried out by the newly created authorized service provider private companies. Mandating private inspections will now increase from 8,000 per year to 65,000. I did talk about what that impact might be on the retailers.

There is no ombudsman office to evaluate problems or investigate complaints. This is a very important aspect that we have been on record about, and I will talk about when we first raised that. There is no refund or compensation for consumers who are ripped off and no refunds or restitutions on the taxes collected in the phantom gasoline purchases.

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On these last two points, since 1999, we know consumers have been overpaying in a significant number of cases. However, how do we go back to consumers over 10 years and say that they overpaid their gas bills for the last 10 years? There is not even any recognition of that and there is no acknowledgement as well on the taxes that were collected on these so-called phantom gasoline purchases. We have had people paying more at the gas pumps and the government has been collecting taxes on phantom gas. Therefore, we have other problems with the bill.

In April, the member for Windsor West called on the government to take immediate action. He said that gas pump problems were exposed more than two years ago by a media investigation and the government waited far too long to respond. He said the government was allowing the thieves to keep what they stole over the past few years. The member for Windsor West is very passionate about this file.

He went on to say:

What is outrageous is that the government potentially collected taxes from consumers who were paying for phantom gasoline...The question that must be asked is whether the government earned tax revenues from this short-changing of Canadian motorists and, if so, how much?

To make matters worse, the "Fairness at the Pumps Act" will further remove the federal government from the inspection process and will essentially allow the oil industry to police itself.

We have seen this in other cases. The do-not-call list comes to mind, where the industry was policing itself. We have seen how ineffective that has been in terms of monitoring that list. We have little faith that turning this over to the private sector is going to ensure that not only are retailers protected, but that consumers are protected as well. I absolutely support the member for Windsor West calling for these inspections to be carried out with government employees.

In 2008, which is how long New Democrats have been raising this, during a question period exchange, the member for Toronto—Danforth raised the issue around this report. In his question he said:

—the Ottawa Citizen has reported that one in twenty pumps is not correctly calibrated and that consumers are paying the price. In addition to shortchanging people at the pumps, the big oil companies are not even giving people the gas they paid for. At \$1.30 a litre, every cent counts. When will this government create an ombudsman position to protect consumers from the big oil companies?

The minister of industry at the time came back and said a bunch of other things that did not do much around answering the question, but he did say they would not be creating the position of ombudsman.

Although the act does put in place some measures, it simply does not guarantee the kind of protection for which New Democrats have called. One would wonder why we have not seen this ombudsperson who would give Canadians a bit more faith that their interests were being well looked after.

•(1615)

Perhaps we will not get one because people are afraid of what the ombudsperson will speak up about. We have seen this with Veterans Affairs. The ombudsperson has done a very good job, is well respected by veterans, but his term will not be renewed. If we do not get an ombudsperson around consumer protection, is it because people are afraid we would get a very good ombudsperson who would speak up and protect consumers?

It makes no sense that those kinds of things are not included. They would give Canadians more confidence.

Because we were unable to get the amendments we were looking for at the committee stage, New Democrats simply cannot support the bill without some of those other measures and protections in place. Therefore, we will be voting against it.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for a number of years the government of the province of Manitoba had a random inspection system for cars. If people owned their cars over a 10 or 12 year period, they would probably be called in by government inspectors once every 6 or 7 years. Manitobans trusted that system because they trusted the government inspectors, and there was no charge to it.

In 1995 the Conservative government of Gary Filmon turned it all over to private garages. What happened? Entry level cars doubled in price. No one could buy a car for \$300 anymore, it was \$1,000, and every two years it had to be inspected. CBC's *I-Team* investigators uncovered widespread gouging by garages. With a private garage, if people kept their cars for 10 years, they would never have to be inspected. Only if they were sold would have to be re-inspected.

Which system helped to keep safe cars on the road? The one where the government randomly brought them in every 3 or 4 years, or the system that if people bought their cars through private garages, they could drive them for 10 to 12 years and never have them inspected?

This is what happened in Manitoba. I see a direct parallel here.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member from Elmwood—Transcona raises a very good case of how the private inspection services simply do not work. Arguably, perhaps more inspections are needed, but it is troubling to think that we will radically increase the number of inspections, which means that we will have all of these private sector authorized inspectors put in place. There would be a cost to the retailers and people simply do not have faith in that private inspection process because of examples exactly like the kind that the member from Elmwood—Transcona pointed out.

That is why we call on the government to maintain the inspection service with Measurements Canada and ensure it has the adequate resources to conduct those inspections. Also, those inspections could be random and at arm's-length from the industry. Then people would have more faith in them.

As we have seen of the inspections that were being carried out in the past, the government was taking no action when a problem was identified. Again, the government department that is responsible needs to have the resources in place and the support of the minister to ensure the work they do results in the kinds of outcomes that we can see, which is fairness to consumers.

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Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech from the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. As always, it was right to the point.

I have had literally thousands of phone calls in my constituency office since I have been elected about gouging at the pumps. This bill addresses a very small part of that larger problem. It talks about calibration at particular gas stations. The member has addressed concerns about privatization in terms of enforcement and issues with respect to fines on that aspect of it. For most people who call my office, that is only a tiny fraction of the concerns they have.

People are much more concerned with what is happening with the oil companies in general and what is happening on perceived collusion, especially in terms of setting gas prices. It seems that prices are always going up on long weekends, or on Fridays or when one station raises its prices, all of them do.

There are much larger issues that this government is failing to address. This is still a government that is giving huge corporate tax cuts to the oil and gas industry, precisely part of the players who are gouging consumers in our communities.

Could the member from Nanaimo—Cowichan take a couple of seconds to address those issues as well?

• (1620)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton Mountain is absolutely correct. We have received a number of calls in our offices about gas prices. I am always shocked when I go home to Nanaimo—Cowichan on Vancouver Island. Our gas prices are always substantially more than they are in this part of the country. It is always a surprise to me when we know there are not a lot of refineries.

The member Windsor West has raised this issue a number of times and has called for an investigation into how gas prices are set at the retail level. It does seem to be a bit of a miracle that on the Friday of a long weekend, the gas prices, throughout the area, go up almost simultaneously.

An hon. member: Free market.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I hear one of my colleagues talking about free market. It is hard to believe there is much free market happening when there is this simultaneous raising of prices.

At the beginning of my speech on Bill C-14, I talked about fairness for consumers and the fact that the NDP had called for a number of initiatives to ensure there would fairness to consumers across a broad range of issues, including gas prices. We have called for a minister responsible for consumer affairs who can take on the responsibility for looking at things such as the retail gas prices in our country and whether or not there had been collusion among the retailers and the gas companies and ensure consumers were all paying the same price.

There is no free market competition with gas prices. The member for Hamilton Mountain raised a great point and she is absolutely correct. This bill does nothing to protect consumers around that kind of practice in the market.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, that was a perfect answer so I will just take the opportunity follow up a bit.

One of the problems people have in our communities is that when they see prices rising simultaneously, as the member just talked about, and when they have that perception of collusion, there is absolutely no redress for those people. They do not know what to do. We can complain to each other and people do, right at the pumps. They certainly complain to their family members and they call us as members of Parliament to complain to us, but right now there is absolutely no formal mechanism for addressing those very legitimate concerns, having them investigated and frankly acted upon.

One of the things I had the privilege of doing in the House was to introduce a bill calling for an oil and gas ombudsman, someone who would have to take those complaints seriously, who would have to do the investigative piece, but also then have the power to order remedial action. That would be real consumer protection. That is something for which people in my riding of Hamilton Mountain are calling. That is something they have supported. I know the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has constituents who are watching this just as closely because, frankly, this is an issue from coast to coast to coast.

Would she care to comment about whether she has also received a flood of those requests, whether her constituents have signed those petitions and whether she thinks this would be part of the solution?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, again the member for Hamilton Mountain is absolutely correct. The bill she tabled for an oil and gas ombudsperson would help alleviate some of the problem that we have seen with oil and gas pricing across the country. I know, from hearing from members in my own riding, they are very supportive of this kind of initiative.

New Democrats are proposing these kinds of initiatives to protect consumers, fairness for consumers. I outlined at the beginning of my speech a number of those initiatives, whether it was a minister responsible for consumer affairs, or the kind of labelling that we would all like to see, or looking after the health and safety of products that were imported in the country.

New Democrats have been taking on a number of things to ensure that consumers are protected and that there is fairness in the pricing.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Justice; the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, The Environment; the hon. member for Etobicoke North, Health.

[*English*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand today to talk about this particular bill.

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At first glance I noticed that we have this wonderful way of playing with titles in this House with certain aspects of legislation. Sometimes it means a significant amendment to other acts or it may be an act upon itself but we tend to title them in a way that, I suppose, sells.

A perfect illustration of what I am talking about is Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act. Basically we are making sure that the calibration is correct and that people are not being unfairly gouged at the pumps because of the measurements and weights that are involved in determining how much gas is being put through the pump.

As my hon. colleagues pointed out, a very small fraction of retail outlets, that do it unwittingly, are subject to shortchanging their customers. In this particular situation, that is what this bill tries to amend.

The title of the bill, and this is the best part, is fairness at the pumps act. In relative debate, we have been talking about the price of gas now for the past 5 to 10 years extensively. We all know why. The price of oil rises and the price at the retail pump is extremely high, well over a \$1. In my riding in central Newfoundland, it is some of the highest in the country, exceeding \$1.20 in certain cases. I think that in Labrador it is even more than that. I think we get the idea.

Therefore, fairness at the pumps act leads us to believe that fundamental action has taken place so that the price of the fuel is coming down in a particular area. That is not particularly the case here. What this would do is help calibrate the machines and ensure the retail outlets are following suit.

In this particular situation, they may be sideswiped by some of these regulations, which I will get to in a moment. I had to start by saying that the fairness at the pumps act is not an apt description. It is kind of discovering an old t-shirt in our closet. We take it out to clean the floor and call it ShamWow because it sounds good, but it is still an old t-shirt.

In this particular case, some of the fundamental points provided in Bill C-14 deal with, in one instance, the administrative monetary penalties. That is for contraventions under the act. That is a big part of this for the particular retail outlets.

Let us not be led astray here. This is not for the average consumer. This is for the retail outlets and, in this case, especially if they are rural or northern, this will be a hard situation to face in certain circumstances. This is why I think there should be more in this bill to help people in particular situations.

Before I proceed, Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

The bill would increase maximum fines for offences and it introduces a new fine for repeated offences, which is apropos for the case. If people are doing something because they were unaware that the calibration was wrong and what we see as a price tag is not what just went into the gas tank, which sometimes happens unwittingly, there is a fine involved. However, if it happens again and again and the person is a repeat offender whose intent is to bilk the customers, then the person should be dealt with accordingly.

Bill C-14 proposes to increase the accountability of retailers for the accuracy of the measuring devices. Mandatory inspection frequencies, common in the majority of countries, deal primarily with retail petroleum, wholesale petroleum, dairy, retail, food, fishing, logging, grain, field crops and mining. Essentially, these are measurements for industries in general where the measurement of the goods being sold or purchased is very important. There needs to be that standard and, in this case, this international standard.

Other sectors could be included in the future of course as time goes on and I am sure we will have a debate about that in the future.

• (1630)

Measurement Canada will take a more active role in this. One of the roles it will take is the training of people involved in helping to calibrate these machines to ensure they are correct.

I will now talk about some of the clauses that are considered here, one being the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act. The act requires that only approved and verified metres would be involved. The act allows the accreditation of independent metre verifiers to verify the accuracy of electricity and natural gas metres on behalf of Measurement Canada.

We see there is another element being brought in that is really quite something. Now we are branching off into a different direction that, in my particular riding, could be detrimental under certain circumstances. However, the spirit of this is an honest one, which is to ensure the calibration on the pumps is correct, but in this particular case the government could help maintain that perfection in the system by doing more things to help certain retailers.

Bill C-14 proposes to give the Minister of Industry the power to appoint non-government inspectors. These inspectors would be trained and certified by Measurement Canada, as I mentioned. This is where the bill gets a little bit dicey, a little bit cloudy as to the clarification of what it is that certain retailers must do and what it is they are on the hook for, as the common vernacular goes.

Description and analysis: In addition to ensuring metres are kept in good repair, owners are responsible for paying any fees required by the act, such as those that may be charged for mandatory inspections.

I will touch on that one for a moment because it is one that is of grave concern to me. The owner is responsible for the cost involved in looking at the metres to ensure they are calibrated. Let us say that the owner is someone with a retail outlet in a remote area, perhaps on the south coast of Newfoundland. In certain cases there are places remote enough so that there is no other way to purchase gasoline in a 200 kilometre radius. The owner finds himself in a situation where, if he needs to have someone come in and if it is not someone from the government or someone trained and willing to do it but someone in the private sector, a fee is involved to bring the person to the owner's establishment to ensure his pumps have the right readings.

Government Orders

A lot of small retailers will be on the hook for travel costs, meals costs and mileage costs. The frequency of getting their pumps calibrated will be such that it is an added expense to them. It is not just that. Let us assume, unwittingly, that there is a slight mistake in the calibration and that the gas pump is putting out something that is slightly off what the price on the pump shows. It must be shut down. Even though that is the only pump in a 200 kilometre radius, it must be down for a period of time because, let us face it, if it has to be fixed and it has to be fixed by someone else. Someone else has to come in and do that.

We should think about the people in the area who rely on gasoline to get to work, take their kids to schools or get to the hospital, God willing. These are the situations that I do not think we have looked into with the bill. When the bill was put together, I would hope that there was some consideration and thought put into it, more than what I see on the surface of this particular bill. I certainly believe that the government should have looked at some kind of subsidy for these small retailers to help them in calibrating their pumps.

In the meantime, we have the administrative monetary penalties, which in this case are apt because we have a graduated amount of money. As I said earlier, if owners unwittingly make a mistake in their pump or it is showing a different reading, then obviously they will be fined for it, but if it happens again and again, the intent is such that they want to bilk the public. After all, this is about fairness at the pumps, I suppose.

That said, the graduated fine should be to a point where individual retailers will not have to pay a small fee every time it happens. They must pay more and more as we go along. That is the key element of this.

• (1635)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that the Bloc's Bill C-452 would go a long way toward solving the problem here. It would change the Competition Act to authorize the commissioner to inquire into an entire industry sector, which is what we really need to do in this country.

The public has been aware of price fixing on gasoline prices for many years and yet 125 studies, paid for by provincial governments and the federal government, have all concluded that the legal framework is not there to get a conviction. We need to change the Competition Act.

The federal people have been able to chase the real estate agents on two occasions and get action from them to stop price fixing. They managed to get travel agents to stop price fixing. If they can do it with those other industries, why can they not do it with the retail gasoline industry?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, the member made an extremely valid point.

I would like to point out for my colleague that this topic came up in discussions several years ago in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador when we instituted price regulation at the pumps. P.E.I. was the other province.

Why is it that we do not have the framework by which we can cut down on what I would consider an unfair business practice after well

over 100 studies have been completed? It is true that we do it in other sectors. Is it a case of this industry being so connected to world inputs, such as oil prices being determined by a huge global compact? Is this part of the reason?

I do not stand here trying to make excuses for this. I do think that in this particular situation, despite the fact that Canada has a great deal of resources, we still have the right to disentangle ourselves from the world to ensure the consumer in Canada is not unfairly gouged.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor was not here when this was a raging debate, led by members of the now government side, who were in opposition at the time and who were looking for fairness at the pumps.

I noticed that my hon. colleague looked at the legislative item that says fairness at the pumps act. For a government that has been in power for almost five years and one that used to rail against unfairness at the pumps, it has done nothing. It is now simply looking at measurements and weights associated with arriving at prices.

As the member and my hon. colleagues have indicated, six years ago the provinces in Atlantic Canada figured out a particular formula, but one that did not completely address the issue of gouging and fairness in the rest of Canada.

I wonder if my colleague is finding out the same thing that the rest of us are finding out, which is that this is a waste of Parliament's time, especially when the government knew what the program should have been and yet did nothing for five years. It is now moving sound bite legislation with no substance but lots of spin.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if my colleague was here earlier but I mentioned that with some of these bills we are seeing a case where we haul the old t-shirt out of the closet and call it ShamWow and start cleaning with it. Just because it has a fancy label does not make it a better cleaner. The member gets the idea—

An hon. member: It's still a sham.

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes, it is still a sham. That is a good point.

The member made a valid point. The government campaigned on two options: first, a 2¢ reduction in excise tax on diesel; and second, when the price of gasoline goes over 85¢ it would cut out the GST element. Neither of those things were done.

In this particular situation, the government did not even go so far as to talk about the Competition Act, which my colleague from the NDP talked about. Instead, we have mandatory inspections. By the way, this must be paid for by the gas station owner.

• (1640)

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-14, the so-called fairness at the pumps act.

Fairness at the pumps sounds good. It is a nice title. It sounds as though people are trying to do something good.

Government Orders

I have heard different variations on it from the Conservative Party: the getting back at the chisellers act, those who are trying to rip off people when they buy gas.

What this bill amounts to is vast and expensive changes to combat variances which in large part can be attributed to environmental changes and honest errors.

When we look at what has happened in the past, and the amount of the variance or error, studies show that 96% of gas pumps are precisely accurate. Ninety-six per cent is not perfect. However, let us look at the difference. Four per cent are inaccurate. Of that 4%, 2% favour the consumer and 2% favour the owner. It is not as if there is this big massive problem, but it would be nice to try to get 100%.

The petroleum industry is second only to the apiary industry in terms of measurement accuracy. The apiary industry is slightly better than the petroleum industry.

What is more, according to Alan Johnson, president of Measurement Canada, the majority of pumps that were out of tolerance were out by slightly over one tolerance. One tolerance is the equivalent of .5% discrepancy between the amount of gasoline paid for and the amount dispensed. This means that the majority of pumps out of tolerance were about 1% off measurement. That is of that 4%. We can see how minuscule that amount is.

I am not justifying this and I am not saying it is okay to have variance, but what we have to look at is the amount of energy that has gone into this and how this actually comes out.

The Conservatives talk about it as if there were a whole industry out there trying to rip off consumers. They vilified a group. What I am seeing is a repeat of what we had in Ontario in 1995 when the Conservatives were in government in Ontario. Their modus operandi was to create a crisis and vilify one group, one industry. In this case it is not so much the oil industry or the petroleum industry, but they are vilifying the person at the pumps, the small operator.

We have seen this in Ontario. We saw it in Walkerton where they left it up to the individuals to monitor themselves and to hire their own private inspectors, not government inspectors, but private inspectors who would make a living off it going to different areas.

When private inspectors go in when needed or on a regular basis, what we are seeing is the industry regulating itself. I have a small concern with that; actually, it is a large concern because of what we did see in Ontario.

Currently on a report, a fraud is investigated by a government inspector. This will not change under the new system. The only change is that every two years station owners must pay \$200 per pump for a mandatory inspection with no evidence of tampering or intentional discrepancy. That is \$200 every two years. It does not sound like much, but when one has a number of pumps it causes a problem for the small operators.

As was mentioned earlier, I look at northern Ontario. Northern Ontario is a large territory with a sparse population and there are small operators. They are not making millions of dollars. They are not making huge amounts of money pumping gas. They are providing a service.

When we look at northern Ontario and rural Canada in general, there is not a lot of operators. I have seen it happen where people have to drive an hour to get gas, believe it or not. They have to get to that gas station. If that operator is not doing the volume, he still has to get the inspection.

When we look at what causes pumps to go out, cold temperatures cause a bit of variation, but the major factor is the amount of pumping that gets done.

• (1645)

When we look at a major centre such as Toronto, some stations pump gas like it is going out of style and there is some wear. Perhaps the Conservatives would like to look at something like that and say that maybe they should be inspected more often, but it is two years right across the board.

In rural areas in northern Ontario there is not that volume and not the wear and tear. When we look at operators in northern Ontario or in rural Canada, they still have to be inspected every two years. Inspectors are paid \$200 per pump. Northern Ontario is a vast area, as is rural Canada. How many inspectors will be going to the rural areas? They are going to go where the fruit is lying low, which is in the major centres. The inspectors will be in the larger centres like Toronto, Vancouver and Ottawa. In the smaller centres, the operators will be at the mercy of the inspectors. They will be sitting there waiting and wondering when it is going to happen. This is going to cause some problems for the operators.

When we look at operators in rural areas such as northern Ontario, we see that there are independents. Many of the independents have been wiped out, but a lot of the operators are small operators. This adds to their costs. They will have to pass these costs on to the consumer. This is actually adding costs to the operators or the people of northern Ontario and rural Canada.

If this were a problem solver, if it would put an end to all fraud at the pumps, then I would say that this is something we should embrace and let it go ahead, but this bill will not stop those major fraudsters who are overcharging consumers. It will only penalize pump owners, especially in rural regions where equipment is most likely to break down in inclement weather, whose equipment is off by less than 1%. That is not a large amount, yet independents, small owners, are going to be hit hard. In turn we are going to see more and more people asking why they would put themselves up.

Government Orders

It is almost as though they are accused of being guilty until proven innocent in something like this. In the way it is written, it has come to light that all small companies that pump gas are fraudulent, that they are all trying to chisel and steal money from people. That is not so. The people who pump gas are honest and are trying to earn a living.

There might be a little variation but there is variation in all businesses and all industries. When we look at it, about 0.0002% of the gasoline bought by Canadians last year did not end up in their cars. That is two ten-thousandths of one per cent. Anybody who looks at that sees it as a small amount. It is not a large amount. I am not saying it is insignificant, but it is something that should be considered because two ten-thousandths of one per cent is not a huge amount, not when we see the variation in the price of gasoline. It swings up and down. In my community the other day it went from 96¢ to \$1.08. Had they been measuring better, it would not have made a bit of difference.

When I look at what the Conservatives have talked about in the past, such as taking the GST off once it got over 85¢ and all kinds of neat things that sounded good but were not acted upon, this is a pittance. It is playing Canadians for fools. It makes people feel good when they read the title of the bill, but unfortunately, that is where it ends.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member who just spoke to further explain his reservations and why it should not be the consumer who pays. We must find a way to improve the system. However, if improving the system means that we end up paying more at the pump, what is the point?

Has my colleague thought about all that? When we study this matter in committee, how should we go about it and what is his vision?

I would very much appreciate his comments because they will help us get ready to do excellent work in committee.

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question.

In terms of this bill, people believe that in the end, they are not going to be ripped off. The best thing to do is to ensure that a bill is put in place to make a real difference. That should not mean that people have to pay a little bit more and that, in the end, there is no difference.

This bill causes problems for the company or the individual selling the gas, but does nothing about the price of gas. That is the problem. In 2004, the Conservatives began talking about changes and capping the price of gas. They wanted to stop it from climbing. They wanted to make sure that the price would be the same in Toronto as in northern Ontario, the same in Vancouver as in northern British Columbia. They wanted a fair price for everyone. That is what we have to work on: something that looks at the price at the pump, whether it is in major urban centres or in rural areas.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier a colleague from the Liberal Party spoke about the despair he felt around bills like this because the title proclaims fairness at the pump. This gives Canadians the impression that is what is actually going to happen. However, the government is only moving the ball a few inches down the field and a penny here or there might be saved after all the effort that we are putting behind this bill. The big question about the potential abuse by some companies in price fixing has been risen many times, but the rules do not allow government to come to the conclusion that is in front of all of us, that companies seem to elevate their prices at various times of the year and consumers get hit. It is not pennies; it can add up to many dollars every time consumers fill up their tanks. Across the country that could mean millions of dollars.

This was not addressed by the Conservative government in the last five years, nor was it addressed by the previous Liberal regime. Are the Liberals now saying they are willing to work with us to provide consumer protection, to change the fundamental rules so that Canadians can be protected from gouging at the pump?

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Speaker, it is nice to hear that the hon. member is willing to work with us to make a difference because we have not seen that. I remember in 2004 that his leader actually knocked out the Liberals so that the NDP could possibly get a couple of seats and we lost a lot. It was really painful.

However, let us go to fairness at the pumps which is what the hon. member mentioned. It is about the title of the bill. It sounds as though there is actually something being done and it sounds like it is there. As I mentioned earlier, this is a repeat of Ontario under a Conservative government. The Conservatives create a crisis, rally the troops and when they realize that we are all rushing in one direction, what happens is the issue was not there at all. It was somewhere else. This is a diversion that the Conservatives are using to make themselves look good, but it is not solving the problem.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my turn so speak to Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act.

Bill C-14 is not bad in itself because it is very important for pump measurements to be accurate. I have noted, though, the criticisms voiced by my colleagues. They said that consumers should not have to bear the cost of the new monitoring requirements under Bill C-14. We will have to be careful in committee to fully clarify this issue.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of sending the bill to committee. However, the bill does nothing to address the real concern of people, which is that they pay too much for gasoline. Two things need to be done: we have to create an agency to monitor gasoline prices and to give the Competition Act more bite.

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois has introduced some bills in this regard that I will discuss in a few moments. That is what we need to talk about. I hope the government is not going to pat itself on the back, claiming that it introduced a bill to regulate the fluctuations in the price of gasoline and it will ensure that people pay a fair price through tighter monitoring of the measurement devices at the pump. The accuracy of these measurements is a very interesting point.

We do not even know if consumers benefit or are penalized when pumps are not working quite right. I suppose that if people are tampering with the pumps, it is not to do consumers any favours. It remains to be seen, though, whether people have fiddled with the gauge showing the number of litres pumped. That is not the solution, and I will show why in the next few minutes.

Bill C-14 amends certain provisions of the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act in order to better protect consumers against inaccurate gasoline pump measurements. That is basically what we are talking about. Many people are concerned about this. The bill covers other measurement devices as well and not just gasoline pumps.

The bill imposes penalties for contraventions to the laws in question, increases maximum fines for offences, and introduces a new fine for repeat offenders. It also introduced mandatory frequencies for measuring devices and proposes the appointment of non-government inspectors, to be trained and certified by Measurement Canada to conduct mandatory measuring device inspections.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-14 in principle and of sending it to committee.

However, Bill C-14 does not directly address the issue of collusion that has recently come to light in Quebec. Nor does it effectively prevent sudden increases in gas prices. I spoke about two objectives earlier: creating an agency to monitor gasoline prices and giving the Competition Act more teeth.

I want to talk about what happened in my own municipality. Many vehicles are stolen and many people are in possession of stolen vehicles in central Quebec. I do not want people to think that my region is particularly problematic, but in Victoriaville we also had the infamous gas price cartel. Luckily, the scheme was uncovered and people are being held accountable. I hope that if this happens elsewhere in Canada, we will be able to stop them.

However, under current legislation, criticism or complaints must be filed in order for the Competition Bureau to act. That is the difference. The Competition Bureau needs to have quasi-police authority to act when it feels the need and as soon as there are suspicions, not only when there is a complaint. I will come back to that.

• (1700)

We also believe that we still need to make an effort to efficiently respond to rising gas prices, and we can do so with our bill, Bill C-452, which the NDP member mentioned during questions and comments. That bill was introduced by my colleague from Shefford. The Competition Act does not allow the Competition Bureau to conduct inquiries on its own initiative. It must always wait for a private complaint before it can start an inquiry. We are also calling

for a petroleum agency to closely monitor gasoline prices and to respond to any attempts at collusion or unjustified price hikes.

If the government had taken a serious approach to really helping consumers, it would have focused on those two points. Every time the price of gasoline rises suddenly, people begin to wonder about the oil industry, and rightfully so. These increases are unjustified, and consumers must not be the victims of dubious business practices on the part of oil companies. I repeat, the existing Competition Act has significant gaps. For instance, it does not allow the Competition Bureau to undertake a real investigation of an industrial sector. How can it gather information if it can neither force the disclosure of documents nor protect witnesses? This aspect must be corrected.

Bill C-452 introduced by the Bloc Québécois would toughen up the Competition Act to give the federal trade tribunal the right to initiate an investigation, rather than waiting for complaints or accusations, the right to protect witnesses and the right to conduct searches and seize documents. A petition to that effect has been circulating. It is a very popular petition, particularly in my region, understandably, since it was seriously affected by this cartel. To ensure that everyone clearly understands the importance of this issue, I would like to read the petition.

WHEREAS:

1. Individuals and companies pled guilty in the summer of 2008 to conspiring to fix the price of gasoline;
2. According to *Le Soleil*, retailers could be overcharging by more than \$100 million a year;
3. The current Competition Act has significant gaps, preventing the Competition Bureau from conducting investigations until complaints are lodged.

THEREFORE, your petitioners call upon the House of Commons to pass Bill C-452, An Act to amend the Competition Act (inquiry into industry sector), authorizing the Commissioner of Competition to conduct an inquiry of her own accord into the fluctuating price of gasoline.

I can say that this petition is very popular. People are requesting it. They get it online and sign it. People want something to be done about what happened. The Competition Bureau did manage to take action in my region. It is so difficult to do anything about this that this was only the second time the Competition Bureau was able to take action in this type of incident. The first time was in Vancouver in 1995. The second time was in 2008 because there was a complaint. We should not have to wait for a complaint before something can be done. Nonetheless, it worked out and that is how it should be, with increased powers and investigations before things get to the complaint stage.

The Competition Bureau discovered a gasoline cartel in Quebec. By cartel we mean an agreement between companies not to compete with one another. It is a rather simple definition. I will read from a Competition Bureau document, a press release that was issued on June 12, 2008:

...the Competition Bureau became aware of allegations of price-fixing at gas stations in Victoriaville, Quebec. The evidence gathered during the Victoriaville investigation led to further probes in other local markets in Quebec, namely Thetford Mines, Sherbrooke and Magog.

In conducting its investigation, the Bureau uncovered evidence of agreements between competitors to fix the price at the pump at which gasoline was sold to consumers. The evidence indicated that participants in the targeted markets carried out the conspiracy mainly by phoning each other to agree on the price of gasoline and about the timing of price increases, contrary to section 45 of the Competition Act.

Government Orders

A number of investigative tools were used, including wiretaps, searches and the Competition Bureau's Immunity Program.

Some could dispute my argument since I was saying earlier that the Competition Bureau did not have enough room to manoeuvre. Some might say there was collusion, and that a cartel formed in Victoriaville, Thetford Mines, Sherbrooke, and Magog and perhaps elsewhere, but there have been no reports of this in other places.

• (1705)

The competition bureau was able to take action. Lawsuits were filed and some people have already pleaded guilty. So, it works. However, as I keep saying, it took a complaint. At one point, a gasoline retailer from the Victoriaville area received threats, seemingly from other retailers, because he did not want to go along with their scheme. He would keep his prices a little lower than those of the others for a while. His company supported him for a while. However, he eventually found himself all alone and he decided to expose this situation. If I am not mistaken, he talked to a local weekly newspaper. He expressed his frustration to a journalist regarding these events, the threats he had received and the fact that, as a merchant, he wanted to continue to be able to compete with the others.

That is what is wrong with the petroleum industry. If someone wants to buy a pair of shoes, he can go to two or three different stores. Chances are the price of a pair of shoes of the same brand and colour will not be the same everywhere. There may be a \$5 or \$10 difference. The person may even find a pair on sale, at 50% off the regular price if he is lucky. However, when it comes to gasoline, even if we look everywhere, we will rarely find much variation in prices. In the case that took place in my community, the competition bureau showed that retailers would phone each other and set prices. So, obviously, prices were the same everywhere.

That individual decided that enough was enough, and he spoke out about it. It is only when the competition bureau saw what was going on that it could take action. It reasoned that since a complaint had been filed, it could take action. Otherwise, it could not have done anything. That is why the procedure at the competition bureau must change.

As I said, a number of charges were laid. In Victoriaville, 11 companies were involved in the scheme. In Thetford Mines there were 6. In Sherbrooke there were 20, and in Magog there were 5.

As I mentioned earlier, several companies in Victoriaville, Thetford Mines and Sherbrooke pleaded guilty. The fines are rather stiff, that is \$179,000 in one case, \$1,850,000 for an oil company, and \$600,000 and \$90,000 respectively for two other companies. That is more than a slap on the wrist. The \$1,850,000 fine was imposed on an oil company, not on a retailer. There is no doubt that these penalties will have a sobering effect.

Obviously, I travel a lot, like all of my colleagues here. We all travel within our ridings. When we are responsible for files, we deal with them away from here, which allows us to compare gas prices. It is interesting to note that at one time in Victoriaville, gas was always slightly more expensive than in Trois-Rivières or Drummondville. Sometimes it was less expensive than in Quebec City, but it was not the cheapest in the province, far from it. Since the Competition Bureau started its inquiry and the results came out, it is funny, but the

prices are often lower. People had to be caught red-handed for others to be far more careful in terms of fixing prices. We are still the ones who are benefiting today. Luckily, the Competition Bureau's inquiry allowed us to find out what was going on.

As for the individuals linked to this collusion, this cartel, there were fines of \$50,000, \$10,000 and \$5,000. For once, we caught the people and were able to make them pay. I have here a series of fines for \$10,000, \$20,000 and \$25,000, depending on the person's involvement in the scheme.

As for how this all played out, an article in *La Tribune* says that the gas cartel may have cost each car owner up to \$180. This whole story came to light in 2008, but prices were fixed between 2002 and 2006. The newspaper article says:

A very rough estimate [because it is difficult to know how much gas each person bought over the years] is that each year a car owner in Sherbrooke, Magog, Thetford Mines and Victoriaville paid an extra \$20 to \$40 to fill up their vehicle because of the cartel, which distorted gas prices for approximately four and a half years.

• (1710)

It is interesting to note that a class action lawsuit against the gas cartel is now before the civil division of the Quebec Superior Court, which will attempt to determine how much money should be given back to people who were swindled for four and a half years.

To date, over 12,000 people—and that number is a few months old—have signed on to the class action lawsuit authorized by Quebec Superior Court Justice Dominique Bélanger on November 30, 2010, concerning gas price fixing between January 1, 2002, and June 30, 2006, in the aforementioned cities.

According to another interesting article, this time in *Le Soleil*:

Plaintiffs are seeking \$7.5 million plus interest as of January 1, 2002. In addition, they are seeking \$500 for trouble and inconvenience for each participant in the lawsuit, as well as \$1,000 in punitive damages. The Automobile Protection Association is also seeking \$250,000.

That should give a sense of the amounts of money sought by this class action. It is important to note that Bill C-14 does not address these concerns at all. Conservative members should not be saying that this bill will solve all gas price fixing problems. The bill might make retailers more accountable by imposing regular mandatory inspections of measuring devices, such as gas pumps, but it will not prevent the price of gas from going up right before a long weekend for who knows what reason.

I have said this a number of times in the House and I will say it again: every time I see gas prices jump and watch television reports about it, I am always curious about what could possibly have caused gas prices to jump by 5¢, 10¢ or 12¢ per litre.

Government Orders

When a representative of the association of oil companies explains on television that there is a problem in Iraq or an oil rig leak, it is always rather difficult to believe him. In many cases, the facts show that the price of a barrel of oil, given that we have reserves, was a certain amount when the problem occurred. As this amount has still not gone up, the price hike should come later, but that is not what happens. As soon as a problem is announced—and we never know if it is real—the price at the pump goes up right away and never goes down as quickly as it should. Thus, we have reason to wonder.

Getting back to Bill C-14, the fines that the courts could impose pursuant to the Weights and Measures Act would increase from \$1,000 to \$10,000 for minor offences, and from \$5,000 to \$25,000 for major offences. In the case of subsequent offences, a new maximum fine of \$50,000 and/or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years could be imposed. I would be surprised to see that happen.

There are some measures like this in Bill C-14 but, I repeat, that is not what consumers asked for initially.

The member for Westmount—Ville-Marie even said that the Liberal Party, in 2005, had introduced Bill C-19. There again, the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, which called for the creation of a gasoline price monitoring agency and more teeth for the Competition Act, were ignored. These two objectives were not achieved by the previous Liberal government, nor by the Conservative government. It is our responsibility to tackle this issue immediately.

• (1715)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I remember that in my region in northern New Brunswick, as in many other rural and urban areas in the country, the price of gasoline in 2004 and 2005 was over \$1.40 a litre. It almost reached \$1.50. The people in my riding could hardly get over it because for them, cars are an absolute necessity. There is no public transit in rural areas. People need a car to get to work. Workers in my riding, and in many others across the country, could not afford it. They saw the price of gasoline constantly rising. It levelled off for a little while, but then it started rising again.

So far as I can see, the bill now before the House does nothing to limit such drastic and illogical increases. I would like my colleague in the Bloc Québécois to state clearly whether this bill will solve once and for all the problem of drastic increases in the price of gasoline, like those we saw in 2004 and 2005.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question.

I see the same thing in my region, which is also rural. There is some public transit, especially in the largest city, Victoriaville. It is a very good system of public transit, but as soon as people leave Victoriaville, they have to take their cars. All the other municipalities in my riding are rural communities, and like my colleague who just asked me this question, we have to face that reality. People need their cars. It is all very well to talk about car pooling and other efforts to reduce gasoline consumption, the reality is that people often need cars to get to work. In fact, rural people often even need somewhat larger vehicles. They need a vehicle not only to get around, but also to move their farm machinery around. It is very expensive.

I agree entirely with my colleague. The bill does nothing to deal with this reality. It does nothing to prevent fluctuations. As I and other have said in the House many times, we should pass the Bloc Québécois bill that creates an agency to monitor gas prices. Then the oil companies would be forced to explain exactly why there are fluctuations in the price. They could not do whatever they like. That is what needs changing.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the example that the hon. colleague across the floor gave in terms of how the Competition Bureau actually worked. It really created a solution to what was a big issue in Quebec.

We do have a Competition Bureau. So I would ask the member this. Is it also not very important for his constituents to be comfortable and confident when they fill up at the pumps that they are actually getting what they pay for? This is, of course, what the bill is intended to do.

The Competition Bureau did an excellent job in terms of the member's issue, and now there will be an added comfort in terms of the accuracy at the pump.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I had expected that kind of reaction after giving the example of what happened in my riding. I said that the Competition Bureau had succeeded in doing a good job. I never question that fact. The problem is that complaints have to come in first, either from the public or from someone who has witnessed an incident of fraud in the form of gas price fixing. What we want to see happen—and something needs to change for this to happen—is for the Competition Bureau to be able to act much more independently. It should not have to wait to receive a complaint, in the same way that the police do not have to. When the police suspect something, they can set up a wiretap, for example, with a judge's permission, obviously. We are not talking about allowing just any old thing. The Competition Bureau could develop procedures in order to determine whether fraudulent acts are being committed, for example. That is part of my answer for the hon. member.

People in my riding are obviously particularly attuned to this because they have been defrauded. Everyone is very glad to be able to go and fill up at a pump with an accurate meter. That is why we are ready to see this bill go to committee, but it will not fix everything. Folks will still be watching the prices go up across the board for no particular reason, despite accurate gauges on the gas pumps. One can hope that the measurement is accurate, but that will not solve the whole problem.

Government Orders

•(1720)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, on the clarity of his remarks regarding the impact of a lack of oversight on consumers. The Competition Office should regulate these matters.

I would like the member to elaborate on the price monitoring agency proposed by the Bloc Québécois. Would it not be possible to transfer the responsibilities to be vested in the monitoring agency to the Competition Bureau so that we can better understand why such an agency is necessary and also attempt to define its role?

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Chambly—Borduas.

I would be happy to elaborate. If we go back a few years and if I am not mistaken, our former colleague Paul Crête was the first one to champion this issue in the House. He proposed the creation of a petroleum industry monitoring agency, because there was a desperate need for such an agency. People were at the mercy of the oil companies and their excuses. I gave a few examples earlier. The oil companies would give excuses about what was going on in the world: a pipeline in Afghanistan or Azerbaijan caused problems, an oil rig was hit by a hurricane off the coast of the United States, and so on. Any excuse might explain a price increase.

A petroleum monitoring agency would enable us to see the real reasons, such as the cost price and the profit margin at the refining stage. We cannot always get these explanations and understand them. They must be put together and verified by independent people who can advise consumers on what a fair price would be. If the fair price is \$1.05 a litre, even if that seems expensive, consumers will understand the reasons behind that price and will accept it. It is also possible that a litre could cost 90¢ at certain times of the year. Consumers want to be certain that they are paying a fair price for their gas.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me a few moments to ask a question. At one time, oil companies were each a single entity. They either made a profit or ran a deficit at the end of the year. Now each oil company has split itself into several companies, which allows them to make a profit or run a deficit—and we know they always make a profit—in various entities and increase their global profits, something that used to be impossible to do.

Does the government's bill address this confirmation, this assurance? We must have some control over the companies' ability to split up into several smaller companies and thus bring in larger profits than in the past.

•(1725)

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his second question. I did not see that in Bill C-14, but I think he makes an excellent, very relevant suggestion. This should be discussed in committee, if the bill makes it that far, which is quite possible. That would be one of the questions to consider. I am not certain that studying Bill C-14, which has to do with the accuracy of measuring gas at the pump, will be the best forum for discussing the oil companies' practice of splitting into smaller companies to spread out their profits. It would be very interesting to confirm that. The

government would have to do some very precise calculations of oil companies' profits. Everyone knows they are making billions of dollars in profits.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-14 today.

I wanted to start out by making some comments about the Bloc's initiative in Bill C-452, because I really feel that that is a game-changer. That is an actual solid response to a long-term problem.

The bill is a very short bill, but it basically amends the Competition Act to authorize the commissioner to inquire into an entire industry sector. As the previous Bloc speaker has pointed out, in order to launch an investigation under the Competition Act, a complaint has to be made, and that is essentially the problem that has occurred over the years. We really need the Competition Bureau to be able to act very independently and be very proactive when it sees price-fixing going on in the gas industry.

I have been dealing with this issue now since probably 1988, when we went from government to opposition in Manitoba, and my job was to ask a lot of questions every day about gas prices. We looked at a whole range of ways to deal with the issue. As a matter of fact, the Conservative minister in Manitoba at the time, Jim Ernst, who was very frustrated too, I might say, was determined to follow this issue through as far as he could. He was aware that there were already 125 studies on this very topic sitting on the shelves gathering dust. Nevertheless he went and commissioned another one, so we are up to 126 now probably, and at the end of the day that study came up with the same conclusions that all the others did, that yes, in fact there was price-fixing going on but the Competition Act would have to be changed in order to get a conviction. So we found that that was not going to be the route to go.

Once again, he was the minister and I was the opposition critic, so we were not exactly working together on the subject because I was asking him questions every day as to what he was doing about the matter.

That was the issue of the study. Then we looked at the regulatory options, and we were aware that in the Maritimes there were regulatory boards available, regulating gas prices, but we watched them closely over the years and found out that they were not the answer either, because in fact they tended to regulate simply to the highest price.

I think the public would be very supportive of a monitoring agency or a regulatory agency if in fact they were going to see a regulatory agency with teeth, one that was going to be able to reduce the prices and not just approve the increases. What we will find, if we look at the Maritime regulatory boards, is that they regulate up to the higher price, and that has always been my objection to that approach.

Government Orders

At the end of the day of course, the gasoline prices are pretty much dependent upon world pricing, world events and availability of supplies. When there are examples of refineries impacted by severe storms and hurricanes in the southern United States, such as Louisiana, when refineries are shut down because of weather, storms, explosions or work stoppages, there comes a shortage of product and that creates problems.

We have seen a huge reduction in the number of refineries over the years. In Manitoba, as recently as 20 years ago, I believe we had 2 refineries in the province, and today we have none.

● (1730)

So during this period of the early 1990s, when we were looking at the whole area of studying the issue and changes to the Competition Act and we were looking at regulating gas prices, we were also observing some other developments that were happening within the market. One was to look at possibly bringing gasoline through the port of Churchill because, as members know, we have a port in Manitoba that is very underutilized. However, we have some tanker farms up there where there are a number of tanks, which hold gasoline products that are actually shipped further north. And so, we were looking into the possibility of actually shipping them down to the south by rail.

We also had a number of independent operators who were taking advantage of a very low American price at the time. There was at least one in particular, but I think there were two or three. What this operator would do was drive down to Fargo or Grand Forks, North Dakota, load up from the pipeline there, truck the gasoline up into Winnipeg and sell it at perhaps 10¢ or 20¢ less per litre. It was a substantial amount. The point was that when we turned on the evening television news on a day-by-day basis, we would see cars lined up for blocks to buy gasoline from this gas station, which was being supplied by tankers that were bringing the gas up from the States. But of course this fellow could only operate to the extent of his ability to fill up his tanker truck and bring it back up. He could not get beyond supplying the gasoline for one or two gas stations.

We did look at perhaps expanding on that a bit and trying bring in more tankers of gasoline into some other stations, and we did encounter a lot of different problems in that the transfer of gasoline is certainly not done the way it used to be done years ago. Some of the members opposite who were on farms in the 1950s would know that gasoline was transferred from a little truck that drove to the farm. It would be transferred by a hose into a big tank and then transferred from there into the farm equipment, the tractors and so on. However, things have changed and we cannot drive into town or into a big city anymore with a big tanker truck and start selling gasoline out of the tanker. We did discover that was a fact.

So, we did look at all sorts of areas to try to act on behalf of consumers at that time, and it is easy to do when the prices skyrocket very quickly.

I want to take a minute to talk about the member for Pickering—Scarborough East because he is a long-time Liberal member in this House. We have had Liberal members today talk about this issue as if it were something that they had newly discovered and other members who think it is a big Conservative problem, that this problem only surfaced since the current Prime Minister and the

current Conservative government came to office and now this is all their problem.

The fact of the matter is that all through those periods of time that I spoke about earlier, the Liberals were in power, from 1993 on, and every attempt that was made to do something about high gasoline prices was thwarted. As a matter of fact, with regard to the member for Pickering—Scarborough East, his own Liberal caucus thwarted his efforts on many occasions, I believe. I used to hear him many times over the years, on the radio, being a champion of the consumer and trying to do things with regard to the Competition Bureau and trying to deal with competition and the price-fixing issues in this country, and he was getting nowhere with his own caucus, with his own government and with his own prime minister.

● (1735)

This has been a longstanding problem. Price-fixing is not something that is just peculiar to the gasoline industry. Since the mid-1980s to the present, we have seen at least two major initiatives on the part of the federal government against price-fixing in the real estate industry. The latest one is being resolved as we speak. Within a number of weeks, the real estate boards across Canada will be getting together to ratify a deal that was made to prevent price-fixing. If that deal is not ratified then, of course, they will proceed through court action.

There are anti-competitive activities that have been around in our society for many years and they have been allowed to foster over the years. It takes strong initiatives on the part of government and law enforcement to attack this and try to break it up, so that the public is better served by true competition.

It is not only real estate agents that have been dealt with over the years but the travel agency business and the property and casualty insurance business. I believe the Toyota Motor Corporation was challenged when it tried to set a fixed price. I am sure members will recall five or six years ago when Toyota tried to dictate to its dealers that in fact there was a fixed price, there was a no-haggle pricing and they could not cut the price. That was dealt with by the government in a positive way.

This is not exciting stuff for the average member of the public, but it is very crucial to a proper competitive environment in which business has to compete. A series of monopolies governing the country is not the way our system is supposed to be operating. We try a lot of things, like monitoring. People think it is a good idea, but we have proven it does not work. However, there are a lot of other things we could look at here.

I want to talk about some of the elements of this bill that people on our side of the House have found objectionable. I do not think we would have a problem if, in fact, these gas pumps across the country were being inspected by government inspectors.

I mentioned earlier that for many years in the province of Manitoba, and maybe some other provinces too, we had a system of random inspections of cars. If a car was bought today, owned for 10 years, it would probably be called in once or twice for an inspection and repairs would have to be made to keep the car in good shape to keep it on the road. People trusted that system because they knew it was government inspectors who were doing the inspecting.

Government Orders

Around 1995, the Conservative government of the day decided to turn the whole inspection system over to private garages. The economy was probably tight, they were not making enough money and this was a way to give them a bit of a cash cow. When cars needed inspecting, they would have to go to a local garage and it was up to the garage to tell the owners what was wrong with their cars. We have seen many terrible examples of gouging, where people have bought a car, taken it to a garage, and found out they have to spend hundreds if not thousands of dollars for repairs before they could put that car on the road. We have seen totally different examples of people who have taken cars in and have found out later from a friend in the business that in fact cars that are really not safe at all are being approved, are being certified as safe and being allowed to be driven on the road, because someone has an in with somebody or has a relative in the garage or dealership.

● (1740)

This system was brought in as a sop to the car industry, and overnight the price of used cars went up. We used to see \$50 cars, \$100 cars, back in the early 1990s. Then, overnight, because of the safety inspection system, the worst-looking car on the road was a \$1,000 vehicle.

After a couple of years, the CBC and other news outlets, based on complaints, started to do investigations of what was happening. They found all sorts of examples of gouging in Manitoba, where people were being taken advantage of. The CBC would take in cars that they had previously had inspected; they knew what was wrong with them. I will not mention the garages, but some of them hon. members would know, because they are nationally known chains. The cars would be taken to five or six different garages, and most of the garages, if not all of them, would find huge problems with the cars, when there was nothing wrong with them. That was a blatant example of gouging. Some of the garages lost their licences because of this. Then, a year or two later, a follow-up was done. They found still more cases of gouging. In fact, the second time around, some of the same garages that were caught the first time were cited once again.

Hon. members should know that we cannot get rid of the system once it is in place. The NDP, under Gary Doer, became the government in 1999. It did not get rid of this system and go back to a centralized government inspection system. In fact, it changed the safety inspection period, from two years to one.

As for keeping cars safe on the road, safety inspections are required only when we sell our car. If we have a car and it is sold three or four times in the first two or three years, it will have safety inspections over and over again. However, if we buy the car and drive it ourselves and keep it, we could drive the car forever and it will never be called in for a safety inspection. Potentially, we may have many unsafe cars on our roads. This is a result of turning a perfectly functioning system over to the private sector.

Let us take a look at what could happen and probably will. Members have already said that, if we are dealing with rural areas, northern areas, then we are talking about the private sector. Who will be doing the inspections of the pumps in Yukon? Who will be doing them in the Northwestern Territories, northern B.C., in rural areas? It

is a licence to print money. It is a recipe for abuse to have a system like this.

I also want to deal with some aspects of the weights and measures issue. But this is not the way to go. The public and the retailers would accept it if the government were to do the inspections. The inspections should be done over a period of time, but the government should do them. We should not allow the private sector to do these inspections.

● (1745)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this bill has come before us because over two years ago an investigation by *The Ottawa Citizen* revealed that, between 1999 and 2007, government inspections of over 200,000 fuel pumps found that about 5% of pumps delivered less fuel than reported on the pump display.

The government inspection data showed that about one-third of Canada's gas stations, or about 14,000 of them, had at least one faulty pump. Therefore, a motorist who fills up at various stations and pumps is likely being short-changed about twice a year.

The gas pump problems were exposed more than two years ago by a media investigation, and the government waited far too long to respond. Now the government is allowing thieves to keep what they stole over the past few years.

What is outrageous is that government potentially collected taxes from consumers who were paying for phantom gasoline. Talk about adding insult to injury. Talk about hot air.

Questions must be asked, but I have not heard any of them answered by the Conservative members in the House. Let me give a couple of examples.

Questions must be asked about whether the government earned tax revenues from the short-changing of Canadian motorists. If so, how much? Will this law-and-order government charge the criminals who stole Canadians' money?

I know that the member for Elmwood—Transcona has been here throughout the debate, and I wonder whether he even once heard the Conservatives acknowledge that they benefited from those tax revenues, and whether they have given any indication that they would be amenable to repaying Canadian customers who have been gouged by these faulty pumps.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the member is 100% correct.

I have been waiting to hear from one of the government members for some time, so that I could ask him questions. For example, I know the penalties are being increased under the Weights and Measures Act.

Under weights and measures legislation, we have the whole issue of odometer rollbacks. This is important. Everyone here understands what happens when unscrupulous people roll back odometers or replace odometers and sell cars that have 300,000 kilometres on them as 80,000-kilometre cars.

It is big-time theft. Yet, this is something that would be covered under the increased weights and measures penalties.

Government Orders

I would think it would be a good news story. I would think the government should be issuing a press release confirming that it is moving against people rolling back odometers. However, I cannot find anyone in the government to ask, because there are no speakers who want to get up and talk about this issue.

If anyone is listening over there, I would ask him or her to get back to me and let me know about this. Under this bill, are we taking tough action against odometer rollbacks that occur every day right across the country? The Weights and Measures Act is increasing the penalties by quite a substantial amount.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, the bill proposes a system under which all the inspections of these pumps would be done by the private sector.

The government is contending that the inspections will go up from about 8,000 inspections to approximately 65,000. But the reality is that the government itself will not be enforcing standards. It is going to privatize the enforcement.

I wonder whether the member has had assurances from the government that we will not end up with the oil industry policing itself. It seems to me that as soon as we privatize those services there would be nothing to stop the oil industry from setting up a full inspection system and looking after its own.

Could the member comment on that?

• (1750)

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely correct. Actually, it is worse than that: not only would it be privatizing the inspector services for gas pumps; it would also be dealing with wholesale petroleum, dairy, retail food, fishing, logging, grain and field crops, and mining. So the government has gone the whole hog. It did not stop with the inspection of gasoline pumps; it is trying to privatize inspection services in a whole host of other parts of the economy.

I have already stated the abuses that occurred when Manitoba privatized its car inspection system. Under the proposed system, this would be even worse. We are going to see the Manitoba abuses multiplied by all the other eight different areas in which the government is planning to privatize inspection services.

No one yet has been able to tell me how someone in a remote area will be able to afford to bring in a private sector inspector who can charge what the market will bear. We are not going to have much competition in many rural and northern areas. That is just not going to happen. We have seen that in other areas as well. Maybe the system would work reasonably well in a huge metropolitan area like Toronto, but it is not going to work in rural and northern areas.

Not only that, it is going to be a severe detriment to independence. This is all in favour of the big multinationals, the big chains. But the little mom and pop stores, of which there are fewer every year, are going to be hard pressed to come up with \$2,000 for inspection bills, which they will have to pay on a regular basis. Never mind that we have problems with ambient temperature and are not sure whether a lot of this calibration equipment is actually accurate.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has framed this debate in the naming of

the bill so as to give Canadians the impression that, once this becomes law, they will get a better deal at the gas pump and will not get ripped off anymore. Actually, this is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to consumer protection, particularly with respect to the oil and gas industry.

All along the way, we see the present government and the previous Liberal one offer subsidies to the oil and gas firms, regardless of the price of oil or extraction. Then, when the product moves all the way down the chain, the subsidies come along and the profits leave the country. Canadians become concerned when they see prices in their local gas stations all elevate magically together, while the price of a barrel of oil on the stock exchange has not moved at all. Yet the gas companies are asking us to believe that there is no conversation going on when the prices all of a sudden move in coordination in one town, but not in another town 50 kilometres down the road. This is our experience in northwest of B. C. We see this time and time again. I drive the highway quite a bit, because that is our job as members of Parliament, and the price will move 5¢, 10¢, or 12¢ in communities that are 20 minutes apart. Yet apparently there is no collusion.

Is that not what we should be getting at in legislation, rather than this window dressing that the government has offered?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, we have uncovered instances in the past where people who have worked in the gas stations have come forward and said that they had been ordered to change the prices. So this is well documented. They cannot hide this forever. There are gas station employees whose job it is to climb up and change the prices. They do this based on a phone call that comes from their management.

This is a well-organized effort. Somebody has to go out and document it and start taking the initiative. The Bloc's bill was a good start. I hope that somehow in this minority Parliament we can get this bill passed and start to see some more initiatives that would help to stop the collusion in the retail gas business.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-14, which deals with an amendment to the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act.

As my colleague before me, the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and Bloc Québécois industry critic, said, the Bloc Québécois will support this bill in principle. However, I would like to say that this has been a lot of work for not much result. I will explain why. If the government thinks that with this bill it has done a bold stroke of business, to bring the oil companies into line, that it has come up with the most important thing since sliced bread, it is sadly mistaken. That is why we will agree that it should be considered in committee, subject to our later position over the stages to come.

Government Orders

I listened with interest to the discussions—if I may put it that way, the puck passing—among the NDP members in their speeches and questions and comments. Those discussions were very appropriate, very much on point, and very much in tune. My NDP colleagues have also recognized the private member's bill introduced by my colleague in the Bloc Québécois. However, everyone will acknowledge that Bill C-14 does not allow for a direct response to the problems of collusion such as have recently been brought to light in Quebec, or for effective prevention of sudden gas price increases. The government thinks the solution is inspections of the pumps and penalties imposed by the courts, ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000 for minor offences and from \$5,000 to \$25,000 for major offences. We should not be fooled. Those fines are peanuts for oil companies raking in billions of dollars in profits. I certainly do not think the oil companies deliberately alter the way the pumps work, to steal a half-cent more per litre sold from us. I certainly do not think that is done. But we do agree that there should be more in-depth inspections. We are not against motherhood, any more than we are against apple pie. With fall upon us, we all agree that apple pie is a good thing. During apple season, I have the apple growers on Île d'Orléans and Isle-aux-Coudres in my riding, and they are very skilled and efficient.

All kidding aside, this is not the discovery of the century. The Bloc Québécois would have expected the government to take responsibility, pull up its socks and address the root of the problem in the oil industry, namely collusion between companies. We did not expect to be told that the Competition Bureau looked into the situation and it cannot conduct an investigation itself because that requires accusations and well-documented cases. As far as the case brought to light in Lotbinière, Arthabaska and the Eastern Townships is concerned, fortunately someone from the oil sector blew the whistle. That is how we came to find out about this. However, it is just the tip of the iceberg.

• (1800)

The problem is much more serious. I hope no one will be surprised to learn that the Conservatives are doing nothing to rein in the oil companies and to discipline them. Just look at who is financing the Conservative Party. It is mostly the oil companies. Who needs tax benefits to explore and exploit the oil sands in Alberta? The Conservatives need the oil companies to finance them in the next election campaign as they needed them in previous elections.

Increasing the retailers' responsibility by imposing mandatory periodic inspections of the measuring devices is truly very important, without a doubt, but it is also highly ineffective. We were hoping and we continue to hope that the competition commissioner would be given more powers. The Bloc Québécois has introduced Bill C-452 as a clear response to gasoline price increases.

Mr. Speaker, I hope you understand. I know that your role as Speaker requires you to be completely neutral. You are listening to what I say. You can do two things at once: speak to your colleague on the left and listen to me. You are clearly talented. I will continue to address you, but I will also address the people watching us at home. Do they realize that in Quebec, increases in the price of gas generally happen on Thursdays, when people get paid? Increases can be seen before a long weekend, when there is a statutory holiday. Before Thanksgiving, prices in Montreal jumped by 10¢ or 12¢ just

like that. Nothing happened, and the price per barrel around the world is decreasing. Why did the price in Montreal jump by 10¢, 12¢ and even 15¢?

In the past, the oil companies would tell us that the prices were based on what was going on around the world, on the rising price of a barrel of oil, on the wars in Iraq and the invasion of Kuwait. Any excuse would do. We could understand it if there were instability in the countries that produce oil, or if something specific happened. But in this case, nothing happened. On the contrary, the price per barrel is decreasing, but the price at the pump is going up. That is what makes us say that the oil companies are gouging us.

I will give some more examples for the people at home and for my colleagues in the House who are listening. I do not think there is an equivalent in the other provinces, but in Quebec, the last two weeks of July—sometimes up to the beginning of August—are usually what we call the construction holidays. Hundreds of thousands of construction workers are on vacation at the same time. Generally, construction workers are people who work hard. They get up early, and they are at the mercy of the elements and the weather. They are subject to stress on the construction site, and must meet the deadlines on these construction sites, whether they are residential, commercial or industrial. They must complete the buildings and finish their work on time. In Quebec, construction workers take the last two weeks of July to unwind, and many take that opportunity to travel throughout Quebec.

• (1805)

In Quebec, we are naturally attracted to New England, the coast of Maine and the beaches. Some construction workers take long distance or interprovincial buses, some take the train or plane, but the vast majority generally travel by car. If my colleagues would like proof, they need only travel on Quebec roads during the construction holidays.

It is funny that a few days before July 15, 16 or 17, poof, prices suddenly go up. How can that be? What happens?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michel Guimond: Some NDP members did not like my “poof”. I do not know what else I could have said. Whether by magic or miracle, there is a major hike in gas prices on the eve of the construction holidays. Why?

Here is further proof of collusion. In a number of medium-sized or large cities, it is commonplace to have gas stations on each corner of a traffic circle or other intersection. I see my colleague from Trois-Rivières behind me. I regularly pass through Trois-Rivières as I travel from my riding, on the Beaupré coast, to Ottawa by car. I often stop to fill up in Trois-Rivières, a magnificent city with very welcoming people. There are often gas stations on every corner of an intersection.

She and I could go there together, stopwatches in hand. When one station increases its price by 3¢, 5¢, 10¢, 12¢ or 15¢ per litre, we could count the number of seconds that elapse before the other three increase their prices. Is that open competition? Why does Shell feel the need to increase its price at the same time as Esso? Why increase the price at the same time as Petro-Canada? Why do the increases happen almost simultaneously within a span of seconds? If we had real competition, one service station would charge \$1.038 per litre, another would charge \$1.019 per litre, and yet another would have a different price. Then we would have real competition.

Let us take a look at food and clothing. Food is a good example of a sector where we can compare the price of identical products. We will not look at products such as beer or milk, as their prices are regulated. I believe that they do not have the right to sell milk for a very low price. Milk is a bad example. Take, for instance, Oasis orange juice. If we checked with the four largest food chains, it is very likely that the prices would be different. That is true competition because there is not necessarily collusion among the four major grocers in Quebec.

And that is what we are seeing with gas prices, which is why I began my speech by saying that there has been a lot of work for not much of a result. Bill C-14 is better than nothing, but the government is not addressing the root of the issue. For one, we hoped that the government would use this bill to propose that the Competition Act allow the Competition Bureau to conduct inquiries on its own initiative, as I mentioned earlier, instead of always having to wait for a private complaint before beginning an inquiry.

• (1810)

In addition, the Bloc Québécois has proposed that a petroleum agency be created to monitor gasoline prices and respond to any attempt at collusion or unjustified price hikes. I gave our reasoning earlier. With this type of agency, we could act as soon as prices increase. Instead, the Conservative government keeps telling us—and it was no different under the Liberals—that there is nothing that can be done because the Competition Bureau found that there was no agreement among oil companies to fix prices; therefore, there is no problem. The Bloc Québécois was hoping that the bill would address the real issue.

On May 5, 2003, Konrad von Finckenstein, then the Commissioner of Competition, now chairman of the CRTC, told the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology that even though there were problems with the law, as Commissioner of Competition, he had no choice but to enforce it. Like us, he recognized that the law had loopholes. What we need is a government with the political will to take action and stop oil companies from doing this.

Mr. von Finckenstein said:

...while the Bureau's mandate includes the very important role of being an investigator and advocate for competition, the current legislation does not provide the Bureau with the authority to conduct an industry study.

That is basically the point I wanted to make. Once again, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, the Bloc Québécois industry critic, for his work on this file and for keeping the people of Quebec and Canada informed about loopholes with respect to the price of gas, loopholes that Bill C-14 does nothing to close, unfortunately.

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois supports the bill in principle and will send it to committee. We will see what happens after that. We should not just be talking about the system of measures at the pump and silly fine increases. Oil companies make multi-billion-dollar profits. This bill would fine them \$25,000 instead of \$10,000, yet they will have made millions using these tactics. We do not think that this bill goes far enough.

• (1815)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed the speech of the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord. He said the government refuses to do what is necessary to prevent large oil companies from increasing gas prices without valid reasons. Every spring and every fall, around the holiday season, prices go up worldwide, even though we are talking about oil that is already in stock. A few weeks later, it is still oil that was bought at a lower cost, but the price still does not go down for several weeks, or even months.

If we look at various studies, we see that consumers are treated badly. Yet, there is nothing in this government bill to put an end to these practices.

Why does the hon. member believe that the Conservatives refuse to protect the middle class and consumers, who constantly see their money disappear, because oil companies are abusing them?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for his question. That is precisely the principle to which I was referring earlier: One must not bite the hand that feeds. The Conservatives—that is not the case for the NDP nor for the Bloc Québécois—get hundreds of thousands of dollars in election campaign contributions. The \$1,100 limit is respected, but there are many \$1,100 contributions. The Conservatives receive funds from oil companies located in Calgary, in all of Alberta and in other regions. So, it is not true that the Conservatives will give more teeth to their legislation. A lax approach suits both the oil companies and the Conservatives. That is why they keep a low profile and do not make waves, instead of looking after the consumers' best interests, as the hon. member aptly pointed out. In the end, people cannot do without their cars, they have no other means to travel. They cannot go back to the horse and buggy days, before the automobile was invented.

For goodness sake we must soon have access to the electric vehicle to free ourselves from our dependence on oil.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member opposite a question, since he often insinuates that oil companies make financial contributions to certain political parties. If he has a list of the oil companies or other corporations that make such contributions, the police should be called and such companies should be pursued, because that is against the law.

Can he give us any names?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the House adjourns at 6:30 p.m. I will go get some documentation. I agree with the member—

Government Orders

Mr. Royal Galipeau: A name, a name.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, could you ask the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans to calm down? Perhaps it is because he is going to be on the losing side in the municipal election in Ottawa this evening, but I find him overexcited.

It is true that with the new legislation, Petro-Canada, Shell and Esso have not contributed to Conservative campaigns. However, I would like to point out that individual contributions of \$1,100 quickly add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars and millions of dollars in campaign contributions. That is how they do it. We just have to look at how the Minister of Natural Resources suddenly changed his story about the cocktail fundraiser, which he now admits he should not have attended. Those people contribute money to Conservative coffers. The guy gave \$1,000 but in return got a contract to renovate the West Block. The minister did not see any problem with that. However, on two televised current affairs programs last weekend, he said that maybe it was not such a good idea for him to go to that cocktail fundraiser. Now the tables have turned.

• (1820)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know whether the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques will give me a chance to ask him a question in English. I found him to be quite animated and frustrated. [English]

So I wonder if the member is frustrated because of the “gaspillage du temps de la chambre” to consider a bill of such insignificant magnitude. I say “insignificant” because it is typical of the government’s sound bite legislation.

Here it is, we are talking about the fairness at the pumps act as if it has been unfair and the government has noticed that it has been unfair for five years and has done nothing about it.

I know my hon. colleague used to sit on the industry committee, amongst others, and he heard government members saying that they had to do something about this, they had to introduce competition, and they have not done anything. Now they are talking about a criminal act taking place at the pumps and they are going to pass legislation to change it.

I wonder whether the member thinks this is part of the government’s crime and justice agenda. In other words, is this a sound bite but no bite?

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I see that my colleague was paying attention to what I was saying.

I sit on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, not on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. My riding is Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord. The hon. member is confusing me with my namesake from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. I sit in the first row. If he looks at the seating plan, he will see that my colleague sits in the fifth row. That is okay, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the effort my colleague from Toronto makes to speak French. His French is excellent. He is originally from Italy. We both have Latin roots.

Many of my colleagues in this House arrived here at the same time I did, in 1993. It was 17 years ago today that we were elected. He has improved his French by spending time with francophones in this House, just as my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster has. His French is extraordinary, but he studied at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi so it is no wonder. Other colleagues would benefit from speaking French like my colleague who just asked the question.

I simply want to say in closing that I would not go so far as to talk about wasting the House’s time because we live in a democracy and it is up to the government to introduce whatever bills it wants. We, as members of the opposition, have no choice but to receive the bills the government decides to introduce.

I am not perfect, but I am a democrat. We consider the bills the government introduces, even though they sometimes lack teeth. This bill has more the teeth of a chihuahua than a doberman.

The Deputy Speaker: There is only enough time for a quick question. The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed to see a bill that effectively does so little.

Just a few years ago, I was a critic on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, and the gas issue was very serious. Prices were fluctuating so wildly that an emergency debate was held in this House. I was in Vancouver with the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, and we had to come back for that debate. In the end, an election came, everything was dropped, and we never resolved the issue. The purpose of the bill that was introduced at the time was to give teeth to the Competition Act. I see that that is not the case here. It is all well and good to suspect that there could be collusion, but it has to be proven. I think my colleague demonstrated that. Could he tell us a bit more about that?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has only 30 seconds to answer the question.

• (1825)

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the only thing I can add is that both my colleague from Trois-Rivières, when she was on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, and the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, did excellent work on this issue. We are still waiting for a bill with more teeth.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-14.

First, I would like pay tribute to the person who is responsible for the little action that the government has taken in this regard, and that is the member for Windsor West. He is the one who raised this issue and has been pushing it and working extremely hard in the House of Commons. He is the one who has pushed the government to do the certain little action that has been brought forward. It addresses part of the problem, but as the member for Windsor West has said all along, it does not address the whole problem in any way. That is why we pay tribute to him for pushing the Conservatives on this, but we will need his continued efforts to ensure the government finally responds to consumers who are ripped off by the petroleum industry.

Adjournment Proceedings

Because of the huge gaping hole in the legislation, we could almost call it the gas price ripoff enabling act. It does not deal, in any way, with the problems of gas price gouging that we have seen. It has been very clearly indicated year after year. We have had a number of members speak in the House about what happens with old stock. World prices move, but on that old stock, prices all of a sudden spike up and they stay up. Even when the world price has declined and new stock is entering the stream in Canada, we see those old prices maintained. That means the average Canadian family is being ripped off through the course of that cycle. Millions of dollars are being taken out of the pockets of Canadian consumers.

I do not expect that the Conservative Party will take full action in this regard. The government seems to enjoy enabling ripoffs, whether it is the financial industry or the petroleum industry. We have certainly seen this with the telecommunications industry. Every time some company is willing to rip off the public, the Conservatives just seem unwilling to intervene in any way.

We can add to that the kind of actions the government has brought in, for example, the hated HST in my province of British Columbia. The Conservatives brought in the HST and added additional costs for hard-working middle class and poor families, forcing them to pay more for a whole range of things. Whenever British Columbians finally get their opportunity to speak to what the Conservatives have done against them, whether that is in a byelection or a general election, we will see a significant shift in those who may have voted Conservative in the past. They are not going to vote for the party that forced the HST on British Columbia.

As we well know, many Ontarians feel the same way. They feel the Conservative government having imposed the HST on Ontario, making people and families in Ontario and British Columbia pay more is something that deserves a response when they finally have the opportunity to give their voice to what the Conservatives have done.

I am proud to say our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, has stood up for Canadian families. He has called for the removal of the HST on heating fuel, as we approach winter. He stood in the House and he stood up for Canadian families in that way. This corner of the House will continue to press the Conservatives to start addressing the needs of ordinary working families, middle-class families and poor families rather than giving them HST or allowing them to be ripped off by the petroleum industry. They will have to start to listen to ordinary Canadians.

I will finish my speech tomorrow on the bill and what is missing.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member is right. He will have about 15 minutes and 30 seconds to finish his remarks tomorrow.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

● (1830)

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to follow-up on a question I asked regarding the white collar crime bill, which was tabled in the House, and specifically whether the Conservative government, in its rush to have a fancy title in an evening news cast, forgot a very important element of white collar crime, and that has to do with mortgage fraud.

I commend the efforts of the Conservatives to curtail white collar crime on paper and on the news cast. It looks okay, but I am glad to have another opportunity to discuss this subject, which is yet another Conservative bill trying to make people feel better about curbing crime without delivering the substance that could have been had with a more thorough bill being posited.

The fact is the bill would have done nothing for the victims of Earl Jones. It is nothing more than what is prescribed by law right now. The bulk of the white collar crime problem in Canada is the Earl Jones ponzi-type scheme and mortgage frauds, which are rapidly spreading across the country. The bill addresses neither. Choosing a flashy title for a bill does not protect Canadians.

The bill has a provision for a mandatory jail sentence of two years for fraud over \$1 million. How would this comfort the victims of Earl Jones, who was sentenced to 11 years in prison?

If there is another ponzi scheme out there today, this law does not affect them at all. Jones stole \$15 million from Canadians. He even stole from his own sister-in-law. I would think this situation should alarm the government enough to address that in its standing up for white collar crime act.

Victims of ponzi schemes are calling this bill insufficient. “It doesn't affect us at all”, said Janet Watson, a victim of the Mount Royal scam.

Of the hundreds of mortgage frauds across the country, almost none of them amount to \$1 million on their own. Most of the mortgage fraud costs are absorbed by CMHC in any event, which means Canadians are stuck with the horrendous cost of mortgage fraud. The amount totalled some \$50 million in one instance of repeated transactions involving Martin Keith Wirick in British Columbia. Is this not a serious enough crime for the government to address in meaningful legislation?

Why does the justice minister propose a bill called “standing up for victims of white collar crime” that has no effect on the predominant frauds of our country?

Will the parliamentary secretary tell us what provisions of the bill have helped the victims of Earl Jones' fraud and what specific provisions of the bill protect Canadians in general from fraud? I am looking for specific sections. That was the question before we recessed in the summer. That is the question Canadians are asking.

Adjournment Proceedings

If the Conservatives are going to call a bill “attacking white collar crime”, why do they leave out so much of the notable crime, so much of the crime that has affected so many people, particularly in situations like Earl Jones?

Will the minister seriously consider adding serious provisions that address head on the serious mortgage fraudsters and ponzi schemes that cause so much harm to honest Canadians, our economy and our reputation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak about Bill C-21, which deals with sentencing provisions in fraud cases and aims to improve them in many ways.

Canadians know how serious fraud is; how diverse, sophisticated and subtle fraud schemes can be; how difficult it is to uncover and avoid them; and how damaging the fraud can be for the person who is unlucky enough to be a victim.

That is why this bill is tackling fraud from various angles. First, it provides for a minimum two-year prison sentence for any fraud or series of frauds that leads to a loss of at least \$1 million. The courts recognize how serious major fraud is and appropriate sentences are handed down in those cases. But there are smaller fraud cases that can still be considered large-scale fraud, fraud that leads to more than \$1 million in losses but is not considered major fraud like some we have seen in the past. The government wants to send a clear message to would-be fraudsters, to the courts and to victims: this kind of fraud is very serious and deserves a prison sentence.

Bill C-21 provides additional aggravating factors that the courts must take into account when sentencing those found guilty of fraud. Aggravating circumstances include the following: the offence had a significant impact on the victims given their personal circumstances including their age, health and financial situation; the offender did not comply with a licensing requirement, or professional standard, that is normally applicable to the activity or conduct that forms the subject-matter of the offence; and the offender attempted to conceal or destroy records related to the fraud or to the disbursement of the proceeds of the fraud. The courts will also have to take into account the complexity, duration and magnitude of the fraud.

As I said, fraud is a general offence that may occur in all kinds of circumstances. Over the past few years, we have heard a lot about securities frauds, which were devastating and bankrupted hundreds of people. Recently, a massive mortgage fraud in Alberta made headlines. Just a few years ago, fraudulent telemarketing was all the rage. Cases of fraud have been linked to charities, contests, vacation packages and home renovations. The list is endless.

That is why Bill C-21 proposes general measures. It does not cover specific types of white-collar crime. As such, it includes all types of fraud. Any activity involving deception causing loss to Canadians may be considered fraud. Fraud charges can be laid regardless of how the deceit came about. Fraud charges can be laid in cases of mortgage fraud, title transfer fraud, securities fraud, fraud in the non-profit sector and health care fraud. Our Bill C-21 will cover all types of fraud.

● (1835)

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his work on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which is very much appreciated. Having said that, I would like to mention that the Earl Jones affair took place in his province of Quebec. That case occurred in Quebec.

[*English*]

I have a quote from Janet Watson, a victim of the Earl Jones scheme, who said Bill C-21 “doesn't affect us at all”. She said that it did nothing to respond to the largest fraud, the most notable fraud in that part of Quebec in recent history.

The member comes from Quebec. I hope he would have a more salient response for his people in Quebec who wonder why the government did not stand up for white collar crime.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Speaker, I wish to assure you that the fight against white-collar crime is a priority for the Government of Canada. Bill C-21, Standing up for Victims of White Collar Crime Act, deals with the very serious consequences of major fraud on victims, and ensures that all consequences of major fraud suffered by the victims, including financial, emotional, psychological and health repercussions, are fully taken into account when sentencing the fraudsters.

I would point out to my colleague that the largest, most recent case of fraud in Quebec is that committed by Vincent Lacroix, from Norbourg, who had interests in companies associated with the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec. The Lacroix fraud was even greater than that of Earl Jones.

I would like to point out that Bill C-21 will not only punish offenders, but it also provides for the court to consider making an order of restitution. What is very important is that, henceforth, there will be the possibility of restitution for victims.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as I said in my question of June 2, 2010, during the second world war, Canadian scientists erected at Grosse Île, near Montmagny, an ultra secret military laboratory to produce the biological warfare agent anthrax. The development of a biological weapon named “project N” was one of three war secrets along with research into the atomic bomb and decoding German messages.

One year before the Grosse Île experiments, the British had begun this type of research on Gruinard Island, in Scotland. It was a disaster. The island was contaminated and would stay that way until 1990. At the time, operations ceased, but experiments continued at Grosse Île. It was a very risky operation, as we just saw.

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A number of Canadian scientists who would be assigned to the project were opposed to Grosse Île as a site because the island was too close to shore. The scientists wanted to use a site at least 50 miles from shore. Grosse Île was only three miles from shore. The military ignored this scientific opinion.

It is estimated that roughly 439 litres of anthrax was produced, which represents the equivalent of 70 billion lethal doses, enough to destroy humanity 30 times over. At the end of the project, the anthrax was dumped into the St. Lawrence River.

With the help of the American and British governments, the Canadian government was the first mass producer of this chemical weapon for military purposes.

To summarize, the government's intention was to transform bacteria into a weapon of mass destruction. What is disturbing is that we are talking about a military secret that is over 60 years old. What happened to the anthrax? Were any tests done? Accessing the archives is very difficult and a number of documents have disappeared. For instance, some Department of National Defence documents were accidentally shredded. However, according to Thomas Stovell, a retired scientist from Toronto who worked in the lab, the leftover anthrax was mixed with solvents, left to sit for awhile and then tossed underwater.

Since anthrax spores can survive for about a hundred years and because people are worried, we would like more information about this disposal. On June 2, 2010, I asked the Minister of the Environment to tell us precisely where in the St. Lawrence the leftover anthrax was dumped. I believe it is the government's duty to get more information and conduct an investigation, in order to ensure that people are not exposed to a chemical weapon.

• (1840)

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his important question and I am happy to provide an answer.

First, the Department of National Defence does assign a high priority to its environmental programs and is committed to conducting its operations in ways to protect human health and the environment. The department is also committed to ensuring that its contaminated sites and hazardous waste are managed in a safe and prudent manner. We have been working very hard at that for situations that have piled up over the last 50, 60 or more years.

The health and safety of our Canadian Forces members, the Canadian public and the environment is an important concern in the day-to-day conduct of the work of the Department of National Defence.

During the second world war, Canada and its allies participated in a chemical and biological warfare program, as my colleague has suggested. This program was driven by wartime urgency and the need to build defensive capabilities against weapons that had been used with terrible results in the first world war, which was at that time still a recent and painful memory.

As part of this program, the production of anthrax on a moderate scale commenced at Grosse-Île in late 1943 and continued through August 1944. To ensure that no hazards resulting from the production of Anthrax remained, the Government of Canada conducted a thorough decontamination of structures and surrounding terrain at Grosse-Île to ensure that the site was free of residual anthrax before opening the site to the public in 1997.

Once the decontamination was completed, an interdepartmental expert committee consisting of representatives from Parks Canada, Health Canada, Agriculture Canada and the Department of National Defence determined that the risk of a residual anthrax hazard was extremely remote and work commenced to restore the site.

A documentary aired in June 2010 reporting that barrels of anthrax mixed with a solvent were dumped into the St. Lawrence River by the Canadian Forces after World War II. The department conducted a review of all wartime agent disposals in the 2003-05 timeframe and there are no records that corroborate the release of anthrax into the St. Lawrence River.

That said, based on the information in the documentary, if barrels of anthrax were dumped into the St. Lawrence River, we can rest comforted by the fact that if the anthrax had been mixed with formaldehyde, as reported, this procedure would have been effective in destroying the anthrax.

DND will continue to assess new information as it becomes available.

The Department of National Defence takes its environmental responsibilities very seriously. As a good environmental steward, the department is addressing past environmental problems to maintain the health of the environment, the Canadian people and our Canadian Forces members into the future.

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, I understand what the parliamentary secretary just told us, except that the expert committee he referred to was hardly independent. It was made up of departmental officials who tried to compile some of the available information, but as we know, some information has disappeared.

The parliamentary secretary said that no anthrax was dumped into the St. Lawrence. Yet in the report and the documentary he referred to, a captain, Captain Joseph Lachance, recalled being in an ice canoe and coming across a jug full of anthrax. What he said, basically, was that of course they did not know what was in it. And even if they had known, they would not have been allowed to talk about it. So Captain Lachance's claims contradict what the parliamentary secretary just said.

My question is simple. Will the parliamentary secretary commit to tabling here in the House all of the documentation in his possession?

*Adjournment Proceedings**[English]*

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, as we have pointed out, there is no evidence of the fact that anthrax was dumped into the St. Lawrence River and records have been checked, the best that are available. The other fact is that, as raised in the documentary, even if that did happen, according to the information in the documentary, the anthrax was mixed with formaldehyde which would have rendered the anthrax ineffective or not a hazard.

The committee of experts we are talking about were from Health Canada, which obviously takes great interest in the health and safety of Canadians, and the Department of National Defence which always takes the interests of the health of Canadians and the environment very seriously.

As I said, if there is new information that comes forward we will look at it, but right now all of the information suggests that the department has done its job and is protecting the health of Canadians and the environment.

HEALTH

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health said:

We are currently awaiting the results of seven clinical diagnostic trials....

If the medical experts agree that there is sufficient evidence to warrant clinical trials, then our government will fund them.

I would like to address the seven correlational studies being undertaken, question the need to replicate these studies and argue that there is in fact sufficient evidence to warrant clinical trials in Canada now and that our government should fund them.

In countries around the world, evidence now exists that 80% to 97% of MS patients show one or more venous abnormalities. This is higher than ultrasound or MRI because angioplasty, the gold standard, was used. These studies were undertaken in separate centres in space and time by separate operators and yet show similar results. Why will the government wait another two years for repeat studies?

Time is brain in MS and patients cannot afford a two year delay. Thirty percent to 50% of MS patients who are untreated worsen by one EDSS score in one year. Fifty percent with relapsing remitting MS later develop a progressive form of the disease for which there are no drugs, and up to two-thirds of patients experience cognitive impairment, which can affect daily functioning, employment and social life.

There is a well-known rationale for supporting an association between MS and venous obstruction, namely, MS plaques are venocentric, as identified by Rindfleisch as early as the 1800s and Putnam in 1935 who said it was "...almost inevitable that venular obstruction is the essential immediate antecedent to the formation of typical sclerotic plaques".

Increased iron content in plaques and vessel wall may be a biomarker of tissue damage and may be caused by changes in vascular flow and increases in intracranial pressure.

There may be as many as 48 categories describing the types of vascular abnormalities in the chest, neck and spine that have now been identified by Dr. Haacke, a world leader in diagnostic imaging.

These abnormalities include: stenosis in one or more major veins draining the brain; truncular venous malformations; lack of flow in one or more of the major veins; malfunctioning or stuck valves; reflux in the deep cerebral veins or the jugular veins meaning that blood flow actually reverses and travels toward the brain instead of draining to the heart; and other abnormalities.

Astonishingly, one patient was actually born without jugulars, the deep cervical veins substituted. In other patients the deep cervical veins and vertebral vessels are almost non-existent.

Over 3,000 procedures have been undertaken worldwide in over 50 countries. More important, neurologists are seeing their patients get better, with reduced brain fog, fatigue and improved circulation and motor skills, as demonstrated through improved EDSS scores.

As Dr. Zamboni, the pioneer of the technique, told the neurological subcommittee last June, the diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI are safe, had resulted in significant improvements in the quality of life of many MS patients and that clinical trials were needed.

Why is the government refusing to undertake clinical studies? Why not follow Canadian patients who felt forced to seek treatment overseas? Why lose this important data? Why not lead instead of follow 50 other countries and yet refuse to ask for their data and expertise? Most important, why ensure that Canadians be subjected to devastating MS for at least another two years?

• (1850)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to sincerely thank my colleague for her question. I know she cares about this deeply, as we all do.

It is a terrible disease that affects mostly young adults or is most often diagnosed in young adults, aged 15 to 40. Thousands of Canadians are currently affected by this debilitating disease and we probably all know someone. I know I do.

The disease does not just impact the patients. It also affects families, friends and colleagues and can take an emotional toll on all those surrounding the patient.

Many patients, as was said, obviously face difficulties at work as the disease can affect vision, hearing, memory, balance and mobility, making it often impossible to continue active life in the workplace.

Adjournment Proceedings

That is why the Government of Canada, through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, has provided over \$49 million in funding to date on MS research. CIHR has provided substantial funding to neurosciences and stem cell research, with many research initiatives focusing on MS.

CIHR also funds a great deal of research in related areas such as vascular disease.

All of these investments are building our overall understanding of multiple sclerosis toward more effective treatment and ultimately a cure.

One of the numerous research initiatives supported by CIHR is that of Dr. Brenda Banwell from the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.

Dr. Banwell's research team has focused much of its research on the effects that MS has on the developing brain. It is trying to determine whether childhood MS attacks can create lasting deficits. So far, Dr. Banwell's research has revealed that 40% to 50% of children with MS have some cognitive difficulties, particularly when it comes to multi-tasking and accessing short-term memories.

Dr. Banwell also hopes that the research at the SickKids clinic can help untangle the complicated interaction of genetic and environmental factors that potentially cause MS.

The House of Commons subcommittee has heard many different witnesses debate the merits of the recently developed chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI, treatment brought forward by Italian researcher, Dr. Paolo Zamboni.

It should be noted, however, that just a week and a half ago, at an MS conference in Gothenburg, Sweden, Dr. Zamboni himself indicated very clearly that more research is needed before patients proceed with surgery.

The Minister of Health and CIHR's president, Dr. Alain Beaudet, have been publicly encouraging researchers to submit applications to CIHR funding programs.

In addition, through CIHR's Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction and CIHR's Institute of Circulatory and Respiratory Health, the government has been consulting the research community on Canada's strengths and how to best contribute to the international effort to improve treatment of MS and evaluate CCSVI.

On October 19, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research announced the establishment of a working group of eminent scientists to review evidence and advise on a clinical trial. The first meeting is currently being planned for later this fall.

The government is committed to working with the provinces and territories to responsibly accelerate this scientific research. If the

research shows that clinical trials are both appropriate and advisable, the government will work with the provinces and territories to ensure that they are fully funded.

Meanwhile, Health Canada and CIHR will continue to work with the MS Society of Canada to advance safe, evidence-based research and innovation on this devastating disease.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Zamboni's position has not changed. He said we need more research and we need clinical trials.

Canada needs a registry and clinical trials that are undertaken in multiple centres across our country and that are sufficiently powered. Diagnosis and treatment standards must be established, including ultrasound and MRI, to identify any abnormality, and other MRI techniques including flow quantification, iron content and venous damage. And those undertaking the liberation procedure must be sufficiently trained and practised, like Dr. MacDonald, to ensure the best results for the patient. Patients must then be followed for efficacy, improvements in quality of life, and side effects.

Based on the evidence, the fact that more trials are about to begin in the States, that Saskatchewan is setting aside funds for clinical trials and that neurologists admit their patients get better, will the government do the right thing and support clinical trials for MS patients here in Canada?

• (1855)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, our thoughts do go out to all those who suffer from MS.

Just this year, through CIHR, we have invested \$5.4 million specifically for MS research. We are moving as quickly as possible, based on the best available science. We have established a scientific expert working group to monitor and analyze results from the seven MS Society-sponsored studies already under way in Canada and in the U.S. The terms of reference for this working group, along with the names of the Canadian members, are available on the CIHR website.

If the experts advise in favour of clinical trials, our government, working with the MS Society and provinces, like Saskatchewan and others, and the territories, will ensure they are funded.

We are committed to getting this right, but we really must get it right before we move ahead on something that we have some confidence will work. We do have to be sure.

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

(The House adjourned at 6:56 p.m.)

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