



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 16, 2010

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 16, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-594, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (voting hours).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a bill that I believe will improve democracy by expanding access to voting in Canada. This bill would expand the hours of voting in federal elections from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. in every province and territory.

First, this is an important measure to standardize voting hours across the country. For example, currently voters in British Columbia vote between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., whereas voters in Ontario have until 9:30 p.m. to cast their ballots. Most important, the bill would improve the ability of every Canadian to exercise his or her democratic choice.

Voter turnout in federal elections has been declining steadily since the mid-1980s. In the most recent election, voter participation hit an all-time low of 58.8%. More Canadians did not vote than cast ballots for the Conservatives and Liberals combined.

There are many reasons for declining turnout but one of them is certainly the barriers people face to voting. Canadians lead lives that are busier than ever. There are single parents and families with two working parents. There are seniors who must rely on others to get them to the polls.

Our democracy is valuable. It is worth protecting. Expanding voting hours is a small but important step and I hope all members of the House will support it.

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

PETITIONS

PASSPORT FEES

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petition, signed by dozens of Canadians, calls upon the Canadian government to negotiate with the American government to reduce the United States and Canadian passport fees. The number of American tourists visiting Canada is at its lowest level since 1972. It has fallen by five million visits in the last seven years, from 16 million in 2002 to only 11 million in 2009. Passport fees for an American family of four could be over \$500 U.S. While 50% of Canadians have passports, only 25% of Americans do.

At the recent legislative conference that I attended, representing 11 border states from Illinois to North Dakota, a resolution was passed unanimously, and it 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 the governments to examine the idea of a limited time two-for-one passport renewal or new application;

To be a fair process, the 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, to promote a limited time two-for-one passport renewal or new application fee on a mutual basis with the United States

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my petition concerns EI reform and the pilot projects that exist as of today and which will continue through until June. However, after June it becomes a big mystery as to whether they will be maintained or not, and certainly a mystery for many people in my riding because, if they are maintained, it will mean a lot for local and regional economic development.

We are still dealing with the ravages of hurricane Igor. I recently visited the Port Union and Trinity Bay North area where we discovered that many people are deficient in the number of weeks required to receive EI benefits. Therefore, we are also calling for a program to be put in place by the local agency, ACOA.

Routine Proceedings

In the meantime, this petition does concern the pilot projects, as outlined, that they should be permanently maintained. These names come from the areas of Twillingate, the New World Island area, and working in the plants, such as around Cottles Island, as well as Comfort Cove.

VIA RAIL

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, day after day, week after week, I continue to receive more and more petitions relating to reviving Superior passenger rail. Today I have several dozen more, wanting passenger rail service restored to the north shore of Lake Superior and to Thunder Bay. These are citizens in Marathon, Schreiber, Terrace Bay and other communities across the north shore, including Thunder Bay.

The VIA Rail route along the north shore of Lake Superior was cut over two decades ago, despite being VIA's busiest route. The petition is not necessarily related to VIA, but to any passenger rail service that will work to restore our local economy and to provide a vital transportation link across the north shore.

Cutbacks to passenger bus service and the cost of fuel across our widespread region make it even more important that we restore this passenger rail. It is also one of the most efficient ways to travel and it will be integral to reducing pollution, especially harmful climate change.

I am very pleased to introduce this petition today to restore passenger rail to the north shore.

• (1010)

SEEDS REGULATIONS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce a petition signed by dozens and dozens of citizens of British Columbia who support Bill C-474, a very important piece of legislation introduced by my colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior.

This petition draws to the attention of the House that the approval of genetically engineered seeds in Canada, which are not also approved in our export markets, can cause economic harm to Canadian farmers, as we saw with the 2009 contamination of Canadian flax with GE flax disease that resulted in closed European and other export markets.

The petition notes that unexpected and unwanted contamination from GE crops can result in economic hardship for farmers as a result of lost or uncertain markets and low prices.

The petition calls upon the government to amend the seeds regulations to ensure that any potential problems with GE seeds can be dealt with in an appropriate and responsible manner to protect farmers and our agricultural industry, both in this country and in our export markets.

I would urge all members of the House to take note of this petition and act accordingly.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have four petitions. The first petition is with regard to children's health and nutrition.

The petitioners note that the average 12-year-old boy is 14 pounds heavier today than in 1981, and that girls on average are 11 pounds heavier. They note that 26% of Canadian children aged 6 to 11 and 28% of teenagers are overweight or obese. Once children and teenagers get accustomed to eating unhealthy food, it is difficult to reverse this pattern.

Therefore, the petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to support my children's health and nutrition initiative, which would provide a daily nutritious meal of locally grown food to all school-aged children in Canada under the age of 18. This would combat childhood obesity, teach children about healthy eating and provide school-aged children a daily nutritious meal when they are in school.

• (1015)

G20 SUMMIT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, the second petition is from my constituents and it is with regard to the G20 summit compensation.

The G20 summit, which was held in the downtown core that encompasses numerous residents and businesses, was held during the peak period of summer and many businesses suffered losses and significant property damage. As well, the proposed security area stopped customers from accessing some businesses.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to compensate businesses for any property damage and loss of business because of the G20 summit.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, the third petition is from all across Canada and it is with regard to unemployment insurance.

The petitioners note that the so-called recovery still means that a large number of people are unemployed. It is important to have a social safety net to help regular Canadians through tough times and therefore reforms to the EI rules need to be made.

The petitioners suggest eliminating the two week waiting period, reducing the qualifying period to a minimum of 360 hours of work, allowing self-employed workers to participate in the plan, raising the rate of benefits of 60%, basing benefits on the best 12 weeks in the qualifying period and encouraging training and retraining.

RETROFIT HOMES PROGRAM

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, the last petition is from constituents in my riding who are very excited about the eco-energy program but note that the eco-energy retrofit homes program will be cancelled by March 2011.

They note that the eco-energy program has proven economic benefits to Canadians, that it has realized significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and that the decision to cancel the program threatens the entire industry of professional and associate renovation contractors across Canada.

The petitioners want the immediate reinstatement of the ecoEnergy retrofit homes program so that they can make a meaningful commitment to support the future of energy efficiency and green jobs in Canada.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, if Questions Nos. 405 and 418 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 405—**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes:**

With regard to requests for financial assistance made by communities affected by the forestry crisis under the Temporary Initiative for the Strengthening of Quebec's Forest Economies (TISQFE): (a) how many requests for financial assistance have been made since the initiative's commencement on June 17, 2010; (b) how many requests for financial assistance have been made (i) by each of the 17 targeted communities listed under the TISQFE, (ii) for each of the five programs covered under the TISQFE; (iii) by each of the 17 targeted communities for each of the five programs covered under the TISQFE, (iv) for each of the three initiatives covered under the TISQFE, (v) by each of the 17 targeted communities for each of the three initiatives covered under the TISQFE; (c) how many requests for financial assistance have been made by (i) small and medium-sized enterprises, (ii) small and medium-sized enterprises in each of the 17 targeted communities listed under the TISQFE, (iii) small and medium-sized enterprises for each of the five programs covered under the TISQFE, (iv) small and medium-sized enterprises for each of the three initiatives covered under the TISQFE; (d) how many requests for financial assistance have been made by non-profit organizations (i) in each of the 17 targeted communities listed under the TISQFE, (ii) for each of the five programs covered under the TISQFE, (iv) for each of the three initiatives covered under the TISQFE; (e) how many requests for financial assistance have been made by tourist establishments (i) in each of the 17 targeted communities listed under the TISQFE, (ii) for each of the five programs covered under the TISQFE, (iii) for each of the three initiatives covered under the TISQFE; (f) of the requests submitted for the authorization of the Regional Director, how many did the Director approve, and how many did the Director reject; (g) of the requests submitted for the authorization of the General Director for Regional Coherence, how many did the General Director approve, and how many did the General Director reject; (h) of the requests submitted for the authorization of the Vice-President for Operations, how many did the Vice-President approve, and how many did the Vice-President reject; (i) of the requests submitted for the authorization of the President, how many did the President approve, and how many did the President reject; (j) of the requests submitted for the authorization of the Minister, how many did the Minister approve, and how many did the Minister reject; (k) in cases where financial assistance was granted, what was the amount granted to each requestor (i) in each of the 17 targeted communities listed under the TISQFE, (ii) for each of the five programs covered under the TISQFE, (iii) for each of the three initiatives covered under the TISQFE; and (l) what was the total amount of all financial assistance granted under the TISQFE in each of the (i) 17 targeted communities, (ii) five programs, (iii) three initiatives covered under the TISQFE?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 418—**Ms. Judy Foote:**

With regard to the government's financial assistance to the provinces and territories through the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements (DFAA): (a) what is the total amount paid out by the government since the DFAA program began in

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1970; (b) what is the total amount paid out each year to each province and territory since 1970; (c) what was the total amount paid out to the province of Quebec as a result of the Saguenay flooding in 1996; and (d) what was the total amount paid out to the province of Manitoba as a result of the Red River flood in 1997?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PROTECTING CANADIANS BY ENDING SENTENCE DISCOUNTS FOR MULTIPLE MURDERS ACT

The House resumed from November 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-48, Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca has 19 minutes left.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on this issue that is of pressing importance to all Canadians, including those in my excellent riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Of all the issues we deal with, one of the most frightening for members of the public, naturally, is the issue of violent crime. It strikes fear in everybody. In these days of the 24-hour news cycle, everyone is aware of what is happening within our country from coast to coast. When bad things happen, everyone is aware of them.

It is important, although difficult, for us to try to disarticulate what we see in the media from the facts and to determine with an objective eye what is going on and what can be done to protect our citizens. As elected officials, our primary responsibility is to do what we can and must do to protect our citizens from harm.

Let us take a look. What are the most dangerous cities in Canada? In order of ranking, the first is Port Coquitlam, B.C., then Edmonton, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Vancouver and Calgary; then it goes down through Surrey, Halifax, Toronto and of course many others. These are the 2007 murder statistics.

Is the murder rate going up or down? Since 1990, with one small change a couple of years ago, the homicide rate has actually been in significant decline. Canada's violent crime rate is three times less than that of our friend south of the border, yet the incarceration rate in the United States is significantly higher than in Canada. In the U. S. about 0.7% of the population is in jail. In Canada it is roughly about 0.12%, which is a big difference.

The question is: What do we do and what should work in terms of dealing with violent crime?

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I would like to mention a few other things that may be of interest to members in the House.

In 2006, 2.45 million crimes were reported. Of those, 48% were property-related crimes and 12.6% were violent crimes. There were 594 murders in 2007, 12 fewer than the previous year. One-third of the murders in 2007 were stabbings and another one-third involved firearms. Of the murders involving firearms, handguns were used in two-thirds. Seventy-four youths were accused of murder. That is down by 11 from the previous year. The reason I mention these statistics is to put things in context to show the challenges we are currently facing.

There is a particular area that was not included in this data, particularly in terms of cities because the cities are small, and it relates to the north. In places like Nunavut, Iqaluit and Yellowknife, the rate of violent crime is at levels that would shock Canadians from coast to coast. Let us take a look at those levels.

The most violent regions in all of Canada that were not on the list are Iqaluit, Whitehorse and Yellowknife. In Yellowknife, the rate of aggravated assault is 350% higher than the average. In Iqaluit, the aggravated assault rate is 1,033% above the Canadian average. That is absolutely shocking. According to the RCMP, the rate of sexual assault is more than 1,270% above the average. Much of the north's violent crime wave involves sexual assault, and it defies easy explanation.

Let us take a look at something that is quite staggering. If we want to look at violent crime, let us look at what happened prior to that.

In Nunavut, one-quarter of all babies are born with fetal alcohol syndrome. That is absolutely remarkable. The average person with fetal alcohol syndrome has an IQ of about 67 to 70. Fetal alcohol syndrome is the leading cause of preventable brain damage at birth. This is one of the problems that exists in this area.

Another challenge in the area is suicide. In Nunavut, young women 15 to 24 years of age are 36 times more likely than other Canadian women in the same demographic to commit suicide. That is absolutely shocking. It is a situation that occurs far away in the north and receives very little attention, but it is a tragedy.

• (1020)

In fact, conditions exist in some of these areas, particularly in first nation communities in parts of our country, that I can tell members from personal experience are essentially equivalent to what we find in the developing world, in a third world environment. That is what we have within our borders, in Canada today in 2010.

Within the milieu of some of those communities in northern British Columbia in which I have had the privilege of working, I remember, while making a house call to a gentleman to perform a post-operative checkup, seeing a toddler of four or five years old with untreated impetigo on his face. While the child was standing there with this weeping infection on his face, his uncle was flopped over, drunk at 10 o'clock in the morning, and his father was drunk and swearing at me, as was his mother.

What kind of hope does that child have when he witnesses this kind of abuse taking place right in front of him? The child has little hope at all.

I have been saying this for 17 years in this House. If we are going to be intelligent and responsible to the taxpayer, in terms of doing what is necessary to reduce violent crime, then, rather than standing in the House and saying we simply need to build more prisons and throw people in jail, why do we not be smart about it and try to prevent the crime in the first place so that victims do not have to live in trauma for the rest of their lives as a result of being victims of crime? People may adapt to the situation they have been subjected to, but many times they never really get over it. They adapt to it if they can. However, why do we not try to prevent these kinds of horrors and trauma for the people who are being victimized?

How do we do that? It is very interesting. This is not rocket science. A lot of the evidence has been gathered, and I would hope the government really takes a look at studies that have been done before and find out what works.

In Ypsilanti, Michigan, the Perry preschool program has done a 35-year retrospective analysis on early learning head start programs. It asked what we need to do to reduce violent crime and what we need to do to reduce crime in general. It found that if a child were subjected to a number of interventions, it would help. Number one was home visits by nurses from the prenatal stage all the way through to the first two years of life, every one to two weeks. The mother is able to engage with the home nurse, in terms of the questions she may have, as well as the father, enabling them to develop proper parenting for the child. Single mothers, particularly teen mothers, who are isolated are at risk. They need to be selected and engaged quickly. Nutrition is critically important, as well as teaching proper parenting.

The other thing that worked very clearly, which is interesting, is that if the children were subjected to two-and-a-half hours of preschool time per day five days a week, up to the age five, before they went into school, it had a profound impact upon the outcome for those children. This costs very little. What is the cost-benefit of this when they did the cost-benefit analysis? In the Perry preschool experience, it was a saving of seven dollars for every dollar invested.

The same thing was done in Great Britain. There are a number of excellent studies that I would encourage the government to take a look at. There was the 1996 study called "Misspent Youth", from Great Britain; the 1998 study "Beating Crime"; and "Calling Time on Crime".

The government could take a look at the 1999 study done by the Montreal-based International Centre for the Prevention of Crime. In the United States, Lawrence Sherman did a meta-analysis of 600 programs. He and his team evaluated 600 programs, which had already done work in crime prevention, as to what works and what does not work.

The identification of families at risk, the early home visits, getting the kids into a preschool situation for two and one-half hours a day, enabling the parents to know what proper parenting is, dealing with substance abuse by the parents and reducing violence within the household are all absolutely crucial to changing the trajectory of a child's life.

Government Orders

•(1025)

The reason I am bringing this up in the context of this bill is that we are talking about violent crime. We are talking about homicides. We have to be able to reduce violent crime, and there are some very smart things we can do that will enable us to do that.

Simply building more jails, as seductive as it is on the surface, has been proven not to work. If it were going to work, then surely the United States would have a much safer country than ours, because they incarcerate far more people and have much tougher penalties, including the death penalty.

If that course were going to work, surely that society would be safer than ours. However, the reality is that it is not. There are many more people incarcerated, there is a much higher cost to the taxpayer and, from the public's perspective, people are not safer. They are actually less safe and subjected to more violence. It is a much more dangerous society than Canada's. Therefore, why do we not take a look at what works and implement the things that do?

There are other things we can do that work. One thing we should do, as I said before, is look at prenatal care, which is extremely important. We also need to deal with substance abuse. In the House, we occasionally spend time talking about marijuana. I do not support people using it. It is much stronger now than it ever was before. The THC content of marijuana runs around 36%.

However, if we look objectively at what does the most harm in our society, we will find that by any real measure it is actually alcohol. Alcohol causes many more problems in our society than marijuana ever does. This is all just a way of saying that, instead of being fixated on certain things that may be attractive at a certain level, we should look at ways to reduce substance abuse in general, whether it is marijuana, crystal meth, narcotics, alcohol or cigarettes. All are harmful and have an effect.

I can say from personal experience in emergency rooms that, for the number of people who have come in having done horrible things to other people, far and away alcohol was a mitigating factor. Whether it was a person who drove drunk and killed someone or a drunk person who beat up his or her partner, alcohol was a primary factor in all of that.

We need to try to tear away some of the myths of what we are talking about, deal with the facts and try to implement things that work. If we want to reduce substance abuse, which I know is a common goal for everybody in the House, why do we not take a look at reducing substance abuse with things that work?

The early learning head start programs work very well. They also reduce child abuse rates. Hawaii's healthy start program, which I would encourage the government to take a look at, would reduce child abuse rates by over 90%. That is absolutely staggering. The program identified families at risk, brought in mentors who were usually women who had children, engaged parents who could be at risk, worked together to teach proper parenting and proper nutrition for children and enabled children to live in a loving and caring environment, dramatically changing the trajectory of the children's lives.

We have the science to prove it. Dr. Julio Montaner, Dr. Evan Wood and others at the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS at St. Paul's Hospital have done some incredible work with neurologists from other parts of the world. In fact they can prove now that one can look at a developing child's brain and see that it is developing well if the child is subjected to a loving and caring environment, free of sexual abuse and violence, and has security. Whereas if a child is subjected to those terrible things, one can see that the neural connections in a child's brain happen slowly or do not happen adequately. As a result, the child is at a much higher risk of committing a crime later in life.

I hope this is something the government will take a look at. If it is interested in reducing crime and interventions like the early learning head start programs work, what exactly does it do in terms of crime? This is what was found. Those kinds of programs reduce maternal arrests by 69%, they reduce child abuse rates by 80% in the studies that were done to age 15 and they reduce youth crime by 66%. If there were a program that saved the taxpayer anywhere between \$7 and \$11 per \$1 invested and reduced youth crime by 66%, surely the government would work with the provinces to implement this, because all of this entails working with the provinces.

•(1030)

That makes sense from a humanitarian perspective, it makes sense to reach our objectives, and it makes fiscal sense. The cost-benefit analysis has been done. The evidence is in. It requires action. The government can use a convening power and its fiscal tools to work with the provinces to be able to achieve this objective.

It staggers me, quite frankly, that the government does not do this. It would look good doing this and it would be serving the public in what it is doing. This is my way of saying that these interventions work very well.

On the issue of drug policy, if the government wants to sanction people taking illegal drugs and thinks that is going to help to make our society safer, then it is delusional. All it needs to do is look south of the border to see what has happened in terms of the Americans' war on drugs approach. In fact, a number of states have actually decided very clearly that this does not work. That is what the facts tell them. The war on drugs is a failed war. It does not work. It has never worked and it will not work. In fact, rather than thinking it does work, it actually makes society less safe. It is more costly, does more harm, increases use and makes our society less safe. These are all outcomes that we do not want to have.

What does work? We can take a look at Portugal. Portugal actually liberalized its drug laws. What did it find? It found less drug use, less cost, less harm and less violence. All of that worked very well.

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I would strongly encourage the government to work with the provinces and liberalize the drug laws, because the war on drugs that we are seeing is actually a war that we see on the streets. Many of the murders that we have found in my province of British Columbia have been rooted in drug wars, organized crime gangs fighting over drug territory.

If the government wants to attack organized crime, one of the most effective ways to do that is to go after the financial underpinnings. We can take them out by going after their finances. We can go after their finances by changing the drug laws. If we change the drug laws, that is the worst news for organized crime in this country. That would be a hammer on organized crime. I strongly encourage the government, which says it wants to get tough on crime, to look at drug policy as a way to get tough on crime. If we change the drug laws, we would actually be undermining significantly organized crime gangs. We will not be increasing drug use either. Nobody wants that and it is absurd to think otherwise.

Lastly, on the police, there are a number of decisions that have come down, the McNeil decision and others, that are really harming the ability of our police to do their job. These decisions put the police on trial instead of putting the accused on trial. It makes it very difficult for our police to do their job. They do a yeoman's job across our country. Whether it is the RCMP or other police forces, they do an incredible job for us and we have a huge indebtedness to the men and women who serve us every single day.

I really implore the government to take a look at the crime prevention initiatives that work. We have more than 30 years of experience. The cost-benefit analysis is there. It will reduce crime, it will reduce harm, it will reduce violent crime, and in that we would be doing our job.

• (1035)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his speech. It is the first time I have had this discussion with the hon. member, who will not be running in the next election. I want to say to him that he certainly has been a great inspiration on all levels in the House, and for me as a fairly new member of Parliament back in 2004. For that I thank him.

I want to talk to him about this issue that he speaks of so passionately and has done so for as long as I have been here. On the surface, he talks about this piece of legislation and how it deals with the idea of discounts, which on the surface I do not have a problem with.

However, the member brings up many aspects of the core of the problem. One of the issues regarding drugs is that we do not put enough emphasis on harm reduction, which is something that has been debated for quite some time, through Europe especially right now and all over the world.

Harm reduction seems to be thrown aside for the sake of increasing the amount of penalty for individuals involved in crime. Perhaps the member could talk about harm reduction.

Also, over the past few years we have not seen a lot of vision when it comes to the reduction of crime before the crime actually begins, to use the vernacular. So I thank him for his intervention.

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my friend for his very kind and gracious comments. He really serves his constituents well and will continue to advance the issues that are important not only to his constituents in Newfoundland and Labrador but also to Canadians from coast to coast.

The member is absolutely right in terms of harm reduction. It is unfortunate that the evidence-based harm reduction policies that work, such as the Insite program that Dr. Montaner and his team have run out of St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver, or the NAOMI project, which is an acronym for the North American opiate medication initiative, are not embraced.

Essentially, the NAOMI project is a drug substitution program for narcotics. It has enabled people to actually get on with their lives, to stop taking drugs or to have their drug issues managed, which has led to a reduction in crime or a reduction in harm. It has led to people become productive members of society and get back with their families.

Rather than taking an ideological approach, as the Prime Minister has in the past on this, I would strongly encourage that he becomes educated about this. There is great work that has been done in Canada. Communities from coast to coast need to have access to those programs.

Rather than impeding access to those programs, I hope the Prime Minister and the government will become facilitators to those programs for the communities that would like them.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's very passionate and well-reasoned statements on liberalizing drug policy in this country.

I am left somewhat puzzled, though, because that is absolutely not what is under debate at the moment. We are discussing Bill C-48, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to the National Defence Act.

"Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act" is the name of the act and the issue under debate right now is whether we should give judges in this country discretion to provide sentences for multiple murders that are consecutive, not concurrent. I did not hear my friend address any comments to that.

I wonder what the member's position is on the matter under debate. Does he think judges in this country should have the discretion to give consecutive sentences for multiple murders or not?

• (1040)

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, the rationale for my intervention is really to take advantage of this opportunity to talk about how to not have people committing murders in the first place and how to not have victims of violent crime.

The intervention that I have put forward was really a plea to the government. I hope members from all parties will be able to adopt those interventions that have been, and are, useful in terms of preventing the horrible victimization that occurs in our society.

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Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for talking a little bit about the root causes of crime, because if the government is going to get tough on crime, it has to understand why it happens.

The member also spoke about fetal alcohol syndrome, which is now called fetal alcohol spectrum disorder because it has broadened. Back in 1997, the Provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba did a study and a review of their prison systems and the inmates there. They found, startlingly, that 50% of the inmates in their prisons suffered from mental health disorders related to alcohol taken by a mother during pregnancy. That was also confirmed by Anne McLellan, our federal minister of justice at the time.

I would ask the member to elaborate just a little bit further on the need to be tough on crime, but to understand that there are crimes in which rehabilitation of the perpetrator is not possible and that our institutions are failing people who have mental health disorders.

Rehabilitation for people with mental health disorders is learning how to cope with their problem. Institutionalization and assistance, not rehabilitation in a jail, is appropriate.

Would the member agree that the argument also shows why building more jails is not actually necessary, that there is enough room in our jails for the real criminals, and that what we have to do is make sure that in our jails there are not people who should not be in those institutions?

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, I would like to honour my colleague for all his tireless work on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. He has been a champion to deal with this challenge since he was elected in 1993. I honour and thank him for his service in tirelessly bringing up this issue.

He is absolutely correct, and as I mentioned before, in Nunavut, one quarter of all babies are born with FASD. On the streets of Victoria, for example, there are about 1,450 people on the street. Two-thirds of those people have what we call dual diagnosis, which means that they have a psychiatric problem and they have a substance abuse problem. These conditions often go hand in hand. One sometimes occurs first, but they can shift back and forth. The tragedy of it is that we are not dealing with this properly.

People who commit violent crimes must be in jail to protect society, there is no question about that. We support that, but what we are trying to do is prevent that from ever happening. The member is absolutely right that, for too many people, the institutions are not available. There are some people who simply cannot take care of themselves. Rather than suggesting that they just go out in the community where there are not the community services for them, enable them to have an institution where they can live in peace and security and get the care they require because they cannot live on their own and there are not the resources, frankly, to be able to provide them to live on their own. What happens is that they fall through the cracks and they wind up on the street and doing a number of things that they should not do or should not feel compelled to do.

Why not be smart about it and address the issues of psychiatric challenges and substance abuse in an intelligent, fact-based way and

in a medical way? These are medical problems, not judicial problems.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the previous speaker. I have a difficult question for him. In his opinion, what is the Minister of Justice trying to accomplish by introducing such a bill?

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for his question.

[*English*]

It is unfortunate that a significant bulk of the government's bills have been justice bills to make the Conservatives look "tough on crime" to the general public because it is politically advantageous. The tragedy is that in the process of so-called looking tough on crime, it is not effective on crime. It is actually making the country less secure and harming the public. The irony is that while it can be portrayed from the government's perspective that it is introducing bills that are going to keep people safer because it is tough on crime, the reality is that it does not happen. These bills are going to make Canadians less safe and less secure, and that is the tragedy of it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will begin by saying that the Bloc Québécois intends to support this bill at this stage. However, I still think this bill is useless, because our system is perfectly capable of taking into account aggravating circumstances around crimes such as multiple murders, which are perhaps more serious than single murders. I say "perhaps" because some single murders are more serious than multiple murders. I will give some examples in a moment.

All this bill does is delay the possibility of early parole. For a convicted criminal to obtain early parole, a judge has to give him permission to go before a jury and explain why he should get parole. Then, the decision is made by another jury. Clearly, this other jury, like the judge, will consider whether there were two murders or just one. Some single murders are more serious than double murders.

For those who have just tuned in, we are discussing the possibility of amending the Criminal Code so that in the case of multiple murders or murders committed by someone who has already been convicted of murder, eligibility for parole will be delayed, for reasons that can be explained. Multiple murders fall into one of two categories: those that are committed at the same time and those that are committed by someone who was previously convicted of murder. In any event, the sentence for murder is life in prison. We will not do silly things as they do in the United States, where people are put away for several hundred years just to impress the public. However, it is possible to delay eligibility for parole.

Here is how the judge will proceed. When he hears a case involving multiple murders, he must first put the following question to the jury:

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You have found the accused guilty of murder. The law requires that I now pronounce a sentence of imprisonment for life against the accused. Do you wish to make any recommendation with respect to the period without eligibility for parole to be served for this murder consecutively to the period without eligibility for parole imposed for the previous murder? You are not required to make any recommendation, but if you do, your recommendation will be considered by me when I make my determination.

So, the jury that heard the case can give its opinion, since it is very familiar with the circumstances surrounding the murder. If the judge ignores their recommendation, he is required to justify his decision. Once again, I completely agree with this. As far as I know, when judges render a decision they must provide their reasoning. The bill states that this must be done orally or in writing. I obviously do not object to this part of the bill. However, I find that it is completely pointless.

As we say, plenty is no plague. But we also say that the perfect is the enemy of the good. In this case, I agree more with the first proverb that plenty is no plague. Forcing judges to do something they would already do seems pointless to me, but it does no harm.

● (1050)

We must understand in what context these decisions are made. Mr. Sapers, the Correctional Investigator of Canada, testified before a Senate committee regarding the provisions that allow for early parole, even for individuals sentenced to life in prison. He said:

...the average time served in prison for first degree murder in Canada is 28.4 years. By comparison, the average time served for the same sentence in New Zealand, Scotland, Sweden and Belgium is approximately 12 years. The time served in Canada is already greater than that in most other advanced democracies, including the United States....

Anyone who follows our debates will probably know that the United States is the country that incarcerates the highest number of people, per capita, in the world. But we hold the record on this. If this bill passes, Canada could beat the United States when it comes to the average length of a life sentence. The average length of a life sentence with possibility of parole is 18.5 years in the United States. Members should note that these American statistics do not take into account sentences for which there is no possibility of parole.

Mr. Sapers spoke about what kind of offenders this applies to:

Offenders serving a life sentence in Canada automatically spend at least the first two years of their sentence at a maximum security institution, regardless of their assessed risk. In Canada, a life sentence does, in fact, mean life. Offenders with a life sentence released into the community are supervised until the time of their death.

That is how we know that they do not reoffend. Only in one case of murder was another serious crime committed.

Relative to many other countries that Canada often compares itself to, offenders convicted of first degree murder in this country are already serving a more punitive sentence.

Therefore, I find these provisions to be pointless, especially when we consider the process for obtaining the right to apply for parole to the Parole Board prior to serving 25 years. First, the offender must submit an application to a judge and prove that it is likely, or that there is a substantial likelihood, at least by the preponderance of evidence, that a jury would grant leave to apply. Next, a jury is summoned and it must agree unanimously that the offender may have a hearing before the Parole Board.

Although this system is rather cumbersome, in my mind it is fully justified because, since 1987, only 150 people have been given the right to apply to the Parole Board prior to serving 25 years.

Therefore, this bill would apply to relatively few cases. Even without this bill, such applications would first be considered by a jury that would determine the prisoner's eligibility to apply to the Parole Board, and then by the Parole Board members before parole was granted. The result would be virtually the same. However, as I said, because the discretion of judges is not being restricted, we are prepared to support this bill.

To be clear, we do not consider ourselves to be soft on crime or hard on crime. I really like an expression I heard for the first time when the current Leader of the Opposition gave one of his first speeches in the House, from the bench behind me. He said that it was not about being soft on crime or tough on crime, but it was about being smart on crime and applying the law intelligently.

● (1055)

Everyone understands that the sentences handed down are not determined by just anyone. They must be determined by independent, competent people. Remember that a judge does not live in a bubble; judges read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch television and keep informed. Like many of us, they are perfectly aware of how opinions evolve and of the real dangers threatening society. Based on my experience as a lawyer, I can say that some judges are far tougher than the average member of the public, while others, it is true, are less tough. However, they are all independent and do not need the public's approval, as we do, in order to keep their position or have their mandate renewed, as is the case for members here. Everyone knows that this independence is an important and necessary quality.

In addition, it must be understood that objective factors are important for a judge or anyone else who is handing down a sentence. For example, it is obvious that killing two people is more serious than killing one. But subjective factors also need to be taken into consideration during every sentencing. Why did the person do this? Is it obvious that the person was already leading a criminal life? Their criminal background is considered. What was their motivation? Were they led into this crime by other people? Because, I want to point out that someone can be found guilty of a murder that they did not personally commit but that they were complicit in. Sometimes the accomplices are not as monstrous as the people who committed the crime, but that is not always the case.

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I want to give an example that has always stuck with me. “Mom” Boucher, head of the Hells Angels for years, was convicted of the murder a prison guard, a crime that he did not commit himself but that he had ordered or encouraged. The person who committed the murder stopped a prison bus and began shooting, killing one person. When he tried to shoot the other person, the gun jammed and they took off on their motorbike. He was found guilty of one murder instead of two.

Look at the family tragedy that took place last year in Lac Saint-Jean. Desperate parents had asked for help from other family members. No one could have known that their lives would end in such a horrific fashion. These were people who had never been involved in any sort of criminal activity. They were so desperate that they decided that the whole family had to die. In my view, this is a decision that seems to fall within the realms of both psychiatry and justice. If the woman who survived was put on trial, it was because it was found that she was not mentally ill to the point where she was not criminally liable.

I agree that, in order to acquit someone of a crime by reason of insanity, the mental illness must be fairly severe. These parents purchased enough drugs so they could take some themselves and give some to their children.

• (1100)

The husband died. The two children died. The wife survived. It is a multiple murder. Everyone would subjectively agree that Mom Boucher's attitude was much more serious than the attitude of this woman.

When it comes down to it, a balance must always be found when convicting someone of a criminal offence or imposing a sentence on that person. There are objective criteria, which are those that must be set out by Parliament; however Parliament cannot be expected to determine all of the subjective factors that could arise in each case. That is why we need the people who impose sentences to be fair, educated in matters of law and, above all, independent. They examine all sides of the issue and render a judgment. We would like to invent a system for imposing sentences that would do that reliably.

If the Bloc were opposed to this, then I would oppose the Bloc. However, I personally believe that such a system—one in which independent judges determine the appropriate sentence in specific cases—is fair, and that sentences should be individualized as much as possible. Apparently, this is not what the government thinks.

That is basically why, in this case, we agree on the bill. We think it is unnecessary. It will apply to only a very small number of people. Since 1987, only 150 people have been granted parole before 25 years were up. This shows that those provisions are applied very cautiously. However, it is good for the government to be able to say it is tough on crime. That is the main objective. Our Republican neighbours to the south have taught us how to win elections and so we are still adopting these provisions. Personally, I think that is the main motive behind a bill like this one.

Quite frankly, despite the contempt I have for their motives, I nevertheless recognize that this bill certainly does not do any harm, because it still allows the judiciary sufficient discretion. The minister is always telling us that wherever he goes in public, everyone always

talks to him. I would remind the minister that perhaps a jury—since a jury must be involved—is also representative, even more representative of public opinion, compared to people who show up to say a few words to him when he appears in public.

Since it will be decided by a jury and since the provisions are not mandatory for judges who, if they make an exception, must justify it—which is only right and what they already do—we will therefore support these provisions.

Once again we are confident that our position is not based on ideology, unless people believe that defending the fact that sentences should be not only dissuasive, but also fair, individualized and determined by well-informed, independent judges is ideological. If that is ideological, then many other countries share our ideology. I have already mentioned an interesting fact about other similar countries. Mr. Sapers listed them. In other countries, like New Zealand, England and Belgium, the average sentence served by individuals convicted of murder is 12 years. Here it is 28.4 years. So it is safe to say that we are well above the average.

• (1105)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member in question said that the government boasts about being tough on crime. That is because we are tough on crime. We always have to look for consensus on that, but nobody would suggest the Bloc is tough on crime. I think we can all agree on that.

Certainly, what we have heard from members of the Bloc over the last couple of days, and indeed throughout this Parliament, is entirely consistent with that. They opposed the faint hope clause, the loophole for lifers, the bill that we brought forward to reduce the victimization in this country. The Bloc was against it.

Bloc members have a problem with this consecutive parole ineligibility. The hon. member talks about ideology. I say to him, do not be so ideological and not have a look at what victims are saying.

I am trying to find out exactly where the Bloc members are, and I appreciate this is not confined to the Bloc, and that the Liberals are on this bandwagon. If the hon. member checks *Hansard*, yesterday his colleague spent most of his time attacking the short title of the bill. I just want to know, is this where the Bloc is going in the next federal election? Will Bloc members say that when it comes to crime, they have their priority, which is to spend all their time worrying about the titles of bills? That is it. That is what the Bloc stands for.

That is not what the government stands for. Those are not our priorities. I wonder if the hon. member could address that. Is this the new priority? I appreciate it is not just confined to the Bloc. I want to make that very clear. I appreciate the Liberals have this hang-up as well, but that is what most of the speech yesterday from his colleague was all about, the short title of the bill. Is this the new priority for the Bloc? Is this where the Bloc will concentrate in the justice area?

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I was not here yesterday. I do not come to the House on Mondays. I am at the House from Tuesday to Friday and others are here from Monday to Thursday.

The reason we object to certain titles, if the minister must know, is that they are propaganda, if not lies.

I will give a clear example of a dishonest title. I think it is referred to as the “Ending house arrest for...serious and violent offenders act”. However, the current legislation applies only to sentences of more than two years. I submit to the minister that when individuals are violent and dangerous, they are sentenced more than two years. Furthermore, under the current legislation, a judge's primary consideration in sentencing a person to house arrest is that the individual is not a threat to public safety. Need I convince the minister that violent and dangerous people threaten public safety and that, accordingly, if judges were to use these provisions to release violent and dangerous offenders, they would be disregarding the legislation as it currently exists?

The minister has the nerve to claim that Canadian judges are violating the law and releasing violent and dangerous offenders who threaten public safety. It is an insult to the judiciary and an absolute lie.

Many of the government's titles are nothing but propaganda. No, I will not tell the voters that we are focusing all our time on titles, but I will certainly tell them that your titles are dishonest.

•(1110)

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to ask the member who has just given this very good speech if he does not think the Minister of Justice, who just intervened, was blowing a lot of hot air, given the fact that the subject of debate yesterday was set by the government? It was a Conservative member who moved the motion to reinstate the short title of the bill. The opposition did not set the subject matter of yesterday's debate. It was the government itself. I could not resist responding to that artificial, plastic, misleading suggestion by the Minister of Justice that somehow it was the opposition that had set up the subject of debate yesterday.

This is a process question as opposed to one on the substance of the bill. Would the member not agree that we would be further ahead if the government had simply introduced one criminal law amendment bill with a half dozen of these changes instead of doing a separate bill for every little change and putting into each bill a short title that had a politically over-torqued commercial for whatever the Conservatives' political agenda is? Then all of these subject items would probably be law and passed by now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Madam Speaker, I am convinced that the government has set its legislative agenda this way in order to score political points by presenting these bills. The government always tries to get us into trouble when we try to explain that the harsh sentences it proposes in a certain bill are justified in the most serious cases, but there are also less serious cases in which harsh sentences are less justified. That is especially true when the government

includes minimum sentences. Minimum sentences have been calculated most of the time and when they were not, I indicated that here. Most of the time, minimum sentences are calculated for the most serious commission of offences. They should reread the aiding and abetting sections in the Criminal Code and they will see that those sections cover a lot of people.

The previous Liberal government had toyed with the idea of a complete overhaul of the Criminal Code. I am sorry that it never happened. The Criminal Code has become impossibly complex because of the way in which the laws are written. Without a background in law and in practising criminal law, no one can understand the proposed provisions.

Like the hon. member asking the question, I think the government is electioneering and trying to show that it is doing something, when in most cases it is doing nothing. This bill is a striking example of legislation that will not amount to much because these provisions are already being applied. The jury considers the circumstances of multiple murders and other cases. They know the difference between Mom Boucher and that poor mother who failed in her suicide attempt.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin for his excellent speech. We always benefit from his vast experience in the Quebec justice system.

A bill like this imposes minimum sentences, but we have seen that such sentences are already imposed by judges and juries. Does it not show a lack of trust in our current judiciary's ability to impose sentences if we develop legislation to impose mandatory minimum sentences?

•(1115)

Mr. Serge Ménard: Madam Speaker, in general, my colleague is correct. But in this particular instance, it is not a matter of sentencing; it is a matter of imposing consecutive ineligibility periods in cases of multiple murders.

Since 1967, experience has shown that juries take this into account. The government demonstrates a lack of trust, not only in our judiciary, but also in our juries, which are there to represent the public. These people are chosen randomly based on panels and voters lists. So they are very representative of the population and have an advantage over us as legislators. They hear a particular case, in which they can not only weigh the seriousness of multiple murders, but also consider other circumstances, such as the degree of complicity. This shows a lack of trust not only in our judiciary, but also in our juries.

[*English*]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Richmond Hill. I am always proud to share my time in the House with the hon. member or to do important work with him outside the House, as well as on the international scene. I admire him for all the good work he does and the mentorship that he provides.

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I feel very passionately about Bill C-48. It represents not only the adoption of the position from a Liberal private member's bill, but it also is a realization that the government has taken a lead on many tough on crime measures from this side of the House.

Over the past five years, my colleague from the riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville has championed a private member's bill to end automatic concurrent sentences for multiple murderers and rapists. I was proud to be a seconder to this important bill when it was brought forward in 2007. I thank the Minister of Justice for incorporating a great idea from the hon. member on this side of the House.

The intent was to allow judges the ability to impose consecutive sentences for heinous crimes, while at the same time eliminating the chance of the most dangerous offenders being eligible for parole. Volume discounts, which have always negated the importance of recognizing each crime in its own set of circumstances, represent one of the Canadian legal system's true travesties of justice.

Under current laws, there is no difference in sentencing between single acts of murder or sexual assault and criminals who commit additional acts of violence. However, those individuals who commit a series of murders should face appropriate punishment on each act independently rather than serving their penalties simultaneously.

For I and my constituents in Newton—North Delta, there is one tragic incident that has made this bill very distinct and important to us. In Surrey in the fall of 2007, plumber Ed Schellenberg was innocently doing his job repairing a fireplace in a 15th floor apartment when he was caught in an assassination of four gang members from a rival gang. Neighbour Chris Mohan was also shot when he happened upon the crime next door on his way out to play hockey.

Mr. Schellenberg and Mr. Mohan were innocent victims that had absolutely nothing to do with the unspeakable acts being committed by the gang members. One might say that they were at the wrong place at the wrong time and they paid the ultimate price. I, however, cannot accept this kind of trite explanation.

These men had every right to be where they were. These men were living their lives and minding their own business. The callous and cold-blooded acts of these murderers took their lives without a second thought. Now the men responsible have been caught and brought to justice, which brings a much needed sense of closure for the families of the victims and every resident of Surrey and Delta.

● (1120)

However, as the law stands now, the perpetrators of the Surrey Six slayings will receive no additional punishment for also murdering the innocent victims Ed Schellenburg and Chris Mohan. The law provides no deterrent to harming these witnesses because the killers knew they would serve no more time if they got caught.

For those plotting or even contemplating mass murder, these additional acts are very easy to rationalize given our current legislation, as a criminal does the same amount of time for one murder as he or she would do for ten.

The changes to this out of date legislation cannot come fast enough. In fact, this new bill is the culmination of 11 years of work.

In 1999 a similar bill passed in the House of Commons by a vote of 117 to 40, but failed to make it through the Senate due to a general election being called.

Since my colleague from Mississauga East—Cooksville reintroduced her private member's bill in 2007, the government created many obstacles so it could ignore this wonderful idea. Whether it was proroguing the House to kill all pieces of legislation or simply ignoring an idea because it was proposed by a Liberal member, the government took no notice of the content and intent until recently.

I am very pleased, as I mentioned earlier, that the justice minister had a change of heart and adopted the Liberal bill as part of the government's agenda.

Each victim has his or her own story and it is about time that our justice system begins to recognize this fact. Criminals must understand that there is a penalty for individuals who they hurt, which will hopefully preserve the sanctity of human life before it is too late.

The bill would give back power to judges to use their discretion after considering the character of the offender, the nature and circumstances of the offence and the jury's recommendation. No judge should ever be handcuffed by a section of the Criminal Code that does not recognize the importance of punishing each heinous crime separately. Furthermore, judges should also be required to provide a verbal or written explanation for any decision not to impose consecutive parole ineligibility periods on multiple offenders of murder or sexual assault.

Instead of the government's tunnel vision when it comes to its plan to spend \$10 billion to \$13 billion on building new prisons, the bill represents a tangible and effective step forward to preventing terrible crimes.

I also want to point out for my colleagues across the way that there are many members like myself who believe in a tough and smart on crime approach and that co-operation is always possible should they try to pursue it. However, I also believe in looking at a more holistic approach to being tough on crime, one that takes measures to prevent crime from ever happening, but also one that incorporates the input of all members of the House into the mix.

This is an important proposal to consider, and I encourage my colleagues from all parties to vote in favour of Bill C-48 so it can go to the committee where it can be studied in a very diligent way.

● (1125)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate, and I will support sending the bill to the committee.

I would like to acknowledge my friend's comments with regard to our colleague from Mississauga East—Cooksville, who repeatedly has brought forth private members' legislation in support of this type of approach, one which most members in the House could adopt.

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We had another version of this, Bill C-54, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to the National Defence Act. It is back again. As members know, the House was prorogued and because of that, we did not deal with this issue. This tough on crime government supposedly let it languish and has only brought it back recently. There has been a lot of rhetoric about getting tough on crime, but the reality is when it has come to legislation, the government has not been very speedy in bringing it before the House.

Members may recall that Parliament repealed the death penalty in 1976 and imposed a mandatory life sentence for the offence of murder. Offenders convicted of first degree murder were to serve life, as a minimum sentence, with no eligibility before 25 years. For offenders convicted of second degree murder, a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment was also imposed, with a parole eligibility somewhere between 10 and 25 years when it could be reviewed. Those serving life sentences could only be released on parole by the National Parole Board.

We are all concerned about crime. One of the things we do not hear enough about from the government is the issue of dealing with the causes of crime. In the areas of murder in our country, the statistics have remained relatively stable since 1999. There was a spike in the seventies and early eighties, but it has remained relatively the same since then.

We need to deal with the kinds of programs that deal with alcohol abuse, drug abuse, housing issues, education, issues that really affect the development of crime. It is those social issues that ultimately are the ones that breed crime in Canada. When we do not deal with those, when we say that all the solutions to crime are to throw everybody in prison, it really does not address the causation.

There is an old commercial about changing our oil and filters, which says, "Pay me now or pay me later". I would rather pay now and deal with the causes of crime rather than have to pay the escalating costs later on down the road. That also could apply to health care, again dealing with prevention first, such as a better diet, exercise, et cetera, rather than the extreme costs that occur later on, particularly in areas of health care.

We know the Criminal Code implicitly provides that all sentences shall be served concurrently, unless a sentencing judge directs or legislation requires that a sentence be served consecutively. For example, section 85(4) of the Criminal Code requires that a sentence for using a firearm in the commission of an offence "shall be served consecutively to any other punishment imposed on the person for an offence arising out of the same event or series of events".

Section 83.26 mandates consecutive sentences for terrorist activities, other than in the case of a life sentence. Section 467.14 requires consecutive sentences for organized crime offences. One example when a consecutive sentence may be imposed by a sentencing judge is where the offender is already under a sentence of imprisonment.

My colleague from Mississauga East—Cooksville had proposed amendments when we were in government, which I supported. Offenders who killed one person received 25 years. If they killed two

or more people, they received 25 years but their sentences were served concurrently. That obviously sent out the wrong message.

We hear that the statistics in Canada are alarming. When I look at England, Ireland or New Zealand, our rates of incarceration, particularly dealing with first degree murder, are significantly higher.

● (1130)

The inability to impose consecutive life sentences does not mean that parole ineligibility periods cannot be effective. A single parole ineligibility period for multiple murders can be increased when someone serving a life sentence receives an additional definite sentence. In such a case the offender is not eligible for full parole until the day on which the additional sentence was imposed. A lot of life sentences are not for 25 years; on average they are 28 years, so it is not automatic.

A large majority of homicides, over 95%, involve a single victim, not multiple victims. Since 1999, the rate has remained relatively stable. An international comparison was done in 1999 which looked at Canada in terms of first degree murder sentences and the average time served in other countries including the United States. With the exception of the U.S., for offenders serving life sentences without parole the average time in Canada was about 28.4 years. The impression out there is that people get a good deal, but they actually serve longer.

It is important that we send the bill to committee so that experts can testify and members of Parliament can have an informed and intelligent review of this legislation. Again, the bill affects a very small number, but we know it is the image out there that affects people's impression of reality, but the reality is clearly different.

In places like England and Wales the ministry of justice has revealed that the mean time served by mandatory lifers, that is murderers, first released from prison in 2008 on life sentences was 16 years. There was no change from the previous year. In Ireland, in 2004, the minister of justice acknowledged that imprisonment averaged 17 years. According to the New Zealand parole board, the average in that country was seven years if sentenced prior to August 1, 1987, and after that date, it was about 10 years. In terms of incarcerating first degree murderers, we are much further along than many other states in the world, particularly Commonwealth states.

Cases such as the Clifford Olson case or Robert Pickton case are the ones which attract national attention. They are the ones on which millions of dollars are spent. People ask what happens to the victims. One of the concerns on this side of the House is we do not want people to have to relive these tragedies every few years. It is important there be incarceration for 25 years, but if there is more than one murder involved, I support, and always have supported, consecutive terms.

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Does that mean we have thrown away rehabilitation? Rehabilitation is useful in some cases. I do not know that it would be applicable in the case of multiple murders. We listen to people like Sharon Rosenfeldt, the founder of Victims of Violence. Her comment is that although this bill affects a small number of perpetrators, it still will cause the greatest amount of fear, controversy and unrest in our judicial system and the Canadian public. It will send a message.

If nothing else, as long as we are sending a clear message, that is important. But we should never shy away from the fact that the government has a responsibility to deal with the hard issues of the day, such as the causation of crime. We should start by focusing on youth at a very young age. It starts in our communities and schools. That is where we need to focus. This is again a small minority. We are dealing with this now, but if the government were really serious about dealing with this issue, it would have brought forward this legislation much sooner and it would not have prorogued Parliament in the meantime.

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on Bill C-48. This bill is very much in line with this Conservative government's philosophy and conception of what a justice system should be.

We will support Bill C-48 because it will give judges more flexibility and enable them to hand down tough sentences, if necessary. The bill is a little phoney however, and I will have the opportunity to discuss this later. Indeed, in practice this bill will have an impact on very few cases and, in fact, it essentially reflects the way things work now.

I will begin with an aside on this government's overall vision regarding justice. Virtually every member who has risen in this House has used the expression about being tough on crime. The expression has been used over and over again, and it is an argument the Conservatives haul out at election time, basically their only argument. Upon reflection, I find it somewhat ridiculous because it basically amounts to taking people for fools. Do they sincerely believe that the quality of a justice system can be gauged by the number of years people spend behind bars? Why then go to the trouble of passing balanced legislation and of asking judges to set sentences? Why not put first offenders behind bars for the rest of their lives? That would be the best system, and the toughest on crime. Obviously, anyone with their wits about them knows that this does not make any sense and that the aim of a justice system is not to put people behind bars for as long as possible.

Moreover, a look at the figures, the real world, and justice systems both here and abroad shows that it is not the justice systems that hand out the toughest sentences that get results. Quite to the contrary, the most successful justice systems are generally those that focus on rehabilitation and appropriate sentencing that corresponds to the seriousness of the offence. Such systems ensure that victims feel respected and feel that they have been heard by the justice system. They also ensure that the person committing the crime gets punished. Such systems are also grounded on the premise that it is possible for criminals to be rehabilitated and, when this is done successfully, reintegrated into society.

This is a constant everywhere. For example, we could not imagine a more severe punishment than the death penalty for homicide. Everyone agrees that a death sentence is about as tough on crime as it gets. And yet wherever the death penalty is in use, homicide rates are higher than in countries where it is not in use. This is also true for Canada, where the number of homicides has declined steadily since the death penalty was abolished. That is the clear evidence that this ideology simply does not work. That is not how it works.

We can also look at the average prison term for a murderer in some countries. In Canada, the average is 28.4 years. Criminals are sentenced to life imprisonment, but they are entitled to parole after a certain time. In Canada, on average, the person serves 28.4 years before returning to society. Sweden and England average 12 years and 14.4 years, respectively. By the Conservatives' theory, those societies should have completely degenerated, with murders happening constantly. But no, that is not the case. In the case of Sweden, we are well aware that its homicide and crime rates are among the lowest in the world.

● (1140)

In this kind of debate, the government often appeals to what it calls "common sense". It tries to bring out our basic instincts and get us to say that if someone commits a murder, there is only one way to stop them from committing more crimes, and that is to put them in prison and tell them they are going to stay there for as long as possible. This is a mindset imported directly from the United States. That is what happened with Bernard Madoff, who was sentenced to 200 or 300 years in prison. It is ridiculous to sentence a human being to 200 or 300 years in prison.

Certainly, when we talk about these things at home, on public transit or at the office with our co-workers, when we see something shocking, some heinous crime, we are tempted to say that he or she—because there are women murderers—should go to jail for life or be hanged. That is our basic instinct.

As a society, however, we have to go beyond that and ask ourselves what we can do to ensure our safety. All the criminologists and experts who study this issue agree that what genuinely deters criminals is not how harsh the potential sentence is, but the fear of getting caught. That is what has a deterrent effect on people. For example, if someone plans to murder his wife, he is not going to say to himself that if he kills her, he will go to prison for only 24.8 years, then decide not to kill her when he remembers that it has changed and the sentence has risen to 32.7 years. Obviously, people who plan murders think they will not get caught. It is as simple as that. Even threatening to torture them horrifically for two weeks or five years would change nothing, because people think they will not get caught.

Government Orders

If they really wanted to dissuade, they would invest money in prevention in order to avoid situations that lead to crime, rather than spending a fortune on new prisons and on locking people up longer than necessary. Money should also be invested in our police forces to ensure they have the means to prevent crimes, solve them, investigate them, and prove someone guilty in court. If that were done, potential criminals would think they would get caught. That is the message we should be sending out. That would be much more effective than trying to make offenders think that if they are caught, they will get longer sentences.

This model can be seen in the real world. Experts on drinking and driving, for example, all say the same thing: people drink and drive not so much because the punishments are too soft but because they think they will not get caught. There simply are not very many checkpoints on the streets.

Because of all that, we think the government is taking us in exactly the wrong direction for political marketing reasons.

Earlier today, the question of bill titles arose. The Conservative minister made fun of the fact that the opposition members were complaining about the ridiculous titles of the bills that the government introduces and he said it was frankly not a very important issue. If it is not important, then, why does the government insist on giving its bills stupid titles?

This happens not just in the justice area but everywhere. They talk about cracking down on crooked consultants or protecting Canadians against something or other when the bill does not even do that. They talk about ending early release for dangerous criminals when this does not exist. These titles are complete lies. So why does the government do it if it thinks it is unimportant?

• (1145)

The fact is the government does it for political marketing reasons. It does not really believe in the content of its bills itself. It simply inflicts these ridiculous titles on us. Today we have the Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act. That is a completely gratuitous statement devoid of any basis in reality. First, talk about protecting Canadians has no place in the bill. It is just an opinion. Some people, including the Conservatives, say they believe it will protect Canadians. The experts, though, tend to think it will not have any preventive or dissuasive effect. So the title is untrue. There are no sentence discounts for multiple murders. As the law now stands, the minimum sentence for first degree murder, for example, is life in prison. There is no discount. What the bill addresses is the cumulative nature of the parole system. The title has nothing to do with the actual bill

Once again, some members will say that the title itself is not really important. The title does not make the bill, but what that means—and this is what I want to say to the people who are watching today—is that the government is lying right to their faces. Obviously, the people at home are not going to get a copy of the bill and look at the changes it makes to the Criminal Code. They have obligations and work to do. They are very busy with families, children, jobs and homes. I understand that we cannot all study this country's laws. So what will the average person rely on to try to form an opinion? The average person will rely on what he is told the bill does. If he is told the bill protects people against murderers, he will say it is a good

bill. Who is opposed to protecting people against murderers? The answer is obvious. But the public is being deceived and fooled by the government. I think that is insulting to the public.

I have the opportunity to talk with people in my riding, as we all do, and sometimes some of them tell me they do not agree with our positions. They have seen the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice on the news, saying that the Bloc Québécois voted in favour of pedophiles. He is very good at that. Someone who hears that calls my office and asks whether the Bloc Québécois voted in favour of pedophiles. Come on. As though any member of this House gets up in the morning and thinks about what he or she could do to help pedophiles. It is completely crazy to even suggest that to the public.

The bill the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice was referring to at the time had to do with the trafficking of minors. The word “trafficking” appeared nowhere in the bill, apart from the title. So the bill's title referred to the trafficking of minors, but the substance of the bill had nothing to do with that. We can see that the government wants to deceive and fool the public.

I tell people to beware of politicians who take them for idiots and think they are incapable of reasoning for themselves.

The substance of this bill gives a judge an opportunity to impose consecutive periods, as opposed to concurrent periods, of ineligibility to apply for parole. In other words, committing a double murder, first degree murder for example, would lead to imprisonment for life. Whether the sentence is served concurrently or consecutively, nothing changes. The person is imprisoned for life and, in terms of parole, there are already minimums and maximums set out in the law, based on the type of homicide. Presently, when the judge decides on the length of time, he only chooses one period. He will obviously consider all of the factors surrounding the homicide, but technically, he hands down only one sentence and does not add them together.

• (1150)

This bill will allow a judge to impose a minimum period of x years before parole for a given murder, and a minimum period of y years for another murder. These periods would be consecutive, meaning that the prisoner could not be released before x plus y years.

If the government wants to clarify a law in this way, even though this is already happening in practice, why not? We feel it is pointless and does nothing. We will support the bill. That shows that the Bloc Québécois agrees with making an effort to give judges more flexibility. We see the opposite as being problematic—trying to take flexibility away from judges in cases where they would add or subtract years of imprisonment based on the details of each particular case.

Government Orders

To properly understand this bill, I would like to provide one little statistic. We are talking about people who have committed murders, who are released and could reoffend. Between January 1975 and March 2006, of the 19,210 offenders who served a sentence for murder or manslaughter and were released on parole or statutory release in the community, 45 were later convicted of committing other murders in Canada. That represents 0.2% of convicted offenders. Clearly, that is too many murders. The 45 murders committed by those 45 individuals are unacceptable and should have been prevented. Everyone in this House can agree on that. By no means do I wish to trivialize or minimize any of those incidents. But over a period of 31 years, that number is less than 1%, specifically, 0.2%.

Speaking of the government's false impressions and political marketing, why did it introduce a bill to try to improve this recidivism rate of only 0.2%, or so it claims, when it is doing nothing to prevent the huge number of murders and homicides committed by first-time offenders?

Why is it tackling the most marginal and least frequent cases first, rather than getting to the heart of the problem? We saw the same philosophy recently with the refugees arriving as stowaways on ships, for instance, the Tamil refugee claimants who arrived in Victoria. The government introduced a bill that targeted less than 2% of potential illegitimate refugee claimants, but no one is talking about the other 98%. If we ignore it, it does not exist. It is absolutely appalling.

Meanwhile, the government puts on a show, does some hand-waving and pretends to care about people's safety, yet at the same time, it attacks the gun registry. It just does not make any sense. There is a very strong consensus among all police chiefs: a gun registry is needed in order to better prevent potential crimes and to help solve certain crimes. It is pure logic. We register our vehicles, as well as our dogs and cats in many municipalities. We even register our motorboats and I do not know what else. Yet the government wants to attack the gun registry.

• (1155)

That is absolutely ridiculous. Why tell people that we are going to make it easier to obtain firearms—the way it is in the United States—and that we will take away some of the tools the police use to prevent murder and locate criminals, but that criminals will serve longer sentences. There is something not right about that. It reveals the government's hypocrisy.

The other element of hypocrisy, which is very typical of this government, is the use of victims. I use the term use in its most negative sense. I would say that victims are used for political purposes. In fact, this government—and the Minister of Justice did it again this morning in the House—tells us that if we are against this bill it is because we support the criminals and not the victims. That is completely untrue. Victims need assistance in the form of financial compensation, greater access to employment insurance, and other, similar measures that the government refuses to provide.

I see that my time is up. I may have the opportunity to add details when answering questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to listen to the member's presentation on the bill.

As the member knows, it has been over 40 years since the system has been substantially changed in Canada, and the Criminal Code itself is well over 100 years old.

Clearly, the answer is for the government to introduce a crime bill tying all these measures together, rather than bringing them out one step at a time. Actually, the government should go further. The government should form a committee composed of members of all parties and have hearings across the country to keep people more informed and get them participating in the process. That would be the most sensible approach, but the government has opted for a more piecemeal solution. I do not know whether this is even working in the government's favour. Putting all these measures together might give the government more profile. At least, approaching it inclusively would be more consistent and would give the public an opportunity to make presentations before a committee travelling the country.

I would like to ask the member what he thinks of that approach, vis-à-vis what the government has been doing for the last two or three years. We also have to reflect on what the government has done on the budget bill. It took an omnibus approach to legislation, threw in a bunch of measures it cannot get through the House, put it into a budget bill, and then forced the Liberals to support it to stay in office.

If the government would just use that idea on the criminal justice side of things, I think we would all be better served. I ask the member if he has any comments.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Madam Speaker, I think we have every reason to be critical of the piecemeal approach by which the government introduces many small bills to make changes here and there to the Criminal Code. This is more evidence of what I referred to in my speech about the government doing political marketing. There is no clear vision of what the Criminal Code should look like going forward in 2010. Nothing has been thought out. There are little bits of political marketing here and there. The government introduces bills, lets them die on the order paper because of bogus prorogations, reintroduces them and holds press conferences to announce the exact same bill that was already introduced, and so on. The government ensures that the House uses up as much time as possible looking at a whole bunch of bills. Every time, we have to debate for hours, send bills to committee, wait in line at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, and then return to the House. It takes a lot of time and energy on our part to finally get the slightest hint of a result and a quality bill. It would be much more effective to examine a single comprehensive bill to update the Criminal Code, as was done a few years ago with the Civil Code of Quebec, for example.

Government Orders

The government's strategy is deplorable, but it is certainly in line with its overall approach. The government's goal is not to improve the safety of Quebecers and Canadians. Will we be safer? Will there be fewer murders and less crime, violence and abuse? The government is not interested in that. All it wants to do is spend as much time as possible saying that it will bring in longer sentences and claiming that the bad guys in the opposition defend criminals instead of victims.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to say what I did not have time to say earlier. As far as helping victims is concerned, the Bloc Québécois has made some proposals here in the House. We are proposing, among other things, that victims of crime have access to extended employment insurance benefits in order to deal with the trauma and the crime they have experienced without having to worry about going back to work right away or losing their house or going bankrupt. This is a proposal to help victims. However, the Conservatives have never supported us. They say that to help victims, we have to put murderers in prison for 31.4 years instead of 28.2 years. How will it help victims whose lives are falling apart, who are losing their homes and their jobs and who have to declare bankruptcy, to know that the murderer will stay in prison 1.17 years longer after committing a murder?

At some parole hearings, victims testify in favour of releasing the prisoner. The government is being unbelievably hypocritical and is using victims to hide its unwillingness to help them. Instead of helping victims, the government is saying only that it will put people in prison for longer. That does not really help victims. The government's attitude is deplorable. I long for the day the government supports our proposals to help victims of crime financially and in other ways.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague on a well-reasoned, fact-based and progressive speech. He reflects what the majority of Canadians, and I am sure the majority of Québécois, feel is a more responsible and appropriate approach to dealing with the serious problem of crime.

I would be interested to hear him elaborate a bit more on some of the positive steps he and his party would propose to deal with crime, particularly murder, which is what we are dealing with in this bill. He has given a round criticism of the government's proposals and I agree with him on many of those. I wonder if he could give us one or two ideas on what he and his party think would be a better approach to helping our society deal with murder and other crimes.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has already done so in the past and it continues to support suggestions for improvement. We believe that there are definitely times when the law may be too permissive. We have given the example of parole after serving one-sixth of the sentence for white-collar crimes. We feel that it is abusive and distorts the meaning of the judge's decision, and we want it eliminated. We introduced a bill in the House. We asked for unanimous consent so that it would be passed quickly since all of the parties said that they supported it. The Conservatives, in their usual hypocrisy, refused to give that consent. That shows that they do not really care about getting results; they only care about

political marketing. They convinced themselves that they could not support a Bloc Québécois bill that proved that this party, like all the parliamentarians here, is concerned with the safety of Quebecers and Canadians. Of course not.

We have also made significant proposals in the past. Do not forget that it was the Bloc Québécois that brought the idea of an anti-gang law to the House, which Canada then passed. Our former colleague, Richard Marceau, was a major proponent of this. We continue to make proposals, for example, to prohibit wearing symbols of criminal organizations that have been recognized as such by a judge. We know it is a form of intimidation, and we want it to stop.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the New Democratic caucus today to Bill C-48, a bill that would provide the judges of our country with the discretion to impose consecutive life sentences in cases of convicted multiple murderers, which would be a change from the current state of law that imposes mandatory life sentences but which are served concurrently.

Questions of crime and punishment are profound. They raise some of the deepest emotions that we as human beings are capable of feeling. They invoke and often deal with feelings of great pain and hurt. Of course, whenever there is a crime committed, we have a victim or multiple victims to consider and their families.

What is indisputable is that behind every crime there is tragedy, a tragedy for the victim and the victim's family and friends, a tragedy for the community, a tragedy for our society and, indeed, a tragedy for the perpetrator, as well as his or her family and relatives.

Any time a crime is committed, we as a society and as parliamentarians must deal with the fact that there are broken lives, damaged lives and, in some cases, permanent harm needs to be dealt with. There is no more profound expression of these concepts than when we are examining the crime of murder.

It has been said that one of the most fundamental functions of government is to ensure the safety and security of our citizens. I agree. A well-functioning and well-organized society is no more than a social compact between citizens where we agree that we will come together and relinquish certain rights and freedoms that we would have in the state of nature and we agree to limit those in exchange for guarantees for our security and our safety.

Going back to philosophers, such as Thomas Hobbes who described life in the state of nature as nasty, brutish and short, we have all agreed that we are all better off when we come together and agree on certain fundamental rules where we can have our personal safety guaranteed, the safety of our families and the safety of our property protected and preserved.

Government Orders

Foremost as citizens, I think fundamentally as citizens, we expect that the integrity of our physical beings is guaranteed above and beyond anything else. That is because we agree that in order to function as a society we need to agree to abide by rules.

Although we have a rights-based society, we all agree that our rights are extended only insofar as they do not offend the rights of others. In order to have a well-functioning society and to have a developing society where we all have our rights to pursue life, liberty and happiness, we must, above all, have our physical and property rights respected.

Those who commit murder commit the most profound violation of these rights. Therefore, the issue becomes that when a murder is committed, and in this case, as we will examine, when multiple murders are committed, what is the proper sentence to impose on someone who has violated such a fundamental and profound precept? More important and of relevance to this bill, what is the proper approach we should take to those who have committed multiple murders?

It is important that we remember that we are talking about murder. First degree murder is the planned and deliberate taking of a life, while second degree murder is a murder that is committed in circumstances that any reasonable person would know would likely lead to death. There are other concepts involved in both of those crimes but that expresses the elements of those serious crimes.

We are not talking about manslaughter where a death has been caused but perhaps without the intent necessarily formed by the person carrying out the act. We are talking about murder and multiple murders. We are talking about someone who has either deliberately or very recklessly, with some form of intention, taken the life of more than one person.

● (1210)

This bill would give a judge the discretion to impose consecutive life sentences for each murder. The life sentence for each murder would be served consecutively, as opposed to being served concurrently, at the same time. The practical effect of this bill would be that it would empower the judges of our country in an appropriate case, where a judge so sentences, that a person convicted of multiple murders would effectively never get out of prison.

There are some powerful arguments in favour of this bill. First, there is currently no difference in the practical effects of sentencing between someone who murders one person and someone who murders two, five or even 10 people. To most right-thinking people, that is a question that requires some serious answers. In many people's minds, it would be considered unjust.

Second, the argument is that it gives judicial discretion, which is a major reason that I am in support of the bill. I am not necessarily in support of a blanket application of this rule, but I am in favour of judicial discretion.

Judicial discretion is something that is strongly defended and supported by the New Democratic Party. Justice demands respect for our judiciary. It demands an independent judiciary. It demands a non-political judiciary. Justice demands that the person deciding a case does so after hearing all of the facts, after listening to each witness, watching them testify and observing their demeanour.

Justice demands someone who is learned and skilled in the law, someone who is bound by rules of fairness and justice to make a decision.

I have great faith in the judges of our land. I have great faith in their integrity, skill and commitment to justice. I am not so sure that it is a faith that is shared by members of the government opposite at all times, who I think are more skeptical and cynical of the judges of our country. I, for one, have great faith in their skills and fairness.

I also have great faith in our appellate system, because when errors occur, and they do occur, our appellate courts are poised and our system is well developed to rectify those errors.

Third in terms of favouring this bill is that multiple murderers presently can apply for parole because they have life sentences that are served concurrently. That means that a multiple murderer can apply for parole even though, as I will talk about, it is almost impossible for them to get it. It puts victims' families through unnecessary pain and anxiety.

When we are dealing with multiple murders, I believe we are dealing with a particular type of criminal who is distinct from most, maybe even from other murderers. Someone who has broken the social compact to such a degree that they have taken the lives of two or more citizens is someone who I think we have to seriously look at locking up for the rest of their natural life.

Presently, as I have said, although a multiple murderer may be able to apply for parole, the truth is they will not get it. There is not one case that I can think of and not one case that has been cited by the government of a multiple murderer being paroled or ever getting out of prison under the current situation. So that leads me to the question of politics.

I think the Conservatives are playing politics with this issue. They have taken a cheap idea that has no practical effect or consequence and they have run with it to try to make themselves look tough.

Here is a case where the government has taken legislative time to propose a change to a law that has no problem to solve. There is no case of a multiple murderer who is getting out of jail on parole. So although philosophically I think this idea has merit and we support it, in terms of its practical consequence we should make no mistake that this bill is all about politics and not about fixing any real problem in our system.

● (1215)

I want to move to the short title of the bill as an example of these politics. The short title named by the government is "Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders". That is as motivated by politics and partisanship as it is factually wrong. There are no sentence discounts for multiple murders. There is no such thing.

Government Orders

When persons are convicted of multiple murders, they get life sentences for each of those murders, and that life sentence is a life sentence. When a judge imposes multiple life sentences, there is no discount. That is just a cheap and wrong title for the bill, but it is typical of what the government has done by injecting hyper partisanship into the legislation of our country, which I spoke about yesterday and which I think is regrettable and wrong.

I want to talk about what Canadians do want. If we really want to make a dent in crime in our country, Canadians want to see more community policing. They want to see more police on our streets and in our neighbourhoods.

Last week I was in Chinatown in Vancouver. I was meeting with Tony Lam and members of the Vancouver Chinese Merchants Association and members of the community policing office. They told me that they have had to hire private security guards in Chinatown to deal with the vandalism and theft that they experience every day because there are not enough police and there are not enough quick response times to the break-ins. They are demoralized. In fact, they told me that the future of Chinatown in Vancouver is threatened because of the crime that is going on in the downtown east side.

If the government was serious about really trying to take tangible steps to help people in this country, it would start pouring money into community policing, as the New Democrats called for in the last election. We called for the hiring of 2,500 more police officers in this country and that has not happened.

It would pour money into crime prevention, which the government has cut. There was \$60 million budgeted for crime prevention in the public safety portfolio last year, and the government spent \$44 million. It left unspent one third of the small amount of money on the table for prevention.

Those are the things on which Canadians want to spend: more on crime prevention, more on community policing. That would make a difference in Canadians' lives. That would help make our citizens safe in our communities. That would actually help to lower the crime rate. That would actually put more criminals in prison, instead of putting forth an ideological and philosophical bill that, while I guess we agree with it, will do absolutely nothing to make any Canadian safer.

I want to conclude by talking about some of the root causes of crime, because it is about time we focused on this in the House. Poverty and drug addiction are a fact. Eighty per cent of people in our federal prisons suffer from drug addiction.

I was in the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon this summer. I asked the staff there what percentage of people who are in prison do they think are in prison because of their addiction. They said 70%. It was not a bleeding heart saying this. It was not a New Democrat saying this. It was not a criminal saying this. These are the correctional officers who work in our federal correction system.

We need to start putting money into alcohol and drug treatment, not out of compassion only but out of cold, hard logic. If we want those people not to reoffend, we need to get at the root causes of why they are offending, if we can. I realize that is not possible for many, but it is possible for some.

To the extent that we can do that, we have to do everything possible as a society and as a Parliament to attack those root causes, because what every Canadian wants is the same thing. We want those offenders, when they come out of jail, and 96% of them do come out of jail, not to reoffend. That is what keeps us safe.

In fact, the victims ombudsman who was let go by the government, or I suppose the proper term is "not reappointed" by the government, Steve Sullivan, said that victims do not want criminals to be in jail longer; what they want is those criminals, when they come out, not to reoffend.

Those are two profoundly different things. Keeping someone in jail for four years instead of three and a half, or seven years instead of six, or 10 years instead of eight will not do anything if we are not attacking the reasons they are in prison in the first place.

I am curious as to how the government will react to what I am saying. I am sure it will attack in some manner, but I will stand by what I said because it is a matter of rational, fact-based logic. We have to attack the roots and that is what the bill does not do.

• (1220)

This bill deals with the consequences of murder. It does nothing to address what might be some of the causes.

In fairness to the government and everyone, we cannot stop murders in this society. We cannot get into the mind of what a Russell Williams is thinking or a Paul Bernardo. Those people have committed the most violent, aggressive, unacceptable breach that is known in society and they should be put away for the rest of their lives. They have lost the right to walk amongst free people in society. Perhaps there is nothing that can be done for people like that. However, people like that represent a small portion of society.

This bill deals with multiple murders and that represents probably the tiniest percentage of people in our federal prisons. I agree that those people should never get out, and in appropriate circumstances, I agree that judges should be able to give consecutive sentences to show society's opprobrium at their crimes.

A Clifford Olson or a Paul Bernardo ought to serve consecutive sentences. They should never be able to put forth a parole application and put the victims, families and communities through the suffering, anxiety and pain that they would have to go through. We know that those people do not deserve to come back into society.

I hope all parliamentarians join together not only in support of this bill, but in support of a broader, more intelligent, fact-based and comprehensive approach to crime in this country so that we can accomplish what we all want in this House, which is safer communities.

Government Orders

I will conclude by saying that the government constantly attacks this side of the House for not caring about crime or not caring about victims, and I wish it would stop doing that. Ad hominem arguments are the lowest form of argument. It is name calling. We usually learn in about grade two that it does not work.

In this House, let us have respect for each other. Let us respect that we all care about crime and victims. We may have different approaches to the best way to deal with those issues, but let us start learning from each other, listening to each other and broadening the debate so that prevention, root causes and rehabilitation can join with a punitive aspect. There is room for a punitive aspect in our penal system. That is part of what it is supposed to do, but it is not everything.

We should involve lawyers, social workers, criminologists, victim groups, police officers and prosecutors. They should be part of a national debate to take a comprehensive view of crime.

Let us stop the politicization of this issue and start dealing with this as a mature society looking at a complex problem. We need to have good policy on crime in this country. We do not need cheap politics in our policy, we need sound facts.

I am prepared, on this side of the House, to work with the government and take its good ideas when they come, and some do. I think this is an idea that is good. However, let us make no mistake: this idea is not going to actually make our communities safer at all. There is room for philosophical improvements in our law, and I think this is one of them.

Let us join together and try to move to that next level as a country and as a society and deal with crime in a manner that I think our citizens want us to do.

● (1225)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his speech regarding Bill C-48. Last year, it was called Bill C-54.

For the last five years this government has been introducing and reintroducing the same group of crime bills, over and over again. It really has not been held accountable for this by the press. I was reading some press articles on some of these bills. The fact of the matter is that the reporters get the press releases from the government, simply regurgitate the press releases and announce a new initiative.

Somehow when the government prorogues the House or calls a needless election, such as in 2008, this same press does not do its research, pull up previous files and report that the government has already introduced such a bill. The press proceeds to report the legislation as some new initiative. I have been reading several of these articles and that is the impression I get.

Clearly, part of the responsibility lies with the press for not holding this government accountable for what it has been doing: torching its own crime agenda.

The government pretends that it is so important to the public, even with a bill such as this, and this is not the only crime bill. We have unanimous agreement on the part of all the parties in Parliament to pass this legislation, yet the government simply prorogues the House

and we have to start all over again. That is not showing proper commitment and respect to the public in Canada or to the legislation being introduced.

I would like to ask the member to expand on those comments.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I would prefer to start from the proposition that every member in the House is of good faith. I would like to move us to a debate where we can cease accusing each other of having improper motives and move toward actually debating criminal policy.

I would like to grant government members credit for their interest in the crime issue, and I am not sure that their reintroduction of bills is malevolent in any way. The effect of prorogation is that bills died, and we can question whether the prorogation attempts were valid, credible, or justified. But I would not go so far as to say that the government members purposefully damaged their crime agenda. I do not think that is the case, and I do not think it is fair to the government.

However, there is a real danger, which I have seen in the House, of using fear and crime as a political weapon. It is fair to say that my hon. colleagues on the other side have recognized that using crime and crime policy as a political wedge issue is effective politics in some cases. It can sometimes be bad policy and bad for our society. It can be divisive and make poor criminal policy. But I give the government respect: I believe that members of the government are interested in community safety. We may differ on the ways of achieving safety, but I respect their desire to make Canada safer.

I implore all members of the House, particularly the government, to cease using fear as a political weapon. Crime rates are going down across the board, and we need to approach policy from that point of view.

● (1230)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague discuss the bill, and I think I heard him say he is going to support it. That is a good thing. I also heard him talk about the lack of policing on the streets of Vancouver. There are two parts to my question.

Number one, I would hope that he would explain to the House that policing responsibility rests in the province. Second, it may be before the hon. member came here, but there were additional moneys put in a budget to provide for additional police officers in provinces and municipalities across the country. I wonder if he could explain why his party voted against that additional money to help put police officers on the street.

Government Orders

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I was not present in the House when that vote was taken, but there were serious problems with the way the government made moneys available to the provinces. Number one, Conservatives did not earmark that money to the creation of police. For this reason, we had cases where moneys were given to provinces, and the provinces took the money and put it into general revenue. It did not actually result in boots on the ground.

Also, the previous public safety minister made commitments to ongoing federal funding. But these commitments were reneged on by the government, and the funding that was given to the provinces was for only a three-to-five-year period. I have talked to police officers and chiefs of police who said they will not create positions if they do not have a guarantee of permanent funding. Without a guarantee, they might get those officers trained and on the street, only to have those officer positions dry up.

The NDP is in favour of creating stable, consistent, additional funding to put police boots on the ground, and that is something we will continue to push the government to do.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an issue that was brought up by a colleague of mine goes to what, on the surface of it, is the veneer of all this crime legislation that we are seemingly adopting. It almost leads into the fact that there is some kind of grand vision, but there really is not.

The minister earlier spoke about his frustration with the debate on the title of the bill itself, and in essence that is exactly what is happening. It seems as if all these grand measures have trickled down to smaller measures. My colleague asked why we did not just do one bill and make the changes en masse to the Criminal Code. Perhaps the member would like to comment on that.

The prorogation occurred. There has also been delay after delay. But there does not seem to be one exact vision of what crime control is to become under the government, which has been holding itself out as the champion of crime control for quite some time. Would he comment on the fact that there does not seem to be that vision?

Every time we get some of this legislation, it goes madly off in several directions. For example, the next bill that we will debate will be about people who are incarcerated for longer periods of time receiving money. If that were such an issue, why was it not handled in 2006 when the government was first elected? Now, all of a sudden in 2010, it becomes part of a news item, and it therefore becomes public policy. Perhaps the member could comment on that.

Could he also comment on some of the crime prevention programs that he feels are being ignored?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I fear I do not have enough time to cover all of the important issues that my colleague has just raised, but the government has displayed a dual character.

It has indicated an attention to the crime agenda that I believe is motivated by its political philosophy. I sit on the public safety committee with many hon. colleagues, and I know that the government believes that we need to strengthen and make our penal system harsher as a way of dealing with crime, and I believe this objective is well intentioned.

On the other hand, I also believe fundamentally, and I think Canadians know, that the government has seized upon crime as a political issue. This is why it continually brings forth piecemeal approaches. It pulls out a crime bill whenever it is in trouble politically. It tries to bring forth these bills periodically as a political approach, and that is bad for public policy. One comprehensive bill would be a much more productive way to deal with these important issues.

• (1235)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this bill. I was here earlier when the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca spoke eloquently about the need for parliamentarians to deal not only with those who commit crimes but also with those who have committed crimes without their knowledge or understanding. What he was talking about was fetal alcohol spectrum disorders.

Back in 1997, the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba did a survey of provincial institutions and found that approximately 50% of people in provincial jails suffered from alcohol-related birth defects or other alcohol-caused mental defects. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or FASD, is a spectrum of disorders. It used to be called fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effects, which had to do with the issue of prenatal consumption of alcohol by women.

In 1997, Anne McLellan, who was minister of justice at the time, rose in her place in response to a question that I posed about people in our jails in circumstances that could not be addressed through the rehabilitation process, because they did not understand that they had a mental deficiency that did not allow them to be rehabilitated. Our justice system is based not just on punishment but also on rehabilitation and re-integration, because people eventually get out of jail.

It was interesting that the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca raised the issue of FASD in the context of this bill, which deals with sentencing people to prison and how much time they should spend there. He mentioned as well that we have to deal with some complex issues, like unreported crime, which is really is mesmerizing.

The other part is that we are planning to spend \$10 billion to build more jails. If we were to do the necessary analysis and consultations with our provincial counterparts, we would know that within our jails right now there are people for whom rehabilitation is not possible. Fetal alcohol syndrome is preventable but not treatable, and there is a shortage of institutions to deal with people. Many people who suffer from these alcohol-related birth defects get themselves into trouble.

As a matter of fact, I penned a monograph back in March 2000, which is titled, "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome—The Real Brain Drain".

• (1240)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We are debating Bill C-48, which is about making sure that multiple murderers are not given one sentence but multiple sentences to reflect every life taken. I have no idea what relevance the member's intervention could have to the point at issue.

Government Orders

I know the member for Elmwood—Transcona appreciates me shutting down the member for pontificating and using extra words that have absolutely no relevance to the issue we are dealing with today.

The Deputy Speaker: I will ask the member for Mississauga South to try to bring his remarks quickly to the actual substance of the motion that the House is debating.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, as you well know, when debate occurs in this place and people raise issues that they believe are relevant to the debate before us, others can also comment on those points that are raised.

The point that was raised by the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca was whether the issues of dealing with the sentencing and whether there was credit for time served in pre-sentencing are the only things we should be looking at in terms of this being a crime bill and the hypothesis that we should be tough on crime.

I wonder how many people have figured out whether or not the motivation of the government to put the bill forward is impacted at all by the conditions in our jails right now and who may be there. Maybe the Conservatives have not thought of who is there who should not be there. Maybe it would change the statistics about who is in our jails, and maybe it might even change our assessment about whether or not we can afford to have more people in our jails without building more jails. These are all related. The bill is very linear in terms of this aspect. The government has come to the conclusion that we need to eliminate the two for one, yet that issue is still relevant in the scheme of how do we address crime in Canada.

We have a situation where the provinces have clearly said that half the people in provincial jails should not be there at all, and the federal justice minister said on the record that half the people in there should not be there. If flowing from this piece of legislation is the consequence that we do not give that credit for time, and all of a sudden people will be spending on average longer periods of time within our penal institutions, this means that if the jails are already bursting at the seams, consequentially we have to build more prisons. At a cost of some \$10 billion to deal with a growing prison population, we have to ask ourselves whether or not there is a contribution to faulty thinking by this particular bill.

I raised it, and the example of the provinces just happens to be related to the situation. I happen to know something about that. The member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca spent half his speech talking about it this morning, without having been interrupted. I can only assume that the House believes it was relevant then and I still think it is relevant to raise the fact that there are other things to take into account, not only when we deal with the sentencing, parole, house arrest and some of the other things we dealt with, but this is all part and parcel of the strategy of the government on how we address crime in Canada. How do we deal with those who commit serious crimes?

Yesterday the CBC did a special on a white collar criminal who defrauded about 70 clients out of about \$25 million, and the Ontario Provincial Police laid charges in the case of the very last person who had been defrauded. Ultimately there was not enough court time, there were not enough resources to deal with that, and the charges were dropped. The person, who is in hiding, got away with fraud of

some \$25 million. The court officials described it by saying they had two choices: they could deal with someone who took money from people, or they could deal with a rapist and someone who committed serious assault and somebody who committed manslaughter. They had two choices.

When we look at that we have to ask ourselves whether or not it is important for us to deal with issues like recidivism, to deal with things like crime prevention. I have learned a lot about crime prevention from my own community. We have a wonderful crime prevention council, and Mr. Victor Oh took me under his wing and made sure that I was engaged in that kind of stuff. However, it is all related to how we address crime and criminals. It is not enough, in my view, to say we are getting tough on crime. It is not enough just to say, “if you do the crime, do the time”.

● (1245)

It is a slogan but it does not make a lot of sense when we are dealing with people in our jails who cannot be rehabilitated. We do not have the institutions to care for them before they commit a crime, and we certainly do not have the institutions to take care of them when they get out of those places.

I do not want to take up any more of the House's time. I know members would like to get on with dealing with the specific clauses of the bill.

I was motivated and encouraged by the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca who brought to the floor the fact that when we deal with criminal justice issues we have to deal not only with punishment but we have to deal with rehabilitation, reintegration, the whole gamut. We have to make sure there are supports for people so we do not have the recidivism rates that we have had, which continue to add to the growing population in our jails.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly the government is not overly committed to its crime agenda. It called an unnecessary election in 2008 and prorogued the House on two occasions.

This bill has the support of all parties in the House. It took the government 216 days into the current session to re-table this bill. If that is not an example of the government not being overly committed to its crime agenda, then I do not know what is.

I would like to also observe that the justice system has probably never been totally revamped and there certainly has not been a major revamping in 40 years, and the Criminal Code is over 100 years old.

Would the member agree that perhaps the proper approach for the government to take would be to involve all opposition parties and come up with a comprehensive bill that would deal with all of the little bills that the government is dealing with? A comprehensive bill would be a single approach to the issue.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his suggestion. One of the things I have learned about this place is that people think that for every complex problem there is a simple solution, and that is wrong.

Government Orders

Some of the things that we deal with in this place on a criminal justice basis are very similar and probably should be dealt with in an omnibus bill. A number of bills propose changes to sentencing. Rather than having a separate bill for car theft, or another one for some other issue, et cetera, an omnibus bill tends to make the place inefficient. I would agree that if the government was serious about its crime agenda it would have brought like items together. The committee work could happen at the same time and the same witnesses could appear.

The member also raised another interesting point about the government being serious about its justice agenda.

Back in 2005, Internet service providers appeared before justice committee to say that they disagreed with being obligated to report matters related to the exploitation of children on the Internet. In 2006 the Conservatives took office and today we are still debating that bill, all because they want to have a silly, pissy short title for the bill. Rather than dealing with that directly they called an election and prorogued. The bill was Bill C-58 at one time and is now Bill C-22.

This shows that even on a straightforward issue such as dealing with the sexual exploitation of children through the Internet, the government is still spinning its wheels. Since 2006 the Conservatives have been holding up this bill. They are still holding it up just because they want a short title that says they are doing the job and getting tough on crime. This is outrageous. It is irresponsible.

● (1250)

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my remarks are going to be pretty short. The member from the New Democratic Party gave an excellent speech about this particular bill.

There really is not a lot of opposition to the substance of the bill itself. What has caused concern to me and others is the fact that on the surface there does not appear to be a need for this Criminal Code amendment. The reason is that if there is a homicide, a first degree murder, there is a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment.

Life imprisonment means a life sentence. It does not necessarily mean that every day is going to be spent in prison. However, there is no sentence greater than a life sentence. If I could go back 25 or 30 years when the death penalty was here, if that was still the case now the penalty for a first degree murder would be death. There is not a more significant penalty than that. If there was a double murder or a triple murder, the person can only be executed once.

When the law was changed, we ended with a life sentence. Life means life. A sentence cannot be any longer than that. It was absurd to talk about consecutive life sentences. We only have one life to live at this point in our human history. The impacts were felt to be pretty minimal.

Second, as has been pointed out here, no one has raised any particular instance of releases of individuals who are serving life sentences for multiple murders. There has not been one. If there has not been a release of that nature, why was it found necessary to draft a bill to change the law to prevent something from happening that is not happening anyway? That is the second reason why this bill does not appear to be necessary.

Third, it is really quite egotistical of a House of Parliament to make an assumption that what it would do in this House would have a huge impact on the street in terms of preventing crime. I hope no one here is naive enough to think that by merely sitting in our comfortable seats and changing the law we are going to immediately impact life on the streets in terms of crime prevention. This is not the case.

Many of us think that way from time to time. We politically posture to pretend that by changing the law in some little way we will make Canadians safer. Only in some cases is that a fact. In most cases we are just changing the law that our police and our courts work with.

These are three reasons why will bill looks pretty unnecessary. However, there is a place for this bill. My colleague of 22 years from Mississauga spotted it many years ago. This is that one of the objectives of sentencing under the Criminal Code, one of the specifically written objectives that this House enacted 15 years ago, is societal denunciation for the crime.

In looking at the application of a life sentence, at first blush there does not appear to be much room for additional denunciation. A life sentence is a life sentence. However, it just so happens that in our laws governing parole there did appear to be a failure to take advantage of an opportunity to show denunciation, further denunciation.

Our law does permit parole eligibility, not automatically granted parole but the ability to ask for parole after 25 years have been served. As has been indicated here, the average release time for someone, and this is the average across all those convicted and given life sentences, is about 28 years. They serve 28 years before they apply for parole. Therefore, by the time we take in those who are less than 25 years and those who are over, there are a lot of long sentences being served here.

● (1255)

However, in dealing with the parole eligibility dates, there was an opportunity for society to show an additional element of denunciation. That would involve saying if people killed a second time, they would have to have another 25 years or another period of time of actual in-custody sentences served before they could have eligibility. That was the reason this concept of increasing the denunciation was born. I can support that. In this case, the bill would allow for judicial discretion in applying these penalties.

However, lest we think that this additional denunciation in relation to parole eligibility would have an impact on the street, I can say without any hesitation, and I hope members are realistic enough in the House to agree with this, that there is virtually no case involving a homicide or a double homicide, whether at the same time or sequenced later in time, where the individual involved in that tragic circumstance will pull out a calculator and try to figure out whether or not he or she should proceed because there is some enhanced denunciation involving parole eligibility dates.

Government Orders

It is our hope, naive as it might be, that if someone were to think about, he or she might take it into consideration before taking the drastic action of taking a life. In some case I hope that would happen, that the additional denunciation related to the increased parole eligibility application periods would actually provide some pause or thought on the part of the perpetrator. In most of these tragic cases, I doubt that will happen. In 99% of the cases, the individuals involved do not even think about it and do not think they will ever get caught, so the event happens. It is a tragedy time after time after time.

I will support the bill. As has been mentioned, one might as well consider my words as notice to members opposite that the short title of the bill probably will not survive the committee's consideration. It might, but it is a warning to the drafters of these bills and the short titles that the House is not likely to accept the insertion of political commercials into the short title of bills anymore. Let us get a good objective statement of the change in law proposed by the bill and we will live with that. Do not over-torque it.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: 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)

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ELIMINATING ENTITLEMENTS FOR PRISONERS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

The Deputy Speaker: There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Hon. Gary Lunn (for the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Gary Lunn (for the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development) moved that the bill be read a third time and passed.

• (1300)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-31, Eliminating Entitlements for Prisoners Act. With this legislation, the Government of Canada intends to amend the Old Age Security Act to suspend old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits for incarcerated criminals.

Let me remind the House of what the bill sets out to do. Once passed, it will suspend old age security benefits to prisoners in federal penitentiaries who are serving sentences of two years or

longer. Then in provinces that have agreed to help us implement the bill, an information sharing agreement will be signed, which will allow us to suspend old age security benefits for individuals sentenced to a term of 90 days imprisonment or more in that province or territory.

We want to see these changes implemented as soon as possible and the support of the provinces and territories will be vital to getting that done. It is important to note that this government has taken steps to minimize the impact of innocent spouses and common-law partners. The proposed bill ensures that low income spouses or partners of the prisoners will not lose their own entitlements to the guaranteed income supplement and the allowance. The guaranteed income supplement and allowance benefits to spouses or partners of prisoners will be adjusted so they are based on the income of the spouses or partners who are not incarcerated rather than the combined income of the couple.

The bill would bring the Old Age Security Act in line with other federal and provincial government programs and would suspend benefits to the incarcerated. Across the country, seven provinces and one territory already suspend social and income assistance to inmates.

There are international precedents as well. In the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia among others, also suspend the payment of state pensions to prisoners.

The purpose of old age security is to help seniors, especially those living on a fixed income, to meet their basic needs. It is an important program that recognizes that seniors helped build our great country.

Prisoners do not have to worry about these costs. They do not have to worry about things like paying rent or buying groceries. That is because their basic needs are already paid for by taxpayers. Hard-working taxpayers should not be paying twice. Prisoners should not be receiving old age security benefits. Our Conservative government believes that Canadians who work hard, contribute to the system and play by the rules deserve government benefits such as old age security. It is wrong and obviously unfair that prisoners who broke the law continue to receive the same benefits.

The bill is another example of our government's commitment to ensure fairness for hard-working taxpayers and putting victims and taxpayers first, ahead of criminals. The response we have heard from families of victims and victims organizations have proven to me that the bill is truly the right thing to do.

Let me name just a few of the people who support the bill: Sharon Rosenfeldt who is the mother of one Clifford Olson's victims and president of Victims of Violence; Ray King, the father of another victim of Clifford Olson; David Toner, president of Families Against Crime and Trauma; Vancouver Police Chief Jim Chu; and Kevin Gaudet, Canadian Taxpayers Federation as well.

Government Orders

Ms. Rosenfeldt and Mr. Gaudet appeared before our committee during our study of the bill. Ms. Rosenfeldt's son was tragically murdered by Clifford Olson. For years she has been a tireless advocate for victims and their families. She urged for the passage of the bill. It is common sense that one cannot benefit twice at the expense of Canadian taxpayers. That is why Canadians are upset and outraged. The bill is important for the principles of fairness.

Mr. Gaudet informed the committee that their petitions in support of the bill received close to 50,000 signatures from Canadians across the country in only six weeks. He spoke about how it was not just victims and stakeholders who wanted the bill passed, but countless everyday Canadians cared so much about the bill that they had taken time out of their busy lives to voice their opinion.

When the minister spoke, she said that she had received more correspondence on this issue than almost any other. I have heard from several of my constituents and I know MPs from all parties in the House have also heard from their constituents. Canadians across the country have told us they do not want these benefits going to prisoners. We understand why they feel so strongly about this issue. Canadians are telling us they want the bill passed and they want it passed soon.

● (1305)

I am pleased to report that after extensive study at committee, the bill was passed, but we still have a way to go. We must complete report stage and third reading of the bill, as we are doing now. Then the hon. senators must study it and pass it before it becomes law.

I urge all parties to not unnecessarily delay the bill. Let us get the bill passed so we can ensure that mass murderers like Clifford Olson, Paul Bernardo and Robert Pickton do not receive these benefits while in jail. It is what Canadians want and expect. It is the fair and right thing to do.

I urge the House to get behind the bill to pass it as soon as is possible.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not disagree with the bill and where it is headed. However, I am very concerned with the fact that the victims of crime initiative has seen a 41% cut since 2005. When we add that up to the more than 70% that has been cut from the crime prevention programs, which stop people from becoming victims in the first place, I wonder where some of this revenue would be used. Could the government use some of the revenue it has saved to restore the cuts it has made to important programs that help victims.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, there probably is not a government in history that has done as much for victims as we have.

We created the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime to serve as an independent resource for victims, at \$1.5 million per year. We have a victims fund to provide resources for victims of crime in the support of provincial and territorial services and NGOs.

Support for victims is a priority of this government. We have provided funding of \$5.25 million over five years for the creation and enhancement of child advocacy centres across Canada to help better serve young victims and victims of crime.

We certainly have done significant things for victims of crime. In this case, the bill addresses not only those who are victims of crime, but those who are associated with victims of crime. It requires immediate passage. It is important to put the interests of victims ahead of the interest of prisoners and the entitlements of prisoners.

I would ask the member and his party to get behind the bill, not drag their feet, but have it passed as soon as possible.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I believe the saving to the government will be \$2 million when the bill passes, but the savings as a result of the provinces signing could be as much as \$10 million a year.

Could the member tell us what the situation is with regard to the provinces? Has the government talked to the provinces about this? If so, what is the response it has received from the provinces? Does the government have a commitment from any or all of them to participate in this program and how soon would this roll out?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Firstly, it is not a question necessarily of just the savings of dollars, although that is important. It is the fact that Canadians are outraged with the fact that any money is spent with respect to paying old age security for prisoners when they already have their food and accommodation looked after. The very kind of things for which old age security was intended is already provided for them. Therefore, any amount of money would be too much of a payment.

The minister has certainly been in discussions with the provinces and a number of provinces are on board. I would expect that there would be a good take-up rate on this. We would expect this to go forward as soon as possible. We urge those members, as we are urging the House, to move the bill forward as quickly as possible to the Senate and eventually get it passed.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to support the bill, as it looks like most members are going to support it. No one is foot-dragging or delaying it. However, I have three points.

The parliamentary secretary said that one of the rationales for removing these OAS payments was that they were prisoners who broke the law and should not receive benefits. If that were the rationale, then we would be removing benefits from anyone who broke the law at any time.

We are doing this, and I think the member has already said it, because these individuals in custody are already being supported with food and shelter and other amenities. Is that not the reality? In fact, we pay prisoners something like \$5 a day. That is \$100 a month. We pay prisoners an allowance per diem. Therefore, if the government were consistent with this, it would remove the \$5 a day.

Will the member agree also that this does not apply to the Canada pension plan payments, which is a separate pension plan entitlement that prisoners in custody will continue to receive? Unless they defer them to age 70, they can start receiving them at age 60 if they wish.

Would the member not agree with what I have just said so we can keep a balance in the way we are explaining the rationale of this legislation?

Government Orders

•(1310)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the member seems to be leaning toward supporting this bill. That is a good and admirable thing.

He stated what the underpinnings of it were. The constituent from Redvers, Saskatchewan who wrote to my office set it out very succinctly. He said the principle upon which this bill should rest and the reason it should be passed is that meals and accommodation are already provided and that costs taxpayers a whole lot of dollars. People do not think taxpayers should be victimized again by paying prisoners old age security that was meant to cover things like food, shelter and so on.

There is the issue of victims and those associated with them watching as prisoners set up savings accounts and accumulate dollars. It is an affront to them. They think it is outrageous. It is something they cannot tolerate. They want us to take that benefit away. The specific reason is that provisions are already made at great cost to taxpayers. Taxpayers and those close to victims should not be victimized further.

I suggest that the member not only think about supporting the bill but that he get his colleagues to support it as well so that it can be passed as quickly as possible.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 1979 the Conservative government of Joe Clark changed the rules to make federal inmates eligible for these pensions in the first place. I am very interested in knowing what the rationale was for the Conservative government's decision at that time.

Surely when the minister was formulating this bill, discussing it in caucus and coming up with the rationale for doing it he would have looked back to find out why the Conservative government of Joe Clark started giving pensions to prisoners in the first place. Was it because of a court case? Are there any records to indicate what the rationale was in the first place? We understand the government's wanting to get rid of the payments now, but the question is why a Conservative government started doing it in the first place.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, I certainly would not propose to speak for Mr. Clark or anyone else in history. Certainly this government is not supporting that.

One of the member's colleagues in the NDP raised the issue of universality of pensions and felt that in some fashion prisoners are entitled to receive pensions. I am certainly not an advocate of that. I do not think they are entitled to them or that universality is a challenge to that. If a person commits a crime, there are consequences that follow.

Pensions are not taken away from prisoners forever. Pensions are suspended only for the time the individuals are incarcerated. We have gone so far as to ensure that their spouses or common law partners are not disadvantaged and receive entitlements based on their income and not the incomes of both parties.

This is a fair piece of legislation. It is legislation the public expects. This government has been very quick to respond to this issue. For 13 years the Liberal government did nothing on this issue, but we took action in weeks or months. It has been a very quick and precise response to the public and one which the public expects not

in years but weeks and months to get the bill through. If we had a modicum of co-operation, we could do it even quicker.

•(1315)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to be here to speak to issues, especially things that we went on record some months ago as supporting, without having to listen to some of the rhetoric. I heard my colleague behind me use words that are inappropriate in the House, and I will just leave it at that.

It has been suggested that we on this side of the House are not supporting this bill. It has also been suggested that this has been a fast process. The bill was introduced in June. This issue was brought up first by the media, by the way, not by anybody else, in March. It took until June for the legislation to be introduced. Here we are on November 16 finally getting a bill passed. That has a lot to do with the fact that the committee worked very well with the intent of getting the bill back into the House. Otherwise who knows how long it would take to get it here?

Some of us are concerned and frustrated when we hear the other side say that we are not helping. We are the ones who have been pushing this forward since it was first announced in the media. The government has been advancing it at nothing short of a snail's pace. Let us be clear on that point.

The committee has done a good job. After all, it was a little more than a month since the committee was asked to examine Bill C-31. Members of the committee took the bill seriously. They did their homework and asked questions to make sure that we avoided unintended consequences. Hence the bill is now before us and it could be passed very quickly here and in the other place. It is fair to say that the committee members did a quick and thorough job of reviewing the bill, contrary to, as I indicated earlier, what the government did not do.

My primary concern stems back to the pace that business is being advanced in the House. A proactive government would move quickly on issues that concern Canadians and parliamentarians.

Most members know that Bill C-31 is legislation that is relatively simplistic from a legal perspective, which does not happen too often. It is not particularly controversial, nor is it divisive in its scope. After all, the entire bill, in both English and French, is less than six pages in total length. It is a very small bill.

Put another way, after more than five months of working on this legislation, we have successfully completed just 25% of the legislative process. Imagine, just 25% in five months; that is a snail's pace if there ever were one. If this is the best we can do, Bill C-31 will not pass into law until July 2012, long after when every reasonable person expects the next election to be held. We know what will happen. An election will be called; everything will die on the order paper and nothing will ever get done. This could have been done in September. The bill could have passed in September and gone to the other place. It is not often that we are asking the government why it is not moving something forward faster, but this is a very simple and small bill and it could have been passed by both houses by now.

Government Orders

This means the government wants to talk about this bill more than it wants to pass it. It wants to say that it is tough on crime more than it wants to back its rhetoric with real action. Most particularly, the government is clearly more interested in optics than it is in the elements of governing as responsible Canadians.

Permit me to be completely clear though. We are of the belief that the changes are long overdue and we do not oppose them. In fact, we support them. As I have said before, from the Liberals' perspective, we are certainly prepared to fast-track this legislation. I indicated in June when the minister introduced the legislation that we were prepared to fast-track this bill.

When I last spoke in this House on Bill C-31, my primary concern was simple. I wanted to make sure there were no unintended consequences attached to the bill. It is a requirement for all of us as legislators to ensure there are no unintended consequences on any legislation that is introduced in the House. Even though many of us had strong feelings from the start when the media flagged this issue, our government was not aware of this issue any more than anybody else was. It was members of the media, in the kind of work they do, who discovered Mr. Olson was receiving old age security cheques, which clearly bothered all of us.

While I was anxious to punish the guilty and to ensure that tax dollars were not being wasted, I also needed to be sure we were not punishing the spouses for the crimes of their partners. We all know that the spouses pay a big enough price and I do not believe any of us wanted to add to that difficulty.

• (1320)

It seems that the committee members were satisfied by hearing witnesses from various organizations throughout Canada. They listened to all sides of the issues to make sure that Bill C-31 would not have a negative impact on the spouses, and that the spouses, families and children would be protected.

In my mind there would seem to be no other reason that we would not send Bill C-31 to the other place. If the Prime Minister were truly committed to its speedy passage, he could direct his Conservative-dominated Senate to pass the legislation immediately. It could all be done before we rose for Christmas, if he really wanted it done. Of course, the Prime Minister has little interest in this approach, so one would wonder how serious he is about the issue, or is he just more interested in looking as though he were serious about the issue? That is for the Canadian people to decide at the appropriate time. After all, this is just another in a recent string of examples of the government's relentless drive for good optics.

According to the recently released public accounts, lapsed funding for the victims of crime initiative last year amounted to just under \$4 million, or 45% of the available funds. That means in 2009-10, the Conservatives spent \$4.8 million helping victims of crime versus \$6 million which they spent this year to advertise how they helped those victims of crime.

One of the motions that was introduced at committee was that the \$2 million, the amount of money saved by not sending the pension to the likes of Mr. Olson, should be given to the victims of crime organization so that we could help victims in as many ways as

possible. However, my understanding is that the amendment was not passed at committee.

Those commercials we continue to see in the government's massive advertising campaign fail to mention that when the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament, he killed his entire crime agenda that we had heard so much about for so many years, much of which had the Liberals' support. However, once Parliament was prorogued, all of that fell off the agenda, just as this bill would if the Prime Minister were to prorogue Parliament tomorrow.

People have to understand what proroguing Parliament really does. The legislation that all of us work for, although not all of us necessarily support, is lost once Parliament prorogues. Every single bill at that time was back to square one. When Parliament resumed sitting in the spring, each one of them had to be reintroduced, one by one. That delays them, because they have to go through the same process again: first reading, second reading, consideration at committee, report stage, third reading and then they go to the other place. All that so-called big crime agenda that was necessary was lost. Some of it was not as good as it could have been; there were lots of problems with some of it, but we were supporting it. Then we had to start all over again in the spring. Yet if we listen to the Prime Minister's multi-million dollar ad campaign, we would swear that all of that legislation was in effect right now, which is simply untrue.

Call it retail politics, spin, wedge politics or whatever one wishes, but Canadians are being misinformed again and again by the government. I say it is time for that nonsense to stop and for the government to be honest about the kind of legislation that is being passed and the timelines in doing that.

In simple terms, Bill C-31 seeks to amend the Old Age Security Act to preclude incarcerated persons from receiving benefits under this act and at the same time to maintain entitlement to benefits for their spouse or common law partner. When we talk about unintended consequences, we had to ensure that the spouses and children of these individuals would not be harmed with the passage of Bill C-31.

As I have already said, the latter of these elements is, in my estimation, a pivotal thrust of this particular piece of legislation. We should never be too eager to cast a net without first ensuring that only those deserving of punishment are actually forced to endure it, and not their spouses and children.

Despite our often fierce partisan differences in the House, today we are looking at an issue that should unite all of us regardless of our political affiliation.

• (1325)

As we know, the old age security pension is intended to help seniors pay for their housing, clothing, food and transportation, which are expectations that many seniors struggle with each and every day.

Government Orders

I just came from a meeting at the industry committee where we were talking about Bill C-501. This is a bill that was put forward by one of my colleagues in the other party to try to deal with pensioners and bankruptcy collapse, to deal with what happens to people who work for companies that go bankrupt. This bill deals with the impacts on current pensioners and would-be pensioners. It deals with the devastation of trying to live on \$1,200 a month and the many pensioners who are in poverty as a result of their company's going bankrupt.

This is a call on the government and all parliamentarians, and we were all very serious this morning regardless of party, to try to find solutions to the problem of Nortel, for example, and other companies. How do we better protect pensions and people's contributions in this country?

For thousands of seniors who are struggling with these growing bills on a fixed income, the thought that convicted and imprisoned criminals would be eligible for the same OAS benefit as they are is quite offensive and totally unacceptable for all of us.

Moreover, given that the old age security is meant to help a recipient pay for housing, clothing, food and transportation, it seems unnecessary for prisoners to get a cheque given that their housing, clothing, food and transportation are already paid for as a condition of their incarceration. It does not make a lot of sense that we give the same amount of money to seniors out there having to pay rent and buy their own groceries and clothing and all the rest of it, and yet people in prison, regardless of what they are there for, get all of that plus their old age security.

One senior said, "Maybe I should go to jail. At least I would have some extra money and all of my needs would be taken care of". I assured that senior that once the gate was closed it might not seem like such a good idea.

As a legislator, I see the current reality to be redundant, unacceptable and, as I indicated earlier, something that should be changed without delay, without delay. I would like to hear the government move this through at votes tonight, move it into the Senate and ask the Conservative-dominated Senate to pass Bill C-31 immediately. This is precisely why I am of the belief that Bill C-31 should be advanced, as I indicated before.

I last addressed this issue in June when the minister introduced the legislation. I said at that time that I would not seek to draw this process out for the sake of speaking longer in the House. I did not intend to do that then, nor do I intend to do it today. What is needed today is action and it is needed now.

For the sake of clarity, contrary to my colleague's asking if we would vote for it, the Liberal position has been on the record since June, maybe before that, that we would support this kind of legislation. So that there is no question whether we will, the Liberal side of the House supports the stated notions of Bill C-31 unequivocally.

The next thing we know, though, there will be a massive email campaign going around to everybody in Canada saying to go after the Liberals, NDP and the Bloc because they may not support Bill C-31. Let me be clear. We have indicated from the beginning that we

support it. We are going to continue to support it. In fact, we are asking the government to fast-track it through the Senate.

We agree that convicted and incarcerated criminals should not receive societal benefits, like the monthly old age security cheque. On a purely personal note, I would take this belief one step further.

I, like most Canadians, was horrified as I watched the trial of the former Colonel Williams. This person is now sitting in jail, but upon his formal retirement he could be eligible for a pension that he earned while a member of the Canadian Forces, a time that coincides with the time he committed his heinous crimes. There is something fundamentally wrong with the notion that he will be rewarded on the same scale as Canada's veterans of the war in Afghanistan. There is something terribly wrong with that.

• (1330)

Canada's pension systems, both public and private, need a great deal of attention. The Canada pension plan, old age security, the guaranteed income supplement and the various private options available are good. We are grateful that we have them and that the investments were made, but we need to do better.

We need to examine all facets of these systems in a way that will close the gaps, reduce the redundancies and enhance the benefits for all Canadians. I recently released a white paper on pension reform. That document was the product of more than a year of work by nearly 20 industry and pension specialists of every partisan stripe.

Whether we addressed the creation of a supplementary Canada pension plan, the tightening of regulatory loopholes, the enhancement of regular Canada pension plan benefits or the establishment of a pension bill of rights, the focus was not on politics. It was on substantive pension reform. Our primary focus was, and is, finding ways to make pensions stronger. Some days I wish that example could be adopted more often by the government and this House.

Twenty-eight recommendations later, I am convinced that we have a winning strategy, a comprehensive, multi-generational plan that puts people and their pensions first. The white paper, which can be found on my web page, fits hand-in-glove with Bill C-574, which I introduced on October 1.

Bill C-574 is a pensioners' bill of rights. Since the Mackenzie King government, a Liberal government I should remind the House, first introduced the Old Age Pensions Act 83 years ago, Liberals have fostered a long history of creating, enhancing and expanding pensions available to Canadian seniors.

From old age security, introduced by the Liberal government, to the Canada pension plan of previous Liberal governments and the supplement, also from a previous Liberal government, we understand the extreme importance of protecting and preserving pension security, adequacy and coverage for all deserving and law-abiding Canadians.

Bill C-574 is the next step in that process. Too often, financial illiteracy, inadequate opportunity and economic instability strip away the hard-earned savings of our seniors. That must stop.

Government Orders

Bill C-574 is the first bill of its kind ever proposed to better protect our seniors and their nest eggs. I am proud to have presented it. I clearly hope that all members in this House will adopt it at the appropriate time. I would urge colleagues to take part in that debate on November 23. As always, our seniors are counting on us.

Bill C-31 is yet another step that could be taken down this road. I stand ready to do whatever it takes to achieve these goals, and I look forward to working with my colleagues and with the government to pass measures geared to the same.

With the help of the government, I am hopeful that we can advance Bill C-31 quickly in this House and then, with the help of the Prime Minister, quickly through the other place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate our hon. colleague from York West on her speech. I think we have reached the same conclusions about Bill C-31. She raised the issue of protecting victims. It would be interesting to hear more of her thoughts on this.

We are used to seeing the Conservatives introduce bills to penalize criminals even more, but they almost never introduce anything to prevent crime. Some things, it goes without saying, we can agree on, such as Bill C-31, but the Conservatives rarely or never introduce bills to protect victims.

Can the member tell us if this bill contains any elements to protect victims? If not, what measures should be brought forward to protect the victims of crime?

• (1335)

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, at the committee my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour spoke to me about introducing a motion that would divert the dollars being saved in this bill to the victims of crime. That budget for the victims of crime gets cut on a continuous basis. More money needs to be made available to those very victims who have suffered so much.

I have a wonderful young mother in my riding by the name of Louise Russo. Many members in the House are aware of her. She was picking up a sandwich at a sandwich bar for her daughter after night school and happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. There was a mob hit. Somebody went by and sprayed bullets into this upscale coffee shop with the intention of getting someone else but unfortunately happened to get Ms. Russo, as she entered to get that sandwich for her daughter that fatal night. She nearly died. She is paralyzed from the breast bone down. She is a young mother with a severely disabled child. Now there are two people in wheelchairs, Ms. Russo and her daughter.

When I inquired about what was available in the way of support for people like Ms. Russo, I found out that the maximum amount was \$25,000. We have a woman who had been actively working and had a disabled child, and the only kind of compensation available to her was \$25,000.

Victims of crime need to be supported in a variety of ways. Emotional support needs to be there, but clearly, financial support has to be there as well. Her ability to be employed, to have a

successful job, has been taken away. In Bill C-31, some of the money could have been diverted for the victims of crime.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a little earlier I asked the parliamentary secretary why the Conservative government of Joe Clark started sending federal prisoners OAS and GIS payments in the first place, in 1979.

It seems to me that if a government is trying to undo a measure that is on the books right now, it would first research the history of it. We know it has done it. It seems to me that it would try to find out when the measure was brought into force and why it was brought into force, and on that basis it would frame its legislative initiative. We know the government has done it, but every time I ask the government the question, I get an evasive answer. The answer is, “Well, the Liberals had 13 years and they did not do anything about it”. The parliamentary secretary did not say that his government has had five years and is just starting to look at the issue.

What prompted Joe Clark to change the rules in 1979 in the first place? Was it a court judgment that was made? Was it a caucus discussion? What were the reasons the government started sending pension cheques to federal prisoners in the first place? It is incumbent upon the government to answer that question.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, if I were a member of the government I would answer the question, but I am not a member of the government and I cannot give the member the answer. Maybe one of our colleagues might call Mr. Clark and ask him exactly what happened back then.

I am sure this was not done casually. I am sure there was a serious amount of investigation and study into it. This did not come up because the government of the day found out about it. It came up because the media found out about it and flagged the issue. All of us in the House were concerned about it and we felt that changes needed to be made.

If money is to be spent, it should be spent on victims of crime to try to help those very people who are victimized by the likes of Clifford Olson and others.

• (1340)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on an excellent job. I also congratulate the work being done through the committee, such as zeroing in on the unintended consequences of something like this.

At the very outset, of course, we do not want to punish those who are receiving the money outside of the individuals themselves. We may have people living in poverty where the consequences were of no fault of their own and yet they are the ones being punished because they are not the ones receiving the public subsidy or receiving money from the government to survive, such as those who are incarcerated. Therefore, I congratulate the member and the committee on their work.

Government Orders

I found it very strange and disingenuous of the parliamentary secretary to raise the issue of 13 long years. It has been four years, for goodness sake. On a three page bill, someone should have flagged at some point that this should have been done. How much time has to elapse before we realize that we are now the author of our own demise and no one else wrote that for us.

It goes back to the debate we had earlier. In the other bill dealing with tough on crime, all of these small items could have been done through the Criminal Code on a larger basis. We could have one piece of legislation that takes care of all of that if there were a vision in place by which the government wants to tackle or fight crime.

However, there does not seem to be a vision because it does not go lockstep with anything else. It is incarceration. However, eliminating that crime before it actually begins is just not a part of the vision.

Could my hon. colleague comment on that please?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I believe there was a recent report by the Parliamentary Budget Officer concerning the billions of dollars, I think it was \$12 billion, that it will cost both federally and provincially for all the new prisons that will be required after all this legislation is passed.

It seems to me that investing in crime prevention and organizations like that are the way we need to be going so we can get rid of these criminals so that maybe they are not created. Maybe we could put more money into schools.

I represent a riding that has many challenges and, clearly, from what I understand, investing in early childhood education, showing kids that they have opportunities in the future and giving them hope does far more than building more prisons. We could take that \$12 billion and put it into everything from early learning opportunities to providing hope for people so that, no matter what their background is, there is opportunity for them to move ahead in our society. Whatever challenges they are facing, there are ways to get out of that.

As a society, we should be doing more to help people achieve their goals instead of building so many prisons.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate it if you would delay the time for questions so that I can finish my speech. My colleague from Hochelaga agrees with me.

I am pleased to speak to this important bill. It is important because it shows the true face of this government and it lets us see the government for what it is.

This bill, which was introduced on June 1, 2010, would eliminate old age security benefits for prisoners. From the outset, the Bloc was clear that it would support this new measure in principle, contrary to what our Conservative colleagues are trying to insinuate. We support this bill in principle.

We also said from the outset that we wanted the bill to go to committee, and it was studied by the committee I have the honour to sit on, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. We

made a unanimous recommendation in this House that would correct this flaw that allows prisoners, who are fed and housed at public expense, to receive old age security benefits, which are not earned through employment or otherwise.

The government made this an urgent issue, even though we did not see it as urgent. We saw the need but not the urgency, because no one was threatened or hurt by this situation. It was a matter of recovering the money these people had received unfairly. We discovered along the way that the Conservatives were just paying lip service to the idea of urgency, because they tried and are still trying to drag out the debate so that they can make purely demagogic arguments implying that the opposition parties disagree with the principle of this bill. Clearly, we are talking about something that went unnoticed for years and only came to light because of Mr. Wilson's situation.

A more urgent issue would be the situation of seniors who are not incarcerated, but who live in the community and have to make do with an income that is not enough to let them live in dignity.

I will talk about two specific measures. The first is the guaranteed income supplement, including income security. One seniors advocacy group, FADOQ, has brought this issue forward on a number of occasions, and started a petition that I tabled in this House a week or two ago. My Bloc Québécois colleagues have also filed petitions from each of their ridings.

We find ourselves in this House with petitions presented by Bloc colleagues. These petitions, started and sponsored by seniors groups, are calling urgently for an increase in seniors' income, which consists of basic income security, known as the old age pension, and the guaranteed income supplement for those who receive old age security but still do not have enough income to pay for housing, food, clothing and medication.

In Quebec alone, 78,000 seniors find themselves in this situation; in Canada, the number is threefold.

Therefore, this is of concern to us. A well-known Quebecker said that a society is judged on how it treats its children and its seniors. Given that we can identify 78,000 Quebeckers and more than 200,000 Canadians living not just below the poverty line, but below the level of income considered necessary to live with dignity, something is not working properly in our society.

● (1345)

This is an indication that the laws are poorly designed or not being enforced.

In the case of the guaranteed income supplement, the legislation is being misapplied, perhaps even deliberately misapplied. Eight years ago in 2002, it was discovered that 83,000 eligible people in Quebec alone were not receiving the guaranteed income supplement. And yet, they were entitled to it.

Government Orders

Year after year, we have asked the government why these people are not receiving the guaranteed income supplement even though the government receives their income tax returns and has knowledge of their income. Almost none of these people are aware of their entitlement. They are isolated in the community and lack the necessary knowledge and education. And yet, the government knows who these people are.

Bloc Québécois members including Marcel Gagnon, the former member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, campaigned to make people aware of their GIS eligibility. Tens of thousands of people discovered that they were entitled to the GIS as a result of this campaign. And yet, these people were living in poverty—which I will not describe as abject, because they are proud people—but in poverty that was barely tolerable. The upshot was that over 40,000 people found out about their entitlement and filed applications.

At this very moment, there are still 42,000 people in Quebec and three times that many in the rest of Canada who have fallen through the cracks. There is the very familiar case of the woman from Toronto who had been living in absolute poverty and found out only two years ago that she had qualified for the guaranteed income supplement for the past 10 years or more. News of our campaign spread to Toronto, where she found out about her entitlement and was also discovered. Her story made headlines. That is just one case. There have been tens of thousands of similar cases.

There is a lot of urgency around this first measure. Not only does this situation require urgent attention so that these people get the guaranteed income supplement, but also, benefits must immediately be paid retroactively since over \$3 billion has been misappropriated. That money belongs to seniors. This wrong must be righted immediately.

To correct this injustice, in April, my colleague, the member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, introduced Bill C-516, which includes the following measures. We in the Bloc Québécois truly hope that all members of the House will support this bill and, when the time comes, vote for it. The bill would increase the guaranteed income supplement by \$110 per month. It proposes a six-month extension to the pension and surviving spouse or common-law partner benefit. This six-month extension would ensure that a survivor is able to bridge the gap after the death of his or her spouse. Also included is automatic enrolment for those over the age of 65 who are eligible for the GIS—which I mentioned earlier, and it is ridiculous that this has not yet been done—retroactive guaranteed income supplement payments to seniors, and a surviving spouse benefit increase to match GIS levels.

These are the measures that must be taken immediately with respect to my first example.

● (1350)

My second example has to do with the people who have not reached the age of eligibility for the income security pension, that is, the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement, and who lose their jobs while still under the age of 65. Beginning in 1989, we had a program for older worker adjustment, the POWA, for workers aged 55 and up who lost their jobs and were not able to find new employment, particularly in one-industry regions. These people

were left with nothing once their employment insurance benefits and benefit period ran out, and they ended up on welfare.

From 1989 to 1997, we had a program called POWA, the program for older worker adjustment, which enabled these people, for whom there were no jobs available, to receive income from employment insurance to allow them to live decently.

In 1997, the Liberal government cut that program completely, and it has not existed since then, which means that factories have been shut down in many regions in Quebec and elsewhere. Other members can speak for what has gone on in other provinces.

There is Whirlpool, for example, which shut down in Montmagny in 2004. Nearly 30% of the 245 employees were over 55. The primary employer in the region closed its doors and there were no jobs for the employees who were over 55. The younger ones could always find work elsewhere, but it was a difficult time. What happened to these people? They ended up on welfare. These people had worked and paid into employment insurance their entire lives, and the government did not even support them with a measure that was paid for out of their own pockets.

What happened during that time? The employment insurance fund was generating surpluses every year. In 1997, the same year the government cut the POWA, a surplus of over \$7 billion had accumulated in that fund. Yet over 50% of the employees who had paid into the EI fund were not eligible to receive EI benefits. As a matter of fact, surpluses accumulated year after year, thereby allowing both parties that formed successive governments to misappropriate over \$57 billion from the EI fund over a period of 13 or 14 years. During that time, older workers were losing their jobs and not receiving any benefits, even though they had paid into the EI fund their entire lives.

As we know, some measures were taken during what has been called the economic crisis. These include the stimulus plans for municipal infrastructure, special measures for the automotive industry, and so on. Then again, even if there is no national economic crisis, people who lose their jobs go through their own economic crisis and so do their families.

On behalf of my party, I introduced Bill C-308 to correct the situation, but the Liberals sided with the Conservatives to defeat that bill.

● (1355)

To be fair, some Liberal members voted in favour of the bill, but they arranged, as they so often do, to have enough members absent—including the Liberal Party leader, first and foremost—to ensure it did not pass. We had just won an opposition vote on a Liberal motion, and the Liberal Party leader practically ran down the aisle to leave so he would not have to vote. It was a little pathetic.

So, yes, there are victims who need to be taken care of, victims of crime, of course, and victims of the economic situation. I illustrated this with two very specific cases.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to know when I will be able to finish my speech.

Statements by Members

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have four minutes to finish his speech after question period. We will now proceed to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

LOUIS RIEL

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 125th anniversary of the death of Louis Riel, one of Canada's foremost Métis leaders.

I, as a Métis woman, am truly honoured to acknowledge his contributions, both to the Métis Nation and to Canada as a whole.

Louis Riel is regarded by many as the father of Manitoba, because he led negotiations with the Government of Canada in 1870 that resulted in the formation of Manitoba as the fifth province to join Confederation.

Sadly, at the young age of 41 years, Louis Riel faced death while declaring, "I have nothing but my heart and I have given it long ago to my country".

Although today is a solemn declaration of his death, we are proud as Canadians to reflect on Louis Riel's accomplishments and his efforts to ensure justice and recognition for all Métis people.

• (1400)

[Translation]

Today we pay tribute to a francophone Métis leader who was born in Saint Boniface, died in Regina and was buried in his homeland. Louis Riel was a remarkable and unforgettable man. *Meegwitch.*

* * *

SAINT-QUENTIN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 13, 2010, I had the opportunity to attend the Saint-Quentin chamber of commerce's annual banquet.

Each year, the banquet is an opportunity to pay tribute to the region's entrepreneurial community. This year, the chamber added a young entrepreneur award to highlight the work of our young people and their role as the future of our community.

I would like to acknowledge the four recipients of the 2010 awards: business of the year—Denis Banville Excavation Inc.; female entrepreneur—Anne Mallais, Résidence AM; volunteer entrepreneur, Raoul Couturier, Motel chez RA-LY; and young entrepreneur—Frédéric Perron, Chapiteaux Fred.

I want to take a moment to recognize the time and effort that you have put into your personal and business success. Your leadership and drive make you remarkable people. I would like to congratulate you and thank you for what you bring to the community of Saint-Quentin and the surrounding area. On behalf of the people of Madawaska—Restigouche, be proud of your achievements. I am proud of you.

SAINT-ISIDORE-DE-CLIFTON

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the municipality of Saint-Isidore-de-Clifton was established in 1910, and thus is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Its dynamic inhabitants makes Saint-Isidore a unique place. Well known for its breathtaking views, this municipality in the Haut-St-François RCM is a jewel in the crown of the forestry industry.

On August 7, I had the opportunity to participate in the parade organized for the celebrations. I saw for myself all the talent and know-how of the people of Saint-Isidore. That is why I would like to offer my most sincere congratulations to the organizations and volunteers who are making the centennial of this municipality an unforgettable event. I am proud to be able to represent the citizens of Saint-Isidore in the House of Commons on behalf of the Bloc Québécois.

Thank you and happy anniversary Saint-Isidore-de-Clifton.

* * *

[English]

PENSIONS

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology began two weeks of debate on an important piece of legislation, Bill C-501. It was sent to committee with strong support from members of all parties in the House. I want to extend my thanks to my colleagues for that support, for their participation so far, and for their further participation over the next two weeks.

I invite all members of the House to speak with me about concerns, bring their ideas forward, and explore ways in which we can work together to improve pension security in Canada and pass Bill C-501.

Every member of the House represents constituents who have defined pension benefit plans and who are presently stuck at the back of the line when a company runs into difficulty. Together we can protect the pensions of six million Canadians who have worked hard, played by the rules, and earned the right to retire with dignity.

I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to pass a bill that will serve as a shining example for Canadians of how we can all work together in this place and do the right thing for the people whom we have the honour of serving.

* * *

MILITARY FAMILIES

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian soldiers have served our country with distinction through world wars and in Korea. They have served in many peacekeeping missions and currently serve in Afghanistan and 15 other operations around the world.

Statements by Members

Last week, we paused to remember our soldiers past and present, many of whom never came home. Canadians are grateful for their commitment and we honour their service. Today, I wish to acknowledge Canada's unsung patriots. I am speaking of the families of our soldiers. These patriots do not volunteer service and they did not set foot on a battlefield, but they have made incredible sacrifices. They have given our country their husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and children.

This is a debt impossible to repay. That is why I support our military family resource centres. They provide programs designed to meet the needs of military families and to give them opportunities to make use of what the centres have to offer. I am pleased today to stand and honour our Canadian military families. They are the strength behind the uniform.

* * *

● (1405)

HASSANALI LAKHANI

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to a truly visionary Canadian, Dr. Hassanali Lakhani, who died this past week.

Dr. Lakhani was born in Kenya in 1921, lived in England, but made Canada his home since 1988. His successful business career was surpassed only by his sense of philanthropy and support for charities. He was deeply appreciative of Canada's approach to pluralism and multiculturalism.

In 2003, he established the Noor Centre in Don Valley West. There, Dr. Lakhani made the Canadian vision of pluralism a reality with, among other things, countless educational and cultural exchanges among the Abrahamic faiths that we may know each other.

The Noor Centre has funded fellowships and chairs in Islamic studies at York University.

In 2005, Dr. Lakhani was awarded an honorary doctor of laws degree and the Canadian Centre for Diversity's prestigious human relations award for his bridge-building efforts.

Dr. Lakhani leaves behind his wife Noor, four children, nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

He will be truly missed.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's economic action plan is working: almost 430,000 new jobs created and over 260,000 jobs saved through our work share program.

While the Liberal-Bloc-NDP coalition looked at ways to spend and increase taxes that would result in killing an estimated 400,000 jobs, we focused on what really matters to Canadians: job growth; expanding the economy; investing in infrastructure and in skills and training.

As a result, hope and opportunity is evident in all parts of Canada but specifically in Souris—Moose Mountain. During break week, I saw vehicles, equipment and workers on the ground busy in construction, from sewer and water projects, road building, housing and events centres to work on the Energy Training Institution in Estevan, Saskatchewan. This institute will provide the skilled and trained workers for future development in the energy and oil sector, not only in Souris—Moose Mountain but in Saskatchewan and beyond.

Hope and opportunity continues to abound in Souris—Moose Mountain and we had an important part to play in it.

* * *

[Translation]

GISÈLE GIGUÈRE

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all members of the House know that we owe our positions in large part to the work of our supporters. Thanks to them, I was elected as the member for Hochelaga a year ago.

Today, I would like to pay tribute to an exceptional supporter, Gisèle Giguère, who preferred to simply be called GIGI. Through her hard work, GIGI helped Louise Harel and Carole Poirier get elected to the Quebec National Assembly on a number of occasions, and she also helped our former colleague, Réal Ménard.

GIGI passed away on October 25 and, at her funeral, I committed to honouring her memory. In order to always remember her significant presence at each of our political activities and her advice, which was given so frankly and freely, we will be giving out the GIGI award each year in the Hochelaga riding to recognize the work of a supporter of the sovereigntist cause.

It is with the help of people like you, GIGI, that we will achieve our independence.

Rest in peace. You have earned it.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am deeply concerned over the sentencing of a woman to death for blasphemy in Pakistan. Asia Bibi was sentenced to death by a local court on November 8. I hope that this judgment and any others like it will be swiftly struck down on appeal.

My colleague, Senator Salma Atallahjan, who has been visiting Pakistan, registered Canada's concerns with the sentencing of Asia Bibi in a meeting with the Pakistani foreign minister.

Canada has repeatedly urged the Government of Pakistan to repeal laws criminalizing blasphemy which restrict freedom of religion and of expression. These laws are objectionable in themselves but have also disproportionately targeted religious minorities.

Statements by Members

Canadian officials will continue to encourage federal and provincial authorities in Pakistan to respect Pakistan's international human rights obligations and to ensure the safety and well-being of all of its citizens, regardless of religion or ethnicity.

* * *

YEAR OF THE MÉTIS NATION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 11 months ago, I asked this House to approve the following motion:

That...the government should utilize next year, 2010, to commemorate the Year of the Métis in recognition of the 125th anniversary of the historic events of 1885 in Saskatchewan; and further, the government should recognize and celebrate the invaluable contributions of the Métis Nation across Canada which have enriched the lives of all Canadians, socially, economically, politically and culturally.

That motion was adopted unanimously.

Now, on this day, November 16, we need to pause in solemn reflection on the death, 125 years ago today, of the founder of the Métis Nation, Louis Riel.

A western MP, father of the province of Manitoba, leader of the northwest rebellion and valiant defender of the identity, culture and rights of the Métis people, Louis Riel is a figure of enduring national importance.

On this day, we in this Parliament honour his memory.

* * *

• (1410)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can count on their government to oppose protectionism and defend free trade on the world stage.

Today the Minister of International Trade was in Delhi to launch the first round of negotiations towards a Canada-India free trade agreement. Protectionism continues to threaten long-term economic recovery for Canada and, indeed, for the whole world. This free trade agreement will help businesses and workers expand market opportunities and promote prosperity and job creation in both countries.

A recent joint study showed that such an agreement could deliver a boost to Canada's economy of \$6 billion to \$15 billion, increase bilateral trade with India by 50% and directly benefit Canadian sectors ranging from agriculture, resource-related and chemical products to transport equipment, machinery and services.

Both Canada and India recognize we need the kind of benefits and opportunities that a Canada-India free trade agreement would provide.

* * *

[Translation]

LOUIS RIEL

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 125 years ago, the Canadian government executed Louis Riel, leader of the Métis, father of Confederation, and founder of Manitoba.

It is never too late for a country like Canada that claims to be founded on the rule of law to acknowledge historic wrongs and make amends. That is what everyone in the House did two years ago when we apologized to aboriginal peoples. If there is a truly Canadian people, it is the Métis, born of the First Nations and the first European settlers.

The bill introduced by my colleague from Winnipeg Centre would allow Louis Riel to be officially pardoned and would give him his rightful place in history. In 1985, after being ignored for nearly a century, Franco-Manitobans saw their linguistic rights reinstated by the Supreme Court in the Forest case. Today, this House has another opportunity to make a significant gesture of atonement by giving Louis Riel and the Métis people their rightful place in our history.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government continues to make the economy a priority and is committed to opening new markets for Canadian goods and services. Today, the Minister of International Trade was in Delhi to launch the first round of talks on a free trade agreement between Canada and India.

Such an agreement could result in billions of dollars in economic spinoffs for the Canadian economy, increase bilateral trade with India and directly benefit many Canadian industries.

This agreement shows that our government is committed to building on our already strong ties with India to create a partnership that will lead to new jobs, new opportunities and stronger economies for both Canada and India.

Canadians can count on their government to oppose protectionism and to defend international free trade. As our economy continues to recover, we need the benefits and opportunities that would result from a free trade agreement between Canada and India.

* * *

QUEBEC'S FEDERATION FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF FARMERS

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to welcome the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec to Parliament Hill.

The Bloc Québécois and I agree with and respect the federation's mission, which is to bring together youth who are passionate about agriculture, to defend their interests, to improve conditions for those starting out in agriculture and to attract a new generation to farming.

Like the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec, the Bloc Québécois feels that the federal government should take action quickly in order to encourage family farm transfers and keep farms from being dismantled.

Oral Questions

The Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec can count on the support of Bloc members, who will work tirelessly to defend the interests of a new generation of farmers. This is about justice, equality and respect.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after five years of inaction on public health care, the Prime Minister thinks he can fool Vaughan's voters with an empty promise of federal funding for a new hospital in Vaughan.

After five years of ignoring public health care, the Prime Minister should know better than to pretend that the federal government builds hospitals when it is a provincial jurisdiction.

The Prime Minister is threatening to cut health transfers to the provinces. He broke his election promise to reduce wait times. He refused to defend our health care system when it was under attack by Republican politicians in the United States.

The government is full of cabinet ministers who shut down dozens of hospitals and fired thousands of nurses throughout Ontario. As chair of the York Central Hospital Board, Tony Genco has worked to bring a hospital to Vaughan.

Only Tony Genco understands the collaborative approach needed to deliver on the health needs of Vaughan's families and only the Liberal Party can be trusted to safeguard public health care.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently in Winnipeg, the leader of the Liberal Party made insulting and offensive comments that were supported by his Liberal candidate, Kevin Lamoureux. The Liberal leader insinuated that Julie Javier, a Filipino Canadian with an impressive professional and community background, is only running so she could steal votes from the Liberal candidate in the Filipino community because of her heritage.

Virginia Guiang, former executive director of the Philippine Canadian Centre of Manitoba, said it best when she said:

It's offensive for [the Liberal leader] to insinuate that members of ethnic communities all vote the same way. Putting Canadians into voting blocks based on ethnic origin is old school Liberal politics and it has no place in today's Canada. Women, Filipinos, and members of other ethnic communities are individuals who can make up their own mind. We are not voting machines that just blindly go and vote Liberal.

The Liberal leader and his candidate need to apologize.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since June, our party has been clear: the combat mission in Afghanistan must end in 2011, and Canada must then engage in a training mission.

We have heard the government's proposal. Can the government and the Prime Minister assure us that Canadian soldiers will not be involved in any combat once the new mission begins and that the training will be done—

The Speaker: Order, please. The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not proposing a combat mission. I took note of the Liberal Party's advice in that regard, and I can assure the Liberal Party leader that the mission until 2014 will be a non-combat mission.

[English]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 20,000 Canadians served in Afghanistan since 2001; 153 brave soldiers did not survive and their sacrifices must not be in vain. We need to be clear about this new engagement of Canada after 2011.

Can the Prime Minister guarantee that this is not going to involve combat, that it is going to be out of Kandahar and that the training will occur in safe conditions in Kabul?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): The answer is yes to all those questions, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and others have said, we are looking at a non-combat mission that will occur. It will be a training mission that will occur in classrooms, behind the wire, in bases.

The government has been very clear and we do think this is a way of ensuring we consolidate the gains that we have made and honour the sacrifices of Canadians who have served in Afghanistan.

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we called for an open national debate on this question as far back as June. The government spent five years saying nothing about Afghanistan. In fact, the Prime Minister said very clearly he wanted no post-combat mission. Then he changed his mind. Then there were trial balloons. Then ministers were saying one thing, then another. There was a period of frantic improvisation, and three days before Lisbon, presto, we get the details.

Can the Prime Minister explain and justify this process of frantic improvisation in the making of Canada's foreign policy?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, the current mission does not end until well into next year. That is why the government has taken the time to look at all the facts on the ground before making the decision it has taken.

Oral Questions

I note that the decisions we have taken are very close to what the Liberal Party in fact recommended, so I am glad that we actually agree on this particular matter.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some 13% of the current rotation in Afghanistan is expected to develop anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, but Canadian Forces personnel are waiting up to a month for treatment in the country's five largest mental health clinics. In rural Canada, it is even worse.

How is it possible? How is it possible that the minister did not anticipate these needs?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we did anticipate that we would face challenges with respect to operational stress. That is why we took the unprecedented step of virtually doubling the number of health care professionals currently employed by the Canadian Forces.

We now have roughly 378 full-time mental health professionals. We have others on contract in rural parts of the country. We have a mental health awareness campaign initiated by the Chief of the Defence Staff. Joint personnel support units provide operational stress injury support. We have ongoing programs and efforts. I appreciate the input from the member opposite on this important issue.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no way to track mental health issues among the Canadian Forces and veterans. A national database is critical to understanding the extent of mental health issues and how to best treat conditions.

Can the minister explain why the fully automated medical record-keeping system, which was to be operational in 2008, was delayed until 2011 and now until March 2012?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has to decide whether she will rely on statistics or say there are none.

The reality is that we have now appointed a special adviser for operational stress injuries. As I mentioned, we have doubled the number of full-time mental health professionals. We have, in addition, taken steps to partner with clinics, as we do here in Ottawa with the mental health clinic.

We continue to work with the private sector, as we do with hospitals near many of the bases around the country, and we have a mental health awareness campaign. We provide mental health services through 43 primary care clinics and 26 mental health clinics across the country.

We will continue to invest in this important issue for those personnel and their families.

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's unilateral decision to extend the military mission in Afghanistan is totally unacceptable. In the 2007 throne speech and during the election campaign, the Prime Minister repeatedly promised, and I quote, to "make Parliament responsible for exercising oversight over...the commitment of Canadian Forces to foreign operations".

Is the Prime Minister aware that by breaking his promise to Canadians, he has lost his honour?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the government has kept its promise with regard to the motion that was adopted here in the House. The combat mission will end in 2011, as planned.

In the coming years, as we continue to work alongside the Afghan people and the international community, Canada will continue to play an important role in supporting efforts toward a better future for all Afghans.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is playing word games again, just as he did yesterday. Clearly, a training mission in Afghanistan is a military mission. Moreover, in a recent interview, retired General Rick Hillier made it clear that if we try to help train and develop the Afghan army, we are going to be in combat.

Why is the Prime Minister trying to mislead the public, unless it is to make it easier for him to break his promise to hold a vote in the House and withdraw the troops after 2011?

● (1425)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not playing word games. It would help if the member understood what the words mean.

Canada's new non-combat, I repeat non-combat, role will focus on four key areas: investing in the future of Afghan children and youth through education and health; advancing security, the rule of law and human rights; promoting regional diplomacy; and delivering humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. That is what we are going to do.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to justify keeping Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan on the pretext that they will not have a combat role. France has proven that it is impossible to conduct training without being involved in combat missions. France has lost about 50 soldiers, some of them while training Afghan soldiers.

Will the government admit that it is attempting to mislead Canadians by claiming that we can train the Afghan army without participating in combat missions?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not at all. The member is mistaken.

Oral Questions

[English]

Canada will continue with the mission until 2011. At that time we will transition to a mission that will involve training in Kabul, as the Prime Minister has pointed out.

Approximately 950 Canadian Forces personnel will take part in that mission to train Afghans, to give them the skill set that they need to provide the type of security for their country, to do the type of work, frankly, that we are doing for them right now.

We are very proud of the efforts of the Canadian Forces and all of the Canadians who have contributed mightily in this mission.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by announcing the extension of the military mission in Afghanistan beyond 2011 without consulting Parliament, the Conservative government is reneging on two promises. Quebeckers believed that the government would withdraw all Canadian soldiers from Afghanistan by no later than the end of 2011, and that any military mission now had to be debated and voted on by Parliament.

Why has the Conservative government misled Canadians?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has not misled Canadians at all. We have to distinguish between a combat role and a non-combat role. In any mission, as we have already mentioned, we are sending Canadian troops to a foreign country for a cause. It is Parliament that decides whether or not to play a role and become involved in a war. In a non-combat role, the armed forces provide advice and give courses in classrooms. This type of work is training and we will—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated yesterday that a vote did not have to be held on extending our mission in Afghanistan and that it was the same as deploying our troops to Haiti.

Can the Prime Minister show us that he truly understands the difference between a humanitarian mission to Haiti and the war in Afghanistan?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in future, our mission in Afghanistan will be a development mission, a humanitarian mission and a mission where we will train Afghan forces. We have never had to vote in the House on non-combat missions. We respect the motion passed by this Parliament.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker,

You can come up with all kinds of schemes to hide away in a camp and train people for the Afghan army or police, but they lack credibility. If you try to help train and develop the Afghan army or police in...Afghanistan, you are going to be in combat.

Those are not my words. Those are the words of former General Hillier.

Can the Prime Minister tell us, why did he break his promise to bring our troops home?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. The mission that we are authorizing going forward does not authorize combat. Our soldiers

will be training Afghan personnel on bases and in classrooms. We are very clear on that.

Our Canadian Forces have served in Afghanistan for almost 10 years. They have taken a lot of casualties. It is important that we honour the sacrifice they made, important that we do things to make sure that we consolidate those gains. We are very proud of the work that our Canadian Forces have done and will be doing in Afghanistan.

• (1430)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister campaigned on a promise, and that promise was that when we were to send our troops abroad there would be a vote in the House of Commons. He did that in 2006, and he did that in 2008, but now the government is combining with the Liberals to break that promise to allow Canadians the right to have their Parliament vote on whether we put our troops in harm's way.

If it is the right thing to do, why not bring it to a vote in this chamber?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have never in this House of Commons put to a vote missions that do not involve combat. The government's actions here respect the parliamentary motion.

The fact of the matter is this: The NDP has a very extreme position on this issue. That party has opposed any Canadian involvement in Afghanistan since 2001, even though it was held with NATO, even though it was held under a United Nations mandate.

Because two dozen Canadians were killed in the 9/11 attacks, it is important that we work to ensure that Afghanistan never becomes a safe haven for terrorists. That is what we are doing and we are respecting the parliamentary motion.

* * *

MEMBER FOR CENTRAL NOVA

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence must share our disappointment at the disappearance of the once progressive wing of his party.

First, the Minister of the Environment left for Bay Street, and now we understand that the defence minister, the second half of that progressive wing, is planning to join him.

This is a critical time for the defence department and it deserves a full-time minister.

Can the Minister of National Defence confirm that he has had discussions directly or indirectly with a law firm in Toronto about a job, and what has the Ethics Commissioner told him about this?

The Speaker: I am not sure this question has much to do with the administrative responsibilities of the government, but if the Minister of National Defence wishes to respond, we will of course hear him.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to paraphrase Mark Twain, "Rumours of my political death are greatly exaggerated".

Oral Questions

I really appreciate the genuine and sincere concern being expressed by the member opposite and some of the soothsayers and prognosticators who are with us today, but I can assure the House that I have every intention of continuing in my job, if the Prime Minister so wishes, and I continue to serve my constituents, the Canadian Forces and all Canadians to the best of my ability.

Some hon. members: More, more.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. We are getting more, but we will have some quiet so we can hear it.

The hon. member for Beauséjour has the floor.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, we understand why the current minister wants to quit.

He was excluded from discussions on the new mission in Afghanistan and was shaken by the Camp Mirage fiasco in Dubai.

The minister did not answer the question. Can he confirm, directly or indirectly, that he has had discussions with a law firm in Toronto, or are those lawyers not telling the truth? If he has, what did the Ethics Commission have to say about these negotiations?

[*English*]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has answered those questions.

What we on this side of the House are all delighted to find out is that the member for Beauséjour, and I presume all members of the Liberal Party, have the same high opinion of the Minister of National Defence as all members of the government.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the purchase of the F-35s is becoming more and more embarrassing. The Pentagon, the British, the Dutch, the Norwegians, all are concerned about soaring costs. While other countries are deferring their decision to purchase F-35s, Canada is going full speed ahead in the opposite direction. Moreover, some experts are concerned that the F-35 is an unaffordable plane that does not meet Canada's real performance requirements.

When will the government show us why only one manufacturer is able to meet our requirements?

• (1435)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is a competition was held. It took place under the previous Liberal government. There was a time when people such as the defence critic were the biggest cheerleaders for the F-35, but now times have changed.

I would ask the hon. member this. How does the aerospace industry in his riding feel about the potential of losing access to \$12 billion in aerospace contracts provided by the F-35? It is the best plane on the market. We are going to get the best for the Canadian Forces.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is acting very irresponsibly in refusing to call for bids.

First, it could drag Canada into one of the worst fiascos in the history of federal government expenditures. Second, there is no proof that these planes meet our real needs. Third, the complexity of the planes could lead to huge, unpredictable maintenance costs.

Why does the government still refuse to follow normal procedure and call for bids?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed, as I have said time and time again, to getting the best plane that will ensure mission success, that will support the Canadian Forces, that will support the Canadian aerospace industry to the tune of \$12 billion.

What I would ask the hon. member opposite to explain is the absolute debacle that is known as the Sea King replacement program, costing the country upward of \$1 billion, where the air force is now forced to continue to fly almost 50-year-old helicopters.

That member has nothing to teach us about procurement. He should stand behind his former colleagues in the Canadian Forces and support this project.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment is minimizing the importance of the upcoming climate change summit in Cancun. The Conservative government still does not have a clear plan, objective or policy. It is showing up in Cancun empty handed. It was precisely that type of attitude that torpedoed the Copenhagen conference.

Does the minister realize that his attitude is contributing to what will inevitably be a series of negotiations that will result in lip service and nothing binding?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case at all. The Government of Canada was very proud of its participation in the Copenhagen accord negotiations. We will continue to work very hard in Cancun with more than 130 countries that have signed the Copenhagen accord. If 130 countries are in favour of it, why does the Bloc not support them?

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister has a lot of nerve to talk to us about the Copenhagen conference. He was the one in 2007 who torpedoed the Bali climate change conference when he tabled a climate change plan that renounced the objectives of the Kyoto protocol.

Oral Questions

What are the minister's intentions: show leadership in Cancun or stifle any progress at the upcoming climate change conference?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Cancun, Canada will continue to work on achieving concrete results for all the items on the agenda, such as funding, deforestation, adoption, technology, commitments made by major polluters on mitigation, and reviewing mitigation commitments. We accomplished good work in Copenhagen and we will carry on our work in Cancun.

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CONTAMINATED WATER IN SHANNON

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last weekend the Shannon citizens' committee held its second annual day of remembrance for those killed by exposure to TCE. The families and victims in Shannon took that opportunity to express their anger and confusion to the government, which is adding to their pain by not telling them the truth.

How can the government still not acknowledge its responsibility in this human and environmental disaster?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 1998, the federal government has invested nearly \$60 million in projects that aim to upgrade and maintain the base's water supply systems, to help the municipality of Shannon upgrade its water supply system and to look at water quality. We have been working hard with all individuals, municipalities and levels of government on this issue.

• (1440)

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the people of Shannon now feel it is up to Société immobilière Valcartier to take legal action against the federal government and ask it to repay the \$800,000 spent on decontaminating the former Canadian Arsenal lands.

Since the government partially acknowledged its responsibility by assuming the costs of decontamination up until 2007, does the Minister of National Defence not feel that it is time to compensate the victims for its negligence and decontaminate all of the sites?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the federal government, successive governments, have invested substantial dollars, upwards of \$60 million, in addressing this issue. We have been working with all of the stakeholders, the municipality, the city of Quebec and all of the people affected.

As the member herself has said, quite rightly, there is a class action and the issue is now before the courts. They are seized with this issue. It would be totally inappropriate for me to comment further.

* * *

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today Food Banks Canada released its HungerCount showing food bank usage up 9% this year and 28% over two years.

The government claims it has no money to help Canada's poor, but when it comes to G8 spending the sky is the limit.

New documents show the government spent \$8,704 on a power cord for a generator. How does one spend almost \$9,000 on a power cord? Was it a 240 kilometre-long cord from Huntsville to downtown Toronto to power the fridges used to chill the Conservative champagne, while other Canadians go hungry?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the best way to fight poverty is to get Canadians working again. The economic action plan is doing that by helping to grow the economy and increasing the number of jobs by nearly 430,000 since July 2009.

Liberal coalition plans to increase every tax there is would kill at least 400,000 jobs, according to outside experts. This would not do those in poverty very well.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we did our homework. I went online and could not even find a generator that cost \$9,000, let alone a power cord.

Food bank usage is up almost 30% in two years. These are our neighbours who have run out of options. They cannot afford food. Meanwhile, Canadians watch as the Conservatives blow \$8,700 on a power cord and buy fancy china at nearly \$1,000 per setting.

How can the government spend thousands on fancy plates when almost one million Canadians have empty plates?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have taken a number of actions to help those who need help. For those who are working, we have helped with the working income tax benefit to make work pay and help low-income Canadians over the welfare wall. It helped nearly 900,000 in the first year.

What we have not done is balance our books on the backs of those who are most needy. We did not cut social transfers as the Liberal Party did. It cut transfers by \$25 billion, affecting every segment of society and those living in poverty the most.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, food bank use in Canada has increased by 28% in the past two years. The Conservative government claims it no longer has any money to help the one million people living in poverty, yet for the G8, it threw money down the drain. According to recent documents, the government spent \$8,704 on a single extension cord for a generator.

Oral Questions

Can the minister justify this Conservative wastefulness and this complete disrespect for taxpayers?

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every action we have taken is to help Canadians and their families become independent, to help them contribute to the economy and the community. We have made unprecedented investments in training to get Canadians back to work. In 2009-10 we invested more than \$4 billion in training, helping over 1.2 million Canadians.

We have taken every action we can to help those who need help most. An average family of four has \$3,000 more in its pocket to help it out than was the case during the previous Liberal government.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is why food bank use has increased by 28%. Unless the extension cord I mentioned covered the 240 km between Toronto and Huntsville, that expenditure was wasteful and showed complete incompetence. The Conservatives wasted nearly \$9,000 on a single extension cord, they bought plates and forks that cost nearly \$1,000 per person, and they handed out gifts to the dignitaries and their spouses as though they were kings and queens.

How can the minister justify these royal expenditures when so many Canadians are suffering?

• (1445)

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is focusing on specific items when she should be focusing on the big picture, by cutting taxes to Canadians so they can have more money in their pockets.

The working income tax benefit, which has helped a number of people over the welfare wall, is in fact supported by one of her colleagues.

Here is what the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour had to say, “I support very much the direction on the WITB. I think...the working income tax benefit is a very positive thing”.

The then minister of children and youth services had this to say, “I was happy to see...initiatives that will directly improve the quality of life and the standard of living for kids living in poverty”.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we learned yesterday evening, the current Bloc Québécois justice critic said that in 1993, he was given an envelope containing \$10,000 in cash. Instead of going straight to the police, the hon. member instead chose to keep mum for 17 years. Such heedlessness makes him an unsuitable justice critic. The leader of the Bloc Québécois should demand his resignation immediately.

In the meantime, could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue remind the Bloc leader and the hon. member of the rules we put in place to reform political party financing?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to remind my colleague that our government has passed the harshest anti-corruption legislation in the history of Canada. We have given more teeth to lobbying legislation, we have implemented measures to protect informants, and secret contributions to political candidates have finally been prohibited thanks to our Prime Minister.

Quebeckers know they can count on the Conservative government to ensure that our federal institutions are protected from attempts to corrupt them.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about ethics. When Jim Prentice stepped down as minister, he said two things: that he had talked to the ethics commissioner about his job at CIBC and that he would be leaving the House on December 31.

Since then, the commissioner has been absolutely clear that Jim Prentice never talked to her about CIBC. Yesterday, he resigned immediately after the commissioner contradicted him. Mr. Prentice brokered a golden private sector opportunity for himself when he was minister and chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Does the Prime Minister realize the conflict of interest that Jim Prentice has gotten his government into?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of us in this place have worked with Jim Prentice for many years. Jim Prentice has probably been one of the most well-respected individuals to serve in this and the previous Parliament. He has made an outstanding contribution to public service.

We appreciate the fact that a career came calling and he has moved on elsewhere. We wish him very well on that. We know him to be a man of high integrity. We know he consulted with the independent Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

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GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, three years ago an Ottawa businessman testified about political interference in the awarding of contracts under then-minister Michael Fortier. Two weeks later, the Conservative Party launched a political vendetta against this whistleblower. It brought in a failed Conservative candidate to act as a crown prosecutor. Bureaucrats were ordered not to take notes at their meetings. The government's lawyer admitted that there was political pressure coming from high up. It stinks of a political hit.

Oral Questions

Why are the Conservatives attacking whistleblowers instead of cleaning up the mess they have created over at Public Works?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government brought in the toughest anti-corruption legislation in Canadian history. The Federal Accountability Act introduced tough new reporting requirements for lobbyists and created a commissioner of lobbying. We expanded those rules to include parliamentarians. We created ironclad protection for whistleblowers with the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act. Secret donations to political candidates are now banned for the first time in Canadian history. We strengthened the power of the Ethics Commissioner by creating a new agent of Parliament and bringing into force the new Conflict of Interest Act.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, businessman Joseph Broccolini confirmed he paid for access to the former minister of public works, who is now the Minister of Natural Resources. He admits he attended a Conservative Party fundraiser in a restaurant belonging to an associate of the Rizzuto family in order to get more information from the minister about a major project.

Will the government admit that Joseph Broccolini's actions paid off, because he won two major contracts worth a total of \$600 million?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know two things. First, I know that the well-respected public service appeared before committee and confirmed that there was never any political interference in the awarding of contracts. That speaks very well.

Second, I know that Mr. Broccolini has made substantial donations to political parties, contributions so high they would not be allowed today. They were made on June 2 and November 30, 2005, and they were made to the Liberal Party of Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Joseph Broccolini is surprised that the contract for a third building in Gatineau was not publicized. It seems that this \$300 million untendered contract was designed especially for Multivesco, another company whose executives made contributions to the Conservative Party.

Does the government realize that Joseph Broccolini's testimony confirms that this contract was tailor-made for a major Conservative Party backer?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the acquisitions related to Broccolini and

Multivesco, a fairness monitor oversaw the entire process of these acquisitions and has tabled reports that are available online. In her summary report, the fairness monitor says that "the process was conducted in a fair manner". She goes on to say that the decisions were "made objectively, free from personal favouritism and political interference" and encompass "the elements of openness, competitiveness, transparency and compliance".

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government should be both embarrassed and ashamed that it is spending more money on ads to victims of crime than on supporting the victims themselves. Last week, along with the Winnipeg North candidate Kevin Lamoureux, I highlighted the fact that the Conservatives are spending \$6 million on an ad campaign, after having lapsed \$4 million last year for the victims of crime initiative. This duplicity is an insult to victims.

When will the Conservative government stop misleading Canadians with taxpayers' money?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope the member pointed out that she gutted our bill on conditional sentencing. But I want to be fair about this. I was in Manitoba just this past weekend and I pointed out that her colleagues unanimously voted against our drug bill, which would crack down on drug dealers. Her colleagues in the House, not to be outdone, have opposed us at every opportunity. Now they are obsessed with the names of bills. That is their priority. I was happy to tell this to Manitobans when I was there on the weekend.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is about integrity. The Conservative government's self-serving ads promote legislation that has not even been passed, thanks to prorogation.

Will the Conservatives admit that they are responsible for delaying their own crime bills, that they have failed to deliver funds to victims, and that they have put their own interests before the public interest? How can they find \$6 million for bogus advertising while victims need counselling, program supports, and access to justice?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is certainly nothing more impressive than the zeal and interest of a convert.

Inasmuch as we know this is only going to last another 13 days, until the byelections are over in Manitoba, I am calling on the House leaders to get together and let us get all of these bills passed this afternoon by unanimous consent.

*Oral Questions***POVERTY**

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in spite of what the parliamentary secretary or the minister says, on a typical day this year a record 870,000 people needed a food bank to get by.

Of that number, one out of five has a job but still needs a food bank to put dinner on the table. Others lose their jobs, run out of EI, and fall back on inadequate social assistance, creating another sad statistic. Food bank use in this country has grown by 25%. This is unacceptable.

Will the government stop writing off almost a million people and finally adopt a real poverty plan?

• (1455)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have taken a number of initiatives to address poverty, and many of them included housing.

We have provided funding for the housing of seniors, persons with disabilities, and aboriginals. Sad to say, the member and his party voted against each and every one of these initiatives.

If the member really believes in addressing poverty, he should get behind these initiatives and support these actions.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, obviously he misses the point, the fact that more people are using food banks.

[*Translation*]

The growth in the number of food bank users reflects a long-standing problem that worsened with the recession. The situation will continue to deteriorate with the end of the economic stimulus program, new spending cuts and the government's refusal to come up with a plan to address poverty in our communities.

When will the government realize it must act and put in place a real plan to eradicate poverty?

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have taken action on a number of fronts. We have enhanced the national child tax benefit. We provided an extra five weeks of EI, helping 500,000 Canadians to date. We have provided 5 to 20 weeks of EI to 190,000 unemployed long-tenured workers. We have made record investments in affordable housing, increasing housing for seniors, persons with disabilities, and aboriginals.

The member and that party opposed each and every one of these initiatives. How can those members get up in the House and say we are not taking action?

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRIVACY AND PERSONAL INFORMATION

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the Conservative government is committed to protecting privacy and

personal information. We continue to take action to fill in the gaps left by previous Liberal governments that did not put the interests of Canadians first.

All Canadians were outraged to learn, for example, that the personal information contained in tax returns was not being properly protected by a contractor.

Can the Minister of Public Works and Government Services tell the House what measures the government is taking to correct this security breach?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, any breach of privacy and personal information is completely unacceptable. Thanks to an investigation launched by Public Works and Government Services Canada at my request, security violations were uncovered. That is why Public Works and Government Services Canada is cancelling its contract with Fibres JC.

Our government is taking and will continue to take action to ensure that Canadians' personal information is protected.

* * *

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to address the minister responsible for Quebec for the Conservative government.

Today we learned from a contractor that he was invited by an organizer so that they could speak directly about a contract. That is what happened.

Is that the case, yes or no? If so, why mislead the House, and why is he still a minister in this cabinet?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for this government it is a matter of the highest priority, its highest commitment to the people of Canada. We brought in the Federal Accountability Act that eliminated the influence of big money in politics.

In the past, there would have been \$5,000 cocktail parties, events raising \$1 million or raising hundreds of thousands of dollars.

It is this government that eliminated the influence of big money in politics, so that these types of activities could never again take place.

Government Orders

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on November 5, referring to people who were arrested at the University of Toronto gymnasium during the G20, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety said, and I quote, "They were legally arrested." But he knew very well that Toronto's chief of police had said twice that the police did not have the appropriate warrants to make these arrests.

How much longer will this government mislead the House and refuse to hold a public inquiry into these unfortunate events?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada was responsible for the safety and security of the world leaders, delegates, visitors, and Canadians living and working near where the summits took place. We took this responsibility seriously, and we are proud of the men and women who ensured their protection.

If the member has any specific complaints in respect of any of the police officers, there are appropriate authorities to which she can take those complaints.

* * *

● (1500)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Canada in the year 2010, the government is turning a blind eye to the third world living conditions in Island Lake, Manitoba. These first nations have called on the federal government to partner with them and deal with these conditions by building an all-weather road. Climate change has cut the ice-road season, and this region of 10,000 people and growing needs a stable transportation route to access goods and services for health, housing, education, and economic development.

The province is on board. Why will the federal government not commit to road access and end the third world conditions in our own country?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we are concerned about first nations. We have invested a considerable amount of money on everything from housing to health care to safe water systems.

As to infrastructure, allocations in the last budget were targeted toward first nations communities. Sometimes proposals come through that do not meet the criteria or are not affordable by different levels of government. We do all that we can to meet the needs of first nations and other Canadians.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government and, indeed, all Canadians are proud of the role the Canadian Forces have played in Afghanistan. Thanks to our brave men and women, Canada has helped build a more secure, stable, and self-sufficient Afghanistan that is no longer a safe haven for

terrorists. Today the government announced the role Canada will play as we transition out of a combat mission and focus on other critical work.

Can the hard-working and, it seems, much appreciated Minister of National Defence tell the House what role Canada will play once our combat mission ends?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Lethbridge, particularly for his hard work with his United States colleagues on the permanent joint board on defence.

He is correct. After 2011, Canadian Forces personnel will end the combat mission but continue training the Afghan national security forces until March 2014. Canada will provide up to 950 military trainers and support personnel to help the Afghan national security forces to become better able to protect their own borders and people.

We know the Canadian Forces will rise to this challenge and continue to make all Canadians proud.

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PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Paul Sauvé said, "I organized the cocktail party after being told that it's part of the game, that it would be well seen, after getting the large contract".

We heard today from Broccolini that Mr. Padulo had a sales pitch saying that attending the cocktail party would allow guests to discuss contracts with the minister. The minister put himself in a clear conflict of interest. He knew it and he continues to deny it.

How can the Prime Minister keep him in his cabinet?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this may have been the way things operated under the previous government. I note that on Elections Canada's website Joseph Broccolini made significant donations to the Liberal Party in its last year of government.

Of course, when this government was elected, we brought in the Federal Accountability Act. We eliminated the influence of big money in politics: no more corporate donations, no more fat cat donations, and no more union donations. That is what is bringing about more integrity to government, and that is what real leadership on ethics looks like.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1505)

[English]

ELIMINATING ENTITLEMENTS FOR PRISONERS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, be read the third time and passed.

Government Orders

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to tell you that all four of your House leaders are working very well together.

I did notice the enthusiasm of the member for Winnipeg South Centre, who wanted to pass more crime bills, so I wondered if we could have the unanimous consent of the House to pass all of the crime bills that have been put forward by the good Minister of Justice.

The Speaker: That is a fairly unspecific motion. I do not know which crime bills are on the order paper.

Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: When the bill was before the House prior to statements by members and question period, the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas was speaking. He has four minutes left to finish his speech. The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my speech on Bill C-31, which aims to preclude criminals over age 65 from receiving old age security benefits.

My hon. colleague from Hochelaga was quite right to remind me earlier that there are several kinds of victims in society, including victims of crime and victims of economic crime, and that one serious economic crime is depriving people, such as seniors who are entitled to the guaranteed income supplement, and we know who is doing that. The same is true for people entitled to EI benefits. Yet, the Conservatives have found a way to take away those benefits.

The Conservative government sings its own praises and takes pride in defending victims' interests. But something is not right. My colleague from Compton—Stanstead introduced Bill C-343 in support of victims of crime. In accordance with the will of the majority of the House, this bill was studied by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. But five Conservatives voted against it. That was the first time since I came to this House that a bill specifically meant to help victims of crime had been introduced and, contrary to expectations, the same Conservatives who claim to defend the interests of victims of crime voted against it. That is the real face of this party, which is hypocritical and lies to the public. All it wants is to complicate legislation concerning criminals.

I mentioned this morning that a number of these bills were supported by the Bloc Québécois because none of them were that excessive. The Conservatives have voted against our every effort to make amendments in support of victims.

To conclude, I would like to say again that we will support Bill C-31 because it establishes a balance between those who qualify for old age pensions and those who do not. Of course, criminals do not qualify. However, we strongly condemn the fact that the government is not following through on its commitment to help victims of crime. In fact, it stonewalls all attempts to do just that.

I hope that when the time comes, when we come back to the House for third reading of Bill C-343, all members of the House of

Commons will vote in favour of it, including our Conservative colleagues who, this time, might have the heart to support victims of crime.

• (1510)

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this bill is one that all parties support. It is one that really has caused, I think, a good deal of consternation in the country. The NDP will be part of that coalition of all parties to support the bill. However, I do want to make some points about, really, a missed opportunity with regard to this bill.

It is fairly straightforward what we are doing here. We are simply removing, while a person is incarcerated in a federal prison, his or her right to receive old age security benefits. So, it is quite straightforward in that regard. That provision has been in our laws since the Conservative government of Joe Clark, in the late 1970s. The only reason, quite frankly, this bill is coming forward at this point is because of pique on the part of the Prime Minister, who received a letter from Clifford Olson, we all know he is, sort of taunting the Prime Minister about the fact that, now that he was over 65, Mr. Olson was receiving old age benefits.

Unfortunately, as is all too often the case with the current government and the current Prime Minister, there was a knee-jerk response to dealing with the issue.

As I said, all parties agree that federally incarcerated prisoners, as a general rule, should not be receiving both support while they are in custody in a federal prison and old age benefits from the federal government. That is a given. And it is part of the problem that there should not be an absolute rule.

As I have said, this has been going on now in this country for more than 30 years, getting into 35 years now. However, instead of taking the time, rather than taking a prudent, fiscally responsible and, from the perspective of the victims of crime, thorough review of this, we simply had this knee-jerk response by the Conservatives that they would show Olson, that they would take this right away from him and, at the same time, take it away from everybody else.

Here is where the problems lie. This has been through committee and we dug up as much information as we could. There are all sorts of potential situations we are not aware of. For instance, we do not know who is receiving the old age pension, who is entitled to it at this point. The figure we received was a bit vague. There are approximately 600 prisoners in our federal prisons, out of about 14,000, who are eligible to receive it, as they are over the age of 65. We do not know, though, how many have ever applied or how many have actually received the old age benefit. We do not know that. The only people who would have that information are the individual prisoners who are incarcerated. We have never made any attempt within Corrections Canada to ascertain that information. We were told by the commissioner of prisons that it would take literally months and months to go through every single prisoner over the age of 65 to ascertain that information.

Government Orders

We also do not know if, in fact, these moneys are subject to other court orders. Certainly, we see periodically that there are orders for restitution. We do not know if these funds would have been available for that purpose and, in fact, were being used for that purpose of paying restitution to victims of the crimes these prisoners had committed. We do not know if there are any dependants of the prisoner, to whom these funds are flowing.

Had this been done prudently, properly, the way we are supposed to pass legislation in this House, we would have discovered answers to all those questions.

• (1515)

Finally, with regard to what we do not know, is this going to have an impact of any kind on the amount of money that is received by the federal prison system?

There is a provision within section 78 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that allows the corrections authorities to actually take moneys from prisoners for the provision of their food, clothing and one other minor item, but basically for food and clothing. We in fact do that on a very limited basis; it is hardly at all, but we do it a little bit. Therefore we do not know in this case whether those funds would be used for that purpose.

If the bill goes through, which obviously it is going to, since it has unanimous support, we do not know if in fact some money is going to be lost to Corrections Canada in that regard.

We know this. It is going to save the federal treasury some money. I will add to the list of things we do not know. We have no idea, even though there have been estimates from the government, how much it is going to save. It goes back to the point that we have no idea how many prisoners have, in the past, applied for and begun receiving the old age security benefit.

I want to make one point about the bill itself that gave all members of the committee cause for concern. I moved a series of amendments to the bill. There was a provision in the bill that made it very clear that persons could only, in effect, reinstate their pension benefits once they were released from the federal prisons by notifying the minister of their release. Because of the way the section was worded, they could only give that notice of release after they had been released.

On my party's behalf, I moved amendments, and ultimately after some negotiations with the government and the opposition parties, we reached an agreement and we have amended the bill so that, when prisoners are advised of their pending release, they at that point can give notice to the minister of their pending release so that paperwork can begin to be processed.

This is not a reflection on the officials within the human resources department, but we all know there are times when payments get delayed. There was quite a concern that, if delays occurred, we would have the situation of people being released on the street over age 65, almost certainly unemployable, and then either having to receive municipal welfare benefits and having that level of government shoulder this burden, when clearly it is the responsibility of the federal government, or because of being desperate for revenue, committing further crimes in order to support themselves.

For those two reasons we moved those amendments. We got the co-operation of the government ultimately to change the wording somewhat to provide that notice can be given at the time the notice of release is being given. That usually is a minimum of 30 days before the person is released, so there will be sufficient time for the department to process the application.

I will spend a few more minutes on the other missed opportunities that I made some reference to. There was not only an opportunity to take this benefit away from convicted criminals but there were also, had we moved on this, a number of other areas where we could have implemented some reforms that in fact would have aided victims directly.

I want to be very clear that this saving is going to stay in the human resources department. It is not going to go to the victims. The victims' benefit out of the bill is absolutely zilch. That is where the missed opportunity was.

We are not talking a great deal of dollars, but it is a substantial amount when we look at the number of prisoners. It could be as much as several million dollars. We could have, for instance, said that while they were incarcerated all of this money would be paid into a victims' compensation fund. That did not happen.

• (1520)

We could have gone beyond that and looked at other revenue streams and other assets that could have been made available as compensation for victims. This would be compensation for physical injury more often than not, as well as for psychological trauma suffered as a result of a violent crime perpetrated on a victim, or in some cases a victim's family.

Because of what happened in the exchange between Clifford Olson and the Prime Minister, we had an opportunity to make significant amendments to expose those other assets through court orders so that victims would be able to receive the funds directly and be compensated for the injuries they suffered. We missed that opportunity completely.

We could have looked at several areas, such as expanding a source for restitution to be paid, expanding payments directly to victims as a result of individual lawsuits against the perpetrators of the crimes, and exposing other assets. We had the opportunity to look at all of those, but the government chose this knee-jerk response to slap back at Mr. Olson. We must recognize that this does nothing for any of the victims and it is not going to do anything for any of the victims.

Those were missed opportunities. I would urge the government to consider, as I did during committee hearings, those potential amendments.

Government Orders

It was interesting to listen to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation at committee. It stated that there already was a section in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that would allow the government to take money from prisoners. This group is not exactly an ally of my party on a historical basis, but on this we agree, that there are opportunities here to save the taxpayer some money. From my perspective, the government should go after the assets of some wealthy prisoners to compensate specific victims or the money could go into a general victims compensation fund. It is a fund that we are beginning to scratch the surface on with the government. An additional source of revenue would be a great boon to what we could be doing to assist victims of crime.

This was a missed opportunity. I urge the government to take another look at this area for other reforms that are badly needed, which would be useful to the victims of crime.

We will be supporting the bill, but we hope that at some point in the future the government will move on these other areas.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made a thoughtful and constructive intervention on this bill, which is going to pass.

We are always looking to learn lessons from how legislation has been crafted. Many members will not be able to fully understand the significant forces which come to play on a matter like this one, where we are trying to surgically remove something without unintended consequences. I have a feeling there probably are unintended consequences. That concerns me. It concerns me when a piece of legislation is motivated by public outrage regarding Clifford Olson as opposed to helping victims of crime.

Not having been able to participate on committee and to discuss this issue with officials or expert witnesses, I wonder if the member would care to advise the House about the charter implications of dealing with some people one way and with others another way. This may be affected by their personal wealth, their name, whatever it might be. It seems to me there may be pressure with respect to charter violations in terms of people not being equal under the law.

• (1525)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, at committee I raised the issue of whether this bill was charter proof. I have some doubts as to whether it would survive a charter challenge. From discussions with defence lawyers and some of the agencies that deal with prisoners, it is unlikely there would ever be a charter challenge, and practically speaking, it probably would never happen.

The agencies that deal with prisoners believe that the vast majority of prisoners currently incarcerated do not apply for the old age security benefit until shortly before they get out. That is the general belief. That category of prisoners is not going to bring the application on.

These applications are very expensive. An applicant, in effect, would be taking on the federal government in at least the Federal Court of Appeal if not the Supreme Court of Canada. There is no practical way a prisoner could afford that. Even wealthy prisoners who might be able to afford the fees would look at the minimal amount they would get. They would probably not receive much with the clawback, and they may get as little as zero. There would be no

motivation for people who could pay for it. The final issue is whether the provincial legal aid plans would cover it. They may very well not, given what the costs would be.

There were comments made in the response from the minister's office that it was charter proof. It pointed out some examples at the provincial level where benefits have been taken back. When we analyze each one of those benefits, there is criteria that has to be met. It is understandable why the benefit could be taken back or there could be a refusal to pay it while prisoners were incarcerated in provincial institutions. That criteria is entirely different from the criteria of what is needed in order to get the old age pension in this country.

If somebody does challenge it, I think there is a reasonably strong chance it will be overturned, but the reality is it probably will never be challenged.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, which would eliminate entitlements for prisoners.

I was on the human resources committee which dealt with this bill after it passed the House with the support of all parties. We supported the bill then and we are supporting it again. We hope it is dealt with very quickly. However, that does not mean we do not have certain issues and questions. That is why we have a committee system in Parliament. We look at issues to ensure that however well intended a bill might be, it does not have unintended consequences that could come back to bite us after the fact.

My colleague from Mississauga South referenced that. His view is that it is very possible it will come back to bite us. I tend to agree. I am sure there are parts of it on which we will look back and ask why we did not spend more time on them at committee. We did raise significant issues at committee. My colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh raised some. We raised a number. They were dealt with.

In simple terms, to reinforce what Bill C-31 is about, under Bill C-31, the old age security pension, the GIS provided for under the OAS would not be paid to persons who are incarcerated in a federal institution and serving a sentence of more than two years, incarcerated in a provincial institution and serving a sentence of more than 90 days, or incarcerated in a territorial institution and serving a sentence of more than 90 days.

I think people would say that makes sense but they would want to know how it came about. I want to go through the timeline on this as I think it is somewhat instructive.

On March 26 news reports surfaced across the country that Clifford Olson was getting a pension while in prison. Because of the heinous nature of his crimes, people were understandably and rightly offended by that. That very day the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development made a comment in the House. This is what she said:

...I am very concerned and disturbed [about these reports]. Members can rest assured that we are making every effort at a very rapid pace to ensure the situation does not continue and that it is prevented from happening in the future.

Government Orders

Those were the comments of the minister on March 26. Our party's critic, the member for York West, indicated right away that we would support getting the bill through the House as quickly as possible. Yet it was not until June 1 that the government introduced Bill C-31. The House recessed for the summer on June 17 without the bill having been called for second reading.

On September 23 we came back from the summer break. We had some debates, and the second reading vote was on September 24.

On September 30, we had our first meeting of the human resources committee, referred to as HUMA. It was on October 7 that we finally met to deal with Bill C-31. In fact the first meeting the minister was meant to attend, she was unable to make it. That meant another meeting went by without our being able to act on this bill.

It is a duty of the committee to look at these bills. There may be some unintended consequences. That does not mean this bill could not have come before us quicker. I just say that to show that the official opposition, and I think all opposition parties, wanted to deal with this bill as quickly as we possibly could.

The question is whether this bill will do what it is supposed to do, which is to make sure that Canada's most violent and offensive criminals who are serving long periods of time in jail are not receiving OAS and GIS payments. I think we all agree on that.

On the other hand, there are a number of people who are incarcerated in the prison system and upon release after many years in jail, what are their options? If their options are prefaced by a complete lack of money and resources, what is the action that obviously will follow? In many cases the person who had been an offender will most likely reoffend because the person has no income.

That does not mean those people should receive the payments. We believe they should be withheld, but we wanted to ensure during the course of this that the system was not only taking the payments away when appropriate but also that the payments would resume when appropriate.

We were surprised, perhaps even astonished, at how little information the corrections service keeps on prisoners' families. In fact, the commissioner was unable to tell us some very basic information about the income status of some of the prisoners who were in the system, which obviously could have a direct impact on their families. That was one thing we found surprising. There was not as much information as we thought there should be.

• (1530)

What are other countries doing? I think every country in the world would look at their most violent criminals and say that they need to have a look at that and see if they should be treated differently.

Some work has been done on this. For example, the United Kingdom, Austria, Denmark, Ireland and Luxembourg do not pay state pensions during the duration of prison sentences. In some cases those are recent changes and in some cases that is the way it has been for some time. Austria and Ireland confirmed that the legislation specifically excluded convicted prisoners from receiving their state pensions but that it did not apply to those remanded in custody. Dependants could apply to receive a portion of the pension.

Just about all countries that responded stated that prisoners would not be entitled to the full resumption of their benefits once they left prison, which is certainly the case here, but, as my colleague from the NDP, the justice critic from Windsor—Tecumseh, indicated, the bill had to be amended for us to be certain that the process would be in place to ensure that those payments would continue as appropriate.

Some other EU countries do in fact pay state pensions to prisoners during their sentences. Belgium and the Czech Republic continue to pay state pensions. In France, the payment is made into a prison account. Ten per cent is deducted and allocated to the prosecution and 10% goes toward a release allowance. In Germany, elderly prisoners are entitled to receive state pensions during the period of their prison sentences that is paid into a private bank account. In Norway, sections 3 to 29 of the national insurance act suggest that pensions are subject to deductions during the prison service, according to rules similar to those applying to those in long-term accommodation. In health institutions, the prisoner will receive reduced payments.

Therefore, other countries have had a look at this and some have decided that they should go the route that Canada is going, which is to ensure that people do not get payments while they are in prison.

As I have indicated, we are supportive of this measure because we think it makes sense, but that is not to say that there are not legitimate concerns that have been raised. Some people have indicated that they are concerned that this may not withstand a charter challenge. I am not a lawyer. I have been accused of being one, but I am not a lawyer and I cannot speak effectively to that.

I do want to suggest that there was significant opposition. The Canadian Criminal Justice Association sent some information around to all of us indicating its concerns. Its main points with regard to Bill C-31 are: that it may be in violation of the charter; that it may set a precedent to deny benefits to others housed in government institutions, specifically mental health centres or hospitals; and that the bill may take away funds that may be needed for food and shelter upon release. This goes to the issue of what people would live on when they leave the institution.

The association goes on to say that a waiting period of weeks or months to reinstate payments would exacerbate this problem. I wanted to mention that because that was the biggest issue in our committee and the subject of the amendments, on which the opposition parties and the government eventually came to terms.

The association was also concerned that it may create additional victims out of families, spouses and children of prisoners, as pensions may contribute to household income, and that it could contribute to household disintegration due to lack of income, resulting in additional expenditures to Canadians. There were a number of other issues.

Government Orders

One of the association's biggest concerns, which was a concern expressed by a number of people throughout the country, is whether this is the best way to do criminal justice. Do we react to a headline of a story and then determine that is the course of action?

Back in early summer, Craig Jones, who was then the executive director of the John Howard Society, suggested that this was being used to divert attention from other problems plaguing the government. I want to indicate what his view was. Mr. Jones warned against quickly crafting new laws based on the most extreme examples of offenders. That was a legitimate concern and one that we had to take into account as we did our committee deliberations.

It is not hard to imagine that most Canadians would be generally in favour of suggesting that inmates should not get pensions. In fact, I would reference an Ekos poll taken back in April, shortly after this story broke, under the topic of entitlement to old age benefits while in federal prison. The poll showed that 59% of Canadians agreed with the statement that all federal prisoners should lose their benefits while in prison; 25% said that only federal prisoners with life sentences should lose their benefits; and 17% said that all federal prisoners who are entitled to federal pensions should receive them.

• (1535)

The percentages in the poll were not particularly surprising and probably spurred the government on to ensure that this legislation was brought forward.

However, as I said before, we think it could have been done quicker and, in fact, could have gone to committee before the summer break. Certainly our critic from York West indicated that we would have been very supportive of that.

There were a number of questions, but the key question and the first question I asked when we had committee meetings was: How do we ensure that this gets administered in a way that is not only reasonable for the families, who, in many cases are the unwitting victims of what their loved ones have done by committing offences, but also ensure that we have streets that are safe? How do the benefits get stopped and how do the benefits get started?

We agree that when somebody is in an institution they should not be getting old age benefits and GIS. The spouses could still qualify for GIS on their own income. If it is determined that prisoners will not get benefits while in a federal institution, how would that actually happen and how do we ensure it happens correctly on both ends?

The Commissioner of Correctional Service Canada, Don Head, presented to us on October 26. He took us through a number of things about what happens to inmates while they are in prison. He said:

I would like to address the mechanics of how Correctional Service Canada would help implement the withholding of old age security benefits. We have developed a draft informationsharing agreement with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada that would permit the disclosure by CSC of information on federal offenders age 60 years or older. This would include information on those who are incarcerated in order to facilitate the suspension of payments, as well as information on those who are recently released by virtue of parole or statutory release, so that payments can be reinstated.

I want to emphasize the words "as well as information on those who were recently released". This would indicate that as prisoners

are entering the prison system, when the time has come for their benefits to be stopped, that will happen automatically. On the reverse side, when prisoners come out, the bill stipulates that they must notify the minister, i.e. Service Canada, for the resumption of benefits. What the Commissioner of Correctional Service Canada indicated was that the department would provide information on those who were recently released.

That is a bit of a concern in that it means that people would be hitting the streets without any income to support themselves and potentially their families. We asked if there were a way that Correctional Service Canada could work with inmates as they are coming up for release, either being paroled or at the end of their sentence, to ensure they can make contact with Service Canada to avoid a month or two month delay when they get back onto the streets and hopefully back to their homes, if they have them.

I do not have any reason to doubt the integrity of the Commissioner of Correctional Service Canada or the people who work in the system. I think they are all very well-intentioned and do a very good job. However, they indicated that they could not assist us in ensuring that would be the case.

The nature of the amendments that were provided by the opposition were to ensure that prisoners getting ready for release, not just after they are released, would actually receive those benefits upon release. I think that was taken care of. We had discussions in committee and eventually the government and the opposition parties got together and agreed on some wording to that effect.

As I indicated, I do not know if it is a charter challenge. I am not a lawyer so I cannot speak very effectively to that. However, what makes perfect sense, I think, to most Canadians is that prisoners serving long sentences for serious crimes should not be getting OAS and GIS.

• (1540)

On the other hand, we need to ensure that there will not be some unintended consequences where families will simply have no option. In many cases, it is through no fault of their own that they are involved with people who commit these violent and serious offences.

The other part of this is the cost and/or the savings to the government. We have been told that there needs to be a coordination with the provinces but not all the provinces have signed on. The minister acknowledged this when she appeared before committee. She said that a number of provinces indicated that they would coordinate this with the federal government but that not all of them have. This is something that will need to be worked out, respecting provincial jurisdiction and the fact that some of these costs could be borne by the provinces. Somewhere between \$2 million and \$10 million, which are the numbers we heard, would be withheld or, in other words, saved. The government would spend \$2 million to \$10 million less a year.

Government Orders

When the minister appeared before committee, I asked her if that money could be used to support victims of crime. The critic for the Liberal Party indicated as far back as the spring that it was our view that the savings should go to victims of crime. There are some victims of crime organizations that have had funding cuts or their funding has lapsed with the government. I think we all agree that a lot of people who are victims of crime should get the benefit of the doubt.

If \$2 million to \$10 million will be saved, why can we not allocate that? We all understand that the money goes back to a certain department but there are lots of ways to allocate a certain amount of money and ensure it goes toward something specific. We think it is perfectly sensible and logical that the money should go to victims of crime.

The government talks about victims of crime a lot but it cut the budget of the grants for victims of crime initiative by 41% and the contributions for the victims of crime initiative by 34%, \$2.7 million. There is a need by the groups working with victims of crime and we do not understand why that money, which in fact would be money saved because of this bill, could not be dedicated to them.

The saving of money was not the primary purpose of the bill. The primary purpose of the bill was to ensure that people who commit violent crimes do not benefit while in prison. Their costs are already being paid. Why would they need OAS and GIS? We understand that. However, if there are savings to be made, why could that money not then be turned over to victims of crime organizations?

The minister indicated that statutorily the money goes into the department, and we understand that, but whatever the savings are we could very easily designate those savings to the victims of crime. It is all taxpayer money and it all comes out of the same pot at the end of the day. We believe that amount of money, whether it is \$2 million or \$10 million, would make a bigger difference to victims of crime organizations than it would to the overall bureaucracy that administers OAS and GIS. We were a little disappointed, because we felt this was an initiative that was well worth supporting, that the government did not see fit to support that.

The committee meetings that we had on this were generally productive. As I said, we heard from a number of witnesses, such as Correctional Service Canada and victims groups. We heard some very compelling testimony from people who had been victims of crime. As one can imagine, they tell stories that most Canadians do not want to hear but when they do hear them they feel great empathy and compassion for the families.

The committee worked and at the end day we fashioned a bit of a compromise on an amendment to ensure that more would be done to ensure that long-term prison inmates would not hit the streets without anything for the good of society as much as for the good of themselves and their families. The bill is back in the House today.

I can support this bill. In our country now there is a big need to recognize that there are causes of crime that we can be tough on, but we also want to ensure that we are reasonable, fair and that we are not paying benefits to prisoners that, by and large, Canadians do not think they are entitled to, and I tend to agree with that.

We do not think it is a perfect bill, and there may well be some things that come out down the road, but for today it is an important step for Parliament to say that it is a step forward, that this is a better way of doing things, let us not make perfect be the enemy of better and let us pass Bill C-31.

• (1545)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his very cogent comments and for the support he clearly gave to some of the proposals put forward by our members in the committee, which have strengthened the bill.

From the evidence given today and the reply to the bill, it is very clear that the vast majority of prisoners apparently do not even apply for these benefits just before or after they get out of prison. I do not think any Canadian believes that people who commit serious crimes should have the double benefit of having their room and board paid in prison and at the same time bank money to cover the room and board that they do not need outside of prison.

However, the member raises a number of really critical points. It is regrettable that the government did not listen to or support some of the amendments, particularly the amendments that the member raised about re-channelling those moneys. In other words, if a prisoner would have been able to gain the benefit of OAS and GIS payments, why not put those into a fund that would benefit the victims of that crime, for example, crime prevention funds? Why not fund educational programs in prison so when prisoners get out there is less chance they will violate again? What about the money the government has yanked from the Aboriginal Healing Centres?

Could the member expand on that?

Also, could he also speak to the issue raised by my colleague, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan? She raised concern that we were talking about a relatively small amount of money related to the pension fund. In other words, by denying these funds, we are not really putting a lot back in to benefit those who would normally benefit from pension funds, yet we have veterans living on the street and having to go to food banks. Could he address the broader matter that we are spending all this time debating the bill, which does not really give a lot of benefit to Canadians, when we should be standing in the House and debating specific concrete measures to enhance the pensions to Canadians, including veterans?

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, my colleagues raises some very good questions. When we look at how many people currently incarcerated in federal penitentiaries would be affected by this, we are told it would be 400, potentially up to 600 if we include provincial institutions, at a cost of somewhere between \$2 million and \$10 million.

Government Orders

The bill probably could have been handled much more expeditiously. The last government bill we saw on employment insurance was the military families one, which would affect 60 people a year at a cost of somewhere between \$500,000 and \$1 million a year. Many things we do in the House are more about politics than they are about principle or policy.

Having said that, we follow the rules of this place and we want to support the bill. We want to get it through.

The member mentioned a number areas where the money could go, whether it be \$2 million or \$10 million. There are some things that could be done with that in our prison system and for our veterans. I suggest the money could be dedicated to reopening prison farms, which was only a matter of a few million dollars a year and had great benefits. There are many areas where that money could go. It is not a large amount of money in the overall scheme of things on OAS and GIS, but on specific targeted measures it could have made a significant difference.

• (1550)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the member has done a fair amount of research on the bill. However, in his research work, was he able to ascertain why and when federal prisoners started receiving pensions in the first place? I think the member would discover that it was the Joe Clark Conservative government in 1979 that started issuing the cheques to prisoners. How did that come about?

Presumably when the government was doing its research, as any government would, it would have found out the reasons for instituting the practice in the first place. Was it a court order? What were the reasons? There must be some *Hansard* from those days. There must be some papers available. I have asked government members that questions several times, on the very few times they speak to the bill or any other bill for that matter. I have yet to get a response from them as to why their Conservative government of Joe Clark would bring in this measure in the first place. Now all of a sudden, because of a letter from Clifford Olson and a couple of newspaper articles, we are here, almost in knee-jerk response, cutting these pensions.

We support the bill. Why did the government in 1979 institute this practice in the first place?

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, I know he has asked that question before. I do not know the answer. I do not know why it would have started. I was not aware until recently that it had actually been instituted in 1979 under Prime Minister Clark, a person for whom I have enormous respect. I do not know what the reason is. It might have been something in the courts and if it was post-charter, then maybe that makes it even more problematic now. I do not know the reason for that.

The member is right to ask the government. It is very reasonable. I am sure he could make an appointment with the Minister of Justice or the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. For five or ten minutes, they would be happy to sit down and be very open and transparent about the whole process. They would be better able to give the history than I would.

For now, the history is important. It is important to look at what other people do, particularly those countries to which we like to compare ourselves, European countries, OECD, the United States and other countries, and figure out where we are now. I would be very interested in what he finds out about 1979. I just cannot answer the question.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is nice to hear my hon. colleague say what the government is not willing to say on some of these issues, which is he does not know why this was instituted in the first place.

A number of times I have seen the government take a very specific case or a story out of a newspaper and then draft entire legislation around it. It is not necessarily just specific to the bill that is before us, because these bills take a great deal of effort. They change the laws in our country, so they do not just apply to the newspaper story case or to individuals. They apply to everybody.

We have seen this developing pattern from the supposed tough on crime government where it uses individual cases, newspaper articles or something in the evening news to build legislation and craft Canadian law. This precedent sends us down a very dangerous road. There is the rule of unintended consequences when we craft legislation. We craft it for one purpose, but the way the law works in applying to everything has all sorts of other consequences.

In the case of the so-called Olson bill, I think my colleagues have expressed it well. Canadians have a great resistance to the idea of also paying for CPP and what not. However, there is this principle of designing legislation based upon media moments that may grab a few more votes and bits of attention. It was said once that we should worry as much about who was going into prison as who was coming out.

Could the hon. member comment on this? The government seems not so concerned with the rehabilitative process of prisoners or the fact that they will likely commit a crime again if they do not receive any kind of service or help whatsoever to rehabilitate themselves fully.

• (1555)

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, that is a good question, and I referenced it a bit in my comments. There is certainly a proclivity for the government to take headlines and turn them into immediate pieces of legislation and give them slick-sounding names, which is another thing we see with a lot of the legislation. It does not mean that the bill is wrong, but it does mean that it becomes very political.

We saw that with the last piece of EI legislation on the military families. I am not sure, I have not been around this place long enough, although it seems like an awful long time, to know what can be done without having to come to the House of Commons. We all agree with some of these measures. We could have done it very quickly.

Government Orders

We support this legislation. We think it makes sense. We think it reflects the feelings of Canadians, which is we need to do a better job of reflecting how they want to see their government act in certain matters. However, I certainly agree with my colleague that a lot of these things are taken out of the media, dressed up and some of the policy gets lost amidst the politics, which is disappointing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-31 on behalf of the Bloc Québécois.

It is important for the people listening to us to fully understand. The title of the bill, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, will probably get some people's attention. In fact, as we know, the old age security program has not been enhanced for quite some time, except for a few minor changes. I met a senior who told me that recent increases barely covered the cost of a coffee. Therefore, the title—An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act—could be confusing. It might lead people to believe that the government is overhauling the Old Age Security Act. They will be disappointed because there is no major reform in this bill.

There are two words in the text of the bill, “incarcerated persons”, that shed light on the Conservatives' philosophy. They have decided to implement a law and order agenda, which includes preventing criminals from receiving their old age pension.

On the one hand, I would like to say that the Bloc Québécois agrees. This measure has received the nod from all parties in the House. I do not think that anyone approves of criminals in prison receiving the old age pension. It is an aberration of the system. On the other hand, why is this bill necessary? We must understand why the Conservatives decided to let this bill go to committee, with great debate and major discussion. The purpose was to get us talking about it and sidetrack us from talking about the real problems of the elderly, of our seniors living in difficult circumstances. Many seniors live below the poverty line. They deserve a real debate and a real bill to amend the Old Age Security Act so that, among other things, the guaranteed income supplement can be increased by \$100 per month, as proposed by the Bloc Québécois.

With regard to the guaranteed income supplement, this bill proposes that spouses be treated as though they were single and that they be entitled to an increase in their guaranteed income supplement. That is fine with me. The criminal is in prison, but his spouse does not necessarily deserve to suffer substantial losses. Therefore, it makes sense that she be treated like a single person.

Once again, nothing in this bill addresses the problems our seniors face. We should have expected as much. Given its grand-sounding title, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, we expected meaningful old age security reform. However, this is not the direction that the Conservatives are taking and it is definitely not the direction that the Liberals are discussing. We heard them. The Liberals particularly do not want to talk about an increase in the guaranteed income supplement in case they take power since they do not quite know what to do about the expenditures they have announced. For them, therefore, helping seniors is not a way to help our society progress.

Take, for example, the bill introduced by the Bloc Québécois. Every day when they are here in the House, the members of the Bloc Québécois have at heart the interests of citizens, the men and women in Quebec who have worked hard throughout their lives to help our society progress. As I was saying earlier, it was not for nothing that we introduced a bill to increase the guaranteed income supplement by \$100 a month, among other things. We also introduced a bill to address losses in company pension plans to help citizens who have seen or who may see a significant drop in their pensions because their company went bankrupt or experienced hardship, as was the case during the recent economic crisis.

•(1600)

The Bloc Québécois introduced a bill to provide a tax credit equivalent to 50% of lost revenues to individuals who have lost pension fund income. This would have allowed them to recover 50% and would have had a domino effect in the provinces, because once a bill like that passes in Ottawa, the provinces follow. This would have enabled those who lost money from their pension plans to recover part of that money through refundable tax credits. Once again, the Liberals voted against this bill.

I have experience here because I have had a plant shut down in my riding. It has now reopened because a new buyer was found, but the buyer did not purchase the company with its pension liabilities. The old company is still in talks and is under the protection of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. The company's asset, the factory, was sold and the new buyer put it back into service. But the fact remains that the Fraser pension plan remains under the protection of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. The pensioners were told that their pension plan was reduced by 35% instead of 40%.

It was a big news story. The Bloc Québécois introduced its bill in the House at that time, and the Liberals voted against it. There are still a few Liberals in the Outaouais, and they felt the need to put their oar in and say that they could not support the Bloc's bill, but that they would come up with their own proposal for solving the pension fund problems. The problem, though, is that these people have already lost money, and if they wait for the Liberals to return to power, they will be waiting for decades. The Liberals should have done something for these people and supported the Bloc Québécois's bill, but they did not.

As expected, the Conservatives opposed the bill. The Conservatives' way of helping the poor is to say they have to work. But when you are 55 or over and retired, it is not easy to find a job.

Government Orders

As for the forests, the Conservatives said it was necessary to diversify the economy. The forests are still there and the trees are still growing, but they said the people who worked in forestry had to become computer scientists. That is the Conservatives' approach. It is not a responsible approach, but something that was put down on paper here in Ottawa by high mucky-mucks who opted for monetary trade-offs and decided to put forestry workers into computer jobs.

In the 1990s, they tried the same thing with call centres, which sprang up all over the regions. Today, all the call centres have gone to India. The fact is that jobs that are created in an effort to diversify the economy are not stable. We can achieve stability in the forest industry by developing forest products and reviving the industry. The forests are still there, and as I said, they are still growing.

Once again, to get to that point we need to invest in research and development, support businesses and offer loan guarantees, as we have been calling for. They complied with WTO rules, but Conservative ministers made a big fuss saying that they did not comply while, at the same time, lawyers from the Canadian government were arguing the opposite before the WTO. Our opponents used statements made by ministers in the House to say that the Canadian government was saying one thing before the WTO and using its lawyers to argue its case while simultaneously telling the Canadian Parliament that this was not the way to proceed. The Conservatives have always acted like a dog chasing its tail. The Liberals cut off their own tail with the sponsorship scandal, so they cannot chase it anymore.

• (1605)

And these things might make you laugh, but they can also make you cry if you are a senior living below the poverty line when rent and food prices continue to rise and the measly old age security pension does not keep up with the rising cost of living. I am talking about the cost of living for seniors. The problem with the members of the House, the Conservatives as much as the Liberals, is that they do not seem to understand that the cost of living for seniors as calculated by Statistics Canada is not the average cost of living calculated by the department. And by the way, the Conservative Party was so tired of seeing the data from Statistics Canada that they changed the census form.

The cost of living for seniors includes food, medication and housing. But the costs of these items are not dropping; they continue to rise. Even property values are rising. Some would say that they are not land owners, but renters. But when the price of property rises, rent increases. If we do not build affordable housing for seniors, it is inevitable—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Madam Speaker, this debate is at third reading and is dealing with entitlements for prisoners. My colleagues are going all over the world and their comments have nothing to do with what the intent of the bill is.

If we want to make Parliament work we need to stay on the subject. Certainly the subject is the ending of entitlements for prisoners. When my colleague across the floor talks about all of these other things that have nothing to do with the bill, I would ask,

Madam Speaker, that you ask the hon. members to stay on the focus of the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his comment.

[*Translation*]

Since we are now at third reading, the member's comments must pertain to the bill.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, first of all, I read the title of the bill, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act. Once again, inevitably, when people see such a title for a bill, especially if they are seniors, they will think that the bill is going to affect their lives. Then, when they see the fine print under the title where it says "incarcerated persons", they will be very disappointed.

That is the purpose of my presentation here today, that is, to point out once again that, by giving their bill a title as impressive as An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, the Conservatives want to make us debate a subject that we all agree on.

Why did the Conservatives decide to spice up this bill's title and then indicate in the fine print that it pertains to incarcerated criminals? It is precisely to prevent us from talking about the real issues at hand and the real problems facing our seniors and older people.

I can understand that the Conservatives want to promote their law and order policy and ideology at all cost, but again, all that to say that this is a law and order bill. They want to punish criminals and take away their old age security if they have it. The problem with the Conservatives is that they are so obsessed with law and order that they have forgotten that the vast majority of older people, of our seniors, are living below the poverty line and deserve to have a bill, as the Bloc Québécois had wanted, that would improve the guaranteed income supplement by increasing it by \$100 a month, in order to help seniors cope with increased housing, food and drug expenses.

In the meantime, prisoners are being housed and fed and their drugs are paid for. That is how the Conservatives operate. They decide to get rid of old age pensions for criminals, but they forget that the vast majority of our seniors do not have enough money to pay for their housing or to cover their food and drug costs. That is the reality. The Conservatives are obsessed with law and order and are abandoning good citizens who have paid taxes their entire lives, who have contributed to society and who are now seeing criminals get all the attention in relation to this bill.

Government Orders

We support this bill and have said so from the very beginning. All parties in this House support it. The problem is that we are still talking about it. We should have settled this matter and had a real bill to amend the Old Age Security Act in order to help our seniors who cannot make ends meet and who are living below the poverty line. We have to help them meet their own physical and mental health needs. However, that is not what we are discussing. The government prefers to talk about law and order and eliminating inmates' pension entitlement. As I said, we support this measure, as do all parties in the House.

Why has this matter not been settled yet? Quite simply because the Conservatives have decided to draw out the debate. That is what they want. They want us to talk about it and discuss it. While we discuss the so-called "Act to amend the Old Age Security Act" in Parliament, the people who read the title will think that they are being looked after and that seniors who have trouble making ends meet and who live below the poverty line will be taken care of. It creates a false impression that their needs are being addressed. Instead, the Conservatives are merely promoting their ideology, with the support of the Liberals—all too often we forget about the Liberals—and once again are ignoring the problems of seniors.

In closing, Bill C-31 before us must be passed as quickly as possible. It makes sense to preclude incarcerated persons from receiving their old age pension, particularly in light of the fact that they receive shelter, food, health care and medications free of charge while our seniors, who have worked their entire lives to advance our society, find it difficult to meet their own needs when it comes to housing, food and medications.

• (1610)

That is what the Conservatives, with the support of the Liberals, are forcing us to live with. For two years now, every time a budget vote has come around, the Liberals have stayed seated or not shown up with enough members. They are always there to support the Conservatives. They are like a crutch that keeps hobbling along. We have been watching the Liberals hobble along. Their disease is spreading to the Conservatives, who are limping along as well. That is how they operate.

I am pleased to say that we will support Bill C-31 because it will prevent prisoners, people who are incarcerated, from receiving old age security, and will still protect their spouses. These spouses will be considered single under the Old Age Security Act and will therefore be entitled to a larger guaranteed income supplement amount.

However, I must point out that the impressive title, "An Act to Amend the Old Age Security Act", should not fool the public and the seniors who are watching us. This will not solve their problems. They deserve a monthly increase of \$100 to their guaranteed income supplement, as suggested by the Bloc Québécois. They deserve a real debate and real changes to the Old Age Security Act so that they can have adequate income to pay for housing, food and medication. They have spent their entire lives advancing our society. We want them to know that the Bloc Québécois and all of its elected members will always defend them here in the House. That is what we do and will continue to do as long as they continue to place their trust in us.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member despite his statements about the Liberal Party not working as hard as he would like us to work. I thought it was kind of interesting that some members of the government simply want to stop this debate and get on with it when we have this situation where all of the parties agree on the intent of the bill. We have learned some lessons going through this and the member has raised some very important points about unintended consequences to seniors and in other circumstances where this may be applied.

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh raised an issue with regard to whether the bill would suffer a charter challenge. In his view, it is likely that it would not, not that it should not, but that it would not, simply because those who could afford to pursue such an avenue would not likely want to fight that battle.

My question for the member is whether there is some concern that there may be some problems with regard to violations of the charter. I wonder if the member could comment on whether the government and the Minister of Justice in fact have done their due diligence with regard to determining that the results or the impacts of this bill on not just Clifford Olson, but all others who would be impacted by it, would in fact respect their charter rights and make sure that we are all treated equally under the law.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my Liberal colleague's question. He is asking whether the bill would withstand a charter challenge. I would say there are grounds for a challenge. The courts will decide. The problem with the Liberal Party is that it has wholeheartedly supported the way the Conservatives have handled the economy for at least the past two years, since the 2008 election.

When the Bloc Québécois introduced a bill in the House that would give a tax credit to people who lost pension income because of a company bankruptcy and the Liberals did not stand up, I hope it was not because the bill violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Pensioners with these companies that went bankrupt deserved better than that. They deserved to have us stand up for them, but the Liberals did not do that. It is great that they are talking about the charter. They seem to have something of a conscience today, and that is great. I only hope it will not prevent them from making decisions.

• (1620)

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Madam Speaker, since I sit near my colleague, I know that there are many things he wanted to talk more about, but he did not have time. I am going to give him a chance to talk about them by asking him this question: what would he like to expand on?

Government Orders

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, that is how the federal government treats our seniors. The Conservatives have picked up where the Liberals left off. Employment insurance is a perfect example. The Liberals decided to plunder \$54 billion from the fund and now the Conservatives are saying there is no money left, that we have to start over. The Conservatives are saying they were not the ones who stole from the fund; it was the Liberals. Our unemployed workers are the ones who lose in the end.

The same goes for our seniors. The Liberals did not adjust old age pensions as they should have. And the Conservatives decided to do the same as the Liberals. Under the Liberal government, the Bloc Québécois called for a monthly increase of \$100 in the guaranteed income supplement. The Liberals said no. We asked the Conservatives for the same thing and they also said no. That is the reality of those two old parties. They decided to abandon seniors, older people, unemployed workers and forestry workers. I thank my hon. colleague for giving me the opportunity to talk about it.

Now they are wondering why people have had enough of them. It is quite simply because their way of doing politics is outdated; it is no longer appropriate for our times. Those two parties do not care about defending the interests of seniors and workers the way the Bloc Québécois does. We will continue to defend them every day that we are here in the House.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague talked about the misleading title of this bill. The Conservatives are introducing a bill that says it would amend the Old Age Security Act. My colleague explained to us the anomaly between the content of the bill and its title. With such a title, the Conservatives could have included a measure to make good on a promise, such as automatic registration of all people entitled to receive the guaranteed income supplement. They promised to do that in the 2005-06 election campaign, but they have not done it yet. Because it is not automatic, there are still many people, many seniors, who are not receiving the guaranteed income supplement even though they are entitled to it. It would be very easy for the government to make it automatic. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, I am glad the question came from my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain, because his predecessor was the driving force behind that bill and that request.

The Bloc Québécois took an interest in this issue after it discovered that thousands of Quebecers and Canadians had not received the guaranteed income supplement, which they were entitled to. The Bloc Québécois canvassed seniors associations all across Quebec and identified thousands of people. We know that there are still thousands of people who are not receiving the GIS. Because applicants have to produce their tax return, the simplest solution would be to automatically send a cheque to the people who are entitled to the GIS. Instead, the Liberals decided to shorten the form by reducing the number of questions, which means that people have to fill out another form to qualify. The Conservatives kept this practice but shortened the form even further to make it easier to fill out. So the GIS is not paid automatically.

Often the least fortunate have difficulty taking care of their own affairs either for health reasons or for other reasons. My colleague is

right; it would have been very simple. That is what I am saying: the Liberals and the Conservatives are one and the same. All they want is to try to save money on the backs of the taxpayers to advance their own spending projects. The Conservatives are more focused on military spending, while the Liberals have other priorities. But the average citizen never wins. It is never the least fortunate that win. Money is being ripped out of the hands of the unemployed and of seniors when they are not automatically given the guaranteed income supplement. The government has decided not to help out forestry workers in order to save money because it decided to help Ontario's automobile industry instead. It is a choice.

These are political choices that the Conservatives and Liberals have made to the detriment of the least fortunate in Quebec. They then wonder why they do not win over this part of the population. It is simply because these people know the score. And it is not with a bill like the one introduced today, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, which does not address the real problems facing seniors, that the government will manage. The government could have introduced a bill called, "an act to prevent prisoners from receiving their old age pension", but that would not have been as glamorous as the one they are currently introducing.

* * *

• (1625)

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Before we resume debate, I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following public bill to which the concurrence of the House is desired: S-7, An Act to deter terrorism and to amend the State Immunity Act.

[English]

It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, G8 and G20 Summits; the hon. member for Laval—Les Îles, International Aid.

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ELIMINATING ENTITLEMENTS FOR PRISONERS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I arrived this morning to listen to some more of the debate and followed it closely as it has moved through the system. The summary of the bill states that:

The enactment amends the Old Age Security Act to preclude incarcerated persons from receiving benefits under this Act while maintaining entitlement to benefits for, and avoiding a reduction in the amounts payable to, their spouse or common-law partner under this Act.

This was prompted by a report, before last summer, that the serial killer Clifford Olson was receiving old age security.

Canadians were outraged and parliamentarians agreed and, in fact, all parties agreed that we should move forward with this.

Government Orders

Whenever we do a bill, however, it is not just good enough to say that we all agree, just pass it and let us go. We have to be very careful, and some members have already spoken about potential unintended consequences. I must admit there are some circumstances in which questions could be raised. So, I want to touch on a few of those.

First, old age security, as we know it today, and members are familiar with this, is a benefit that is received by all Canadians who reach the age of 65 and is subject to certain criteria, specifically income, because there is a clawback provision, which means that if a person makes a lot of money in Canada they will not get the old age security.

Interestingly enough, up until I believe it was 1969, Canadians actually paid premiums for old age security. There actually was a specific premium on the tax return to make a contribution toward one's old age security. That makes it different for those who did and those who did not pay into OAS during their working careers. It was contributory and then it stopped, I think in 1970. So we have two different classes of senior, those who were in the OAS contributory plan up until 1970 and those who were not. That raises the question about whether or not there are any other areas in which people have different circumstances.

I wanted to raise these because it would appear that, in the haste to get this bill put together, some of these were not taken into account.

I also understand that once the bill was actually tabled and received a bill number, Bill C-31, it basically languished for a long period of time. It was not dealt with by the government quickly. In fact, it just sat there, and it was not until September 23 that we actually had the first hour of debate at second reading.

We have to ask this question. How is it that the Parliament of Canada can put together a bill so quickly and yet not dispose of it, given the time frame that has already passed, especially when, with discussion among the various House leaders and party leaders, there could be consent? Even today, the House leader did make a reference that we should, right now, have unanimous consent to support and to pass all of the outstanding justice legislation at all stages now.

That was proposed to the government in the last Parliament. to fast-track bills, and the government turned it down.

We have to ask ourselves, even though we are dealing with a specific bill, if we have learned any lessons from the process we have gone through and from what seems to be happening.

• (1630)

The pattern has been that when the government gets into some difficulty, when some tough issues come up, when it gets caught or trapped, such as with whether or not Canada is going to stay in Afghanistan on a training mission, and when there are a lot of concerns and a lot of issues, the government announces that the following week it will be bringing back all of its justice bills and we will debate justice bills for a whole week. We just have to look at the government's record.

That is not the way to do it, because it is basically politically motivated. When there is a difficult issue, when the government does

not want people to dwell on a problem or it does not want a problem articulated too loudly, it switches the channel.

We have switched the channel and we are now on this bill. However, this bill has been with us since before we rose for the summer. Nothing happened to it until September 23, and then it was rushed through the House after a couple of hours of attention and sent to committee. Some concerns were raised by witnesses and amendments were made. When we work together, things can happen. But the bill, as I can see right now, could probably have been completed before we rose for the summer. If the government was serious about the bill, it could probably have been passed at all stages before we broke for the summer. That has to tell us something, and it concerns me.

The other point I want to raise is with regard to the process of bringing this legislation forward. The last thing that happens before the bill comes here and a minister rises to present it, is that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada has to opine on whether the bill is charter-proof, whether the bill is in good form. We cannot have legislation before the House that would be in violation of the charter.

Interestingly enough, today in debate I engaged the member for Windsor—Tecumseh in a question or two about whether or not this bill is charter-proof. The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada gave the opinion to cabinet and the bill was signed off and presented to the House. That does not mean that there cannot be a challenge.

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh also said that the bill would only apply to about 600 prisoners out of the 14,000 in our prisons in Canada. Many of them probably would have income from other sources and may very well earn enough income so they do not get old age security. It is very unlikely that they would get it.

If we took all of the people out who would maybe entertain a charter challenge on the basis that they were being discriminated against under the charter, the number of those 600 is really reduced. Some might have so much money that they do not care to do it because it is of no interest to them. Somebody in the middle might not be able to afford to go through the process. The member concluded that, in our situation, a charter challenge probably would never come forward.

The issue came out at committee. If members consulted some of the committee evidence, they would find that the issue did come out. The Canadian Criminal Justice Association raised the validity of the charter on this matter as one of its first points.

When I see things like this happen, I have to ask myself whether or not we have learned any lessons from the past. It is difficult to understand how legislation can be questionable under the charter and has not been nailed down 100%. That might be the first point. Why is it, if it can be demonstrated that there is a risk about whether or not a bill is charter-proof, that it would be up to someone who was aggrieved by the legislation to fight that case?

Government Orders

We have the potential for some unintended consequences. The issue of unintended consequences was raised by the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour in his speech as well. If our enthusiasm and our motivation for changing the Old Age Security Act is because everybody would like to punish Clifford Olson, is there somebody else who may be touched by this but we have not thought it through?

● (1635)

The speech given by the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who is a member of the committee, by the way, really concerned me. In committee he said that Correctional Service Canada did not seem to be fully informed about the prison population, about inmates' financial considerations, health issues, families, who was splitting benefits, whether they were eligible to do that where there were spousal payments, whether there were orders from other jurisdictions for moneys to be withheld and attached by some other court order.

There is a fair number of details, and none of these things have come up in speeches given by government members. There is one reason, and it is that they do not give speeches. They have someone to present a bill and then they sit on their hands. They do not give speeches or ask questions. They let the opposition parties spin their wheels, and they know that as long as they do not give speeches, they will not have to answer any questions.

That I find somewhat contemptuous of Parliament. Debate is an integral part of what we do here. If the government is not prepared to be accountable and transparent in what it is doing and how it is doing it, then we should express some concern. I hope more members will do that.

This particular bill is not rocket science. As has been outlined to the House, many countries have similar legislation wherein persons incarcerated over a certain period of time are not eligible to receive benefits. They include places like the U.K., Ireland, Austria and a number of other countries. They have various iterations of programs.

The question of unintended consequences is probably what the Bloc member who just spoke was most concerned about. Some people may not agree, but I find this interesting. When somebody over the age of 65 is in jail and will eventually get out of prison, that person needs to live and survive. Nobody wants to be a ward of the state and to be on welfare. People want to live in dignity.

Pension security has always been an issue, and of late a lot of Canadians have expressed that they have not adequately provided for their pension requirements in order to maintain a dignified lifestyle during retirement. Prisoners are still seniors, and the Bloc member gave a very good intervention from the heart about the fact that we should not consider prisoners to be devils, people who should be punished for the rest of their lives.

In fact, our criminal justice system has pillars that work against that kind of thinking. It is a system that, yes, includes punishment for crimes committed, but another important pillar is to provide rehabilitation so that when people ultimately come out of our prison system they understand what they did, are remorseful for it and are looking forward to picking up the pieces of their lives and making the best they can of it.

The other part is to provide for reintegration. That is the part this bill addresses and may be the unintended consequence. People who

do not have a lot of money will receive old age security. However, people say that inmates receiving all of these benefits are not entitled to them and we should take it away. But all that does is take away the resources people may need for getting themselves reintegrated into society.

● (1640)

It may take away the money that will be necessary for their burial. It may take away money that is necessary for caring for any persons for whom they have responsibility or persons whom they love. It does not give them that opportunity. In fact, in some cases we will have people who will not be able to live in dignity after they have served their sentences and paid their dues.

We should learn from our experience in some of these bills. The bill was hastily done and there is some fear that we have to do this and everyone is going to jump on it simply because if we do not the public is going to say that we think Clifford Olson should get his old age security. There are many ways to do this, but we did not think about the victims of the crimes that were committed by those persons in jail. We did not think of what happens if the old age security is not paid to certain of these prisoners. That money stays in the coffers of the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development. It never goes anywhere near the victims. Probably one of the areas that we have not dealt with as legislators as much as we should is dealing with and helping victims of crime.

We also should be talking about the prevention side.

Our criminal justice system has many tentacles. A parallel would be when I first became a parliamentarian in 1993, and at the health committee, the first committee I was on when I became an MP, we were given a briefing on the state of the health system in Canada. We were told that 75% of what we spend is spent on fixing problems and 25% is spent on preventing them. Their conclusion was that the system or the model was unsustainable.

It is interesting. I see it as a valid parallel because right now the Conservative government is totally preoccupied with punishing people, but we have not talked very much about rehabilitation. We have not talked very much about prevention or reintegration. All we are talking about is punishing people who eventually will get out of jail and will have to reintegrate into society. We played with a number of bills that deal with parole, et cetera, and shortening that so that people spend a longer time in prison, even though all of the evidence indicates that people who earn parole and spend less time in jail are less likely to reoffend. We need to learn lessons like that and make sure that our legislation is cognizant of some of those details.

Government Orders

Earlier this morning the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca was speaking to another bill. One of his points was about how half the people in the jails in Canada suffer from mental illness and things like fetal alcohol syndrome. He said that the jails are filled with people who really should not be there and for whom rehabilitation is not possible. That would be another example of where in dealing with legislation, the thinking has to go on. In that case it was dealing with the sexual exploitation of children over the Internet. There are other aspects of legislation to be taken care of.

If we look down the list of the criminal justice bills, many of them are linear bills. Many of them have to do with sentencing. Many of them have to do with parole. They could have been rolled together into an omnibus bill, one to deal with sentencing principles and provisions. The reason the government has not done that and we are dealing with this one very linear issue in a bill is that the government does not want these things to be completed and made into law. The government wants to continue to have them there on the shelf, ready to bring them out, to recirculate and recycle them so that it can change the channel whenever it gets into some difficulty.

• (1645)

It is kind of cynical to say that, but the evidence speaks for itself. Many of these bills were active in the last Parliament, and they have come back. They were not reinstated in the same position after prorogation. Some came back and were actually put together in an omnibus bill. Others were not, but the names were changed.

I support the bill but we have missed some opportunities to make our criminal justice system better.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has indicated that the government plans to save \$2 million by cutting off the pensions to inmates. If all the provinces sign on to the plan, it could potentially save another \$10 million.

We have had information from the member for Windsor—Tecumseh and others who say that the government has no clue as to how many people this measure would actually affect.

Why is the government proceeding on pure speculation? We know that these pensions were first implemented in 1979 by the Joe Clark Conservative government. We asked the government questions about the reasons at the time for Joe Clark to institute these payments to prisoners? There is no information. Either the government does not know, or it does know and it does not want to tell us the information.

The government is now saying it is going to save \$2 million at the federal level and \$10 million at the provincial level. If we do not even know how many prisoners are collecting, are we really dealing with reality here and with proper numbers?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I believe some time earlier one of the members, and it may have been the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, did say that there were about 600 of the 14,000 prisoners in our jail system who were eligible. However, that does not mean they applied.

We do know that the number is less than 600. Even if it is 600, the savings that have been suggested by the government seem to be a little bit out of line.

It is yet another case where the government has not done its homework. It has not done the bill justice and it has not done Parliament justice, simply because it did not do its homework. It does not know what is involved.

All the government knows is that the public will think that taking the old age security away from Clifford Olson is great, and it will get the political benefit from that.

But if everything we do around this place has to do with how we get political benefit, there is no question in my mind that the prayer we say, that we make good laws and wise decisions, will almost be impossible to achieve.

• (1650)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, a proposal was raised by New Democrats through this debate. I am wondering about the member's opinions and his party's opinions on this.

I think the government has found a loophole that involves people who are staying beyond their retirement years who are then having their room and board taken care of, if we want to call prison “room and board”, but are also receiving old age security payments. The government wants to take those funds that have been allocated, and constitutionally allocated, to those prisoners and put them into a fund to help with the rehabilitation process and to help with external programs that it has since cut.

One of those programs that we are very intimate with in the riding I represent is the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. This was an institution set up to help with the institutional effects of residential schools over many generations. The government decided to cut those funds, and the effects have been felt throughout.

The reason I raise aboriginals in this particular case is we know that first nations are overrepresented in our prison system as it is right now. One of the ways to help people either stay out of prison, or if they go in to not go back in, recidivism, is to make sure there are supportive programs when they come out.

The government seems to be blinkered in its attitude towards crime, they believe that the only satisfactory response to crime is to build more prisons as opposed to stopping the crimes from happening in the first place.

If we really want to stand up for victims' rights in this country, we would create fewer victims. By creating more programs there would be fewer victims in the country and fewer crimes happening.

I am wondering about my colleague's opinion about taking this one issue, this so-called Olson bill, and referring it to something a little bit more profound and getting at the sources and roots of crime, the actual nuts and bolts.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I fully agree with the member. This is part of the problem. The government has not thought it through and has not done a good job on the bill, whether it be the funds for rehabilitation purposes, whether it be for victims of crime or anything where it puts those savings, whatever they might be, in a manner that is going to contribute to the reduction of repeat offenders and help people to reintegrate.

Government Orders

My concern is that if the numbers that we are talking about are as small as they are, I suspect that the administration that would have to be set up to deal with this would cost more than the money that one would actually get.

That is why the government needed to have done the work, and if in fact it found out that this was not economically feasible, even the way it is right now where the moneys are retained in human resources and not for victims or for justice-related issues, it probably should have simply had a specific Olson bill to say that Clifford Olson does not get OAS, period, and we are done. It would have gotten unanimous consent and we would not have to spend months with a bill behind which the government really has not put its work nor its heart.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am proud to stand up on behalf of the New Democratic Party and speak about this bill.

As I mentioned earlier today, there are few topics that are more profound than those that involve crime and punishment. When we talk about punishment, we are talking about some of the most serious issues that any mature society can deal with. We are dealing with tragedy, with victims, with pain, damage, some of it permanent, and it is always something that legislators need to take with the most serious of intentions and the utmost good faith.

I am not sure that the bill before us, Bill C-31, was born out of that kind of approach. In the last six months, the prospects of Clifford Olson getting a pension came up in the news and the government then sprang into action, as it often does with crime bills, by governing by exception. The Conservatives will take a case that comes up in an exceptional circumstance and then they will rush to legislate, and I think this bill is a product of that. That is regrettable, and I would urge the government and all parliamentarians to take a more considered, more fact-based and more effective approach to making policy when it comes to Criminal Code amendments and when it comes to determining how we deal with those who have breached the rules of society.

Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, I will say at once, suffers from a very common problem that is becoming increasingly used by the government, and that is the interjection of hyper-partisan short titles of the bill. I heard a cabinet minister today say that the opposition is just focusing on the short title. I think there is something more important at stake, and that is the integrity of the laws of the Government of Canada. There are many lawyers in the House. I myself am a lawyer, and the way that the government has interjected its own partisan leanings into what should be an objective and lawful description of the laws that all citizens of this country have to abide by is regrettable.

The Conservatives have described this bill in short form as the "Eliminating Entitlements for Prisoners Act", which again is probably not accurate. For sure it is partisan and it does not do justice to what we as parliamentarians ought to be doing in the House.

The bill suspends payments of old age security and guaranteed income supplement payments to all persons 65 years of age and older while they are serving more than 90 days in a federal correctional facility. Of course, a person has to be sentenced to two

years or more in order to be in a federal correctional facility in this country.

The bill would suspend payments of the spousal or survivor allowance to eligible individuals between 60 and 64 years of age, while that individual is serving time in a federal facility. The bill does maintain OAS and GIS payments to spouses and partners of those who are incarcerated. They are to receive these payments at the higher single rate, based on their individual, not combined, spousal income. To that degree, I would offer my approval and support to the government for at least having the foresight and care to not penalize spouses of those incarcerated in federal institutions who are over 60 years of age.

The bill would maintain the spousal allowance benefits to the spouse of incarcerated individuals. It also allows provinces to opt in by entering into agreements with the federal government to suspend OAS and GIS and spousal allowance benefits under the terms that I have mentioned, to all individuals incarcerated for a sentence that exceeds 90 days in a provincial facility.

Notwithstanding what I have just said, benefit payments would still be paid during the first month of incarceration, and benefit payments would resume the month that an individual was released on earned remission, parole, statutory release or warrant expiry upon application by that individual.

I want to first deal with a little bit of history, because I think this is instructive. It is interesting that prior to 1979 in this country, inmates in federal penitentiaries did not receive old age security or GIS.

• (1655)

Interestingly, I think Canadians would be very surprised to learn that it was a Conservative government, Joe Clark's government of 1979, that restored pensions to prisoners serving time in federal institutions.

I think this shows just how far the government has strayed from any notion of progressivity that once was a hallmark of the Conservative Party in this country, as it was then called the Progressive Conservative Party. Canadians need to know that Conservatives gave prisoners pensions in this country. I would ask that the members on the other side of the House reflect on that at some point and think about where they have come from and where they are going.

I have some quotes from the Hon. David Crombie, who was the Minister of National Health and Welfare at the time. This is what he said in 1979 when he, as a Conservative, was granting pensions to offenders in federal institutions in this country:

If I may refer now to the provision which will end the suspension of the OAS benefits for prisoners, this is also an improvement of some significance....

This provision has, over the course of years, proven both difficult and unfair. When OAS pensioners are imprisoned and their benefits are subject to suspension, any delay in effecting the suspension can result in overpayments which must be collected when the pension is released. Even if there is no overpayment, the lack of benefits during imprisonment can mean that these people are released with little money at an advanced age and few prospects for making a living.

Government Orders

There are fewer than 100 persons affected by this provision in any given year. The cost of maintaining payment of their OAS benefits is a small fraction of a per cent of program costs. However, if even one prisoner is able to find a better life as a result of this change, and one prisoner's spouse is not deprived of her allowance, it will be well worth the effort....

I invite the support of all members of this House for this particular step, to improve the humanity of a program now in place, and for the broader examination which we hope to carry out, in co-operation with provincial governments and the private sector, to ensure that we have the best possible pension system that we can afford to provide retirement protection for all Canadians.

That is what Conservatives said in 1979.

What they want to do now is strip pensions from certain people in this country, in this case prisoners, and they have done absolutely nothing to address senior poverty in this country or to improve the Canada pension plan or any pension legislation that will actually help our seniors have a retirement and live in dignity in their golden years.

That said, I also want to point out that at that time, in 1979, there were about 100 people who would be affected by the pension. It is not much different today. I have done some research and discovered a number of facts.

There are 398 people over the age of 65 in the federal corrections system. That was as of March 31. Interestingly, many countries have similar legislation, including the U.S., the U.K. and Australia. At least six provinces and territories now stop social welfare for more than three months when people are in prison: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and the Northwest Territories.

I think it is important to ask the government where we sit in terms of comparing ourselves to other countries in the world when it comes to how we are dealing with issues such as this.

I want to talk about some of the positive aspects of the bill, because I think it has some positives and some negatives. First, there is an inherent and undeniable logic to suspending payments designed to provide for the basic necessities of life in cases where our taxpayers are already funding the basic necessities of life for people who are sentenced to federal prisons.

I want to stop there. That makes some sense. I think it would pass the smell test for Canadians that old age security is intended to provide a certain amount of money to seniors. It is not very much. I think it is approximately \$10,000 a year, and that would go to helping a person pay for shelter and food. One could argue, and I think it is a valid argument, that if individuals are in a federal institution and already have their accommodation and food taken care of, the justification for receiving that OAS payment may not be there.

● (1700)

I think there is some small savings to this measure. It has been estimated that suspending OAS and GIS payments to prisoners over the age of 60 would save about \$2 million a year immediately and up to \$10 million per year if all provinces and territories opted into this program.

I want to reiterate that I think the way this legislation is drafted mitigates to an extent the financial impact on spouses of offenders in federal institutions by allowing them to receive OAS and GIS

payments at the single rate and based on their individual rather than combined spousal income, although it must be recognized that a spouse of an offender and their family very likely would stand to be hurt by this provision because they would be deprived of that spouse's income that would otherwise come to the family.

There are some negative aspects of the bill. The constitutionality of these provisions has been questioned. Some may view this provision as an attempt to add a sentencing provision to someone. It brings up the concept of civil forfeiture, which was a concept abolished in the British Commonwealth system some 150 years ago. That is the notion that when people are convicted of a crime, the sentence that is carried out by the state is that they are deprived of their liberty and they are deprived of their ability to walk freely in society. Those I do not think should be underestimated in terms of the profundity and the impact of those losses.

But otherwise a person, even in a federal institution, still retains certain rights as a citizen. They have the right to vote. They have their basic human rights. They have the right to communicate with their lawyers. Stripping them of their private property, as was done in Britain 150 years ago where people convicted of an offence might have their property, personal or real, seized by the Crown, which would throw families into poverty, and where they had debtors' prisons, has been a concept that most mature, civilized societies have rejected. So the concept of stripping someone of an entitlement that is universal in this country may be seen in that respect.

I think it could be argued that this bill would violate the universality aspect of our OAS system, a principle that I think a lot of people in this House hold dear.

We do not accord universal health care or OAS payments generally based on our evaluation of whether that person is a likeable person or whether that person has done something with which we may disagree. We generally accord those principles to every Canadian citizen as a matter of citizenship and as a matter of right. It can be considered worrying that when we open the door to taking away a universal benefit such as this bill would propose, it may open a door to which there is a sliding scale, the destination of which we know not. An example could be that if the logic of this is why are we paying for prisoners' room and board when the taxpayer is already paying, it leads to an argument that maybe we should do that if a senior citizen breaks a hip and has to be in the hospital for three months. Could the argument then be made that while the taxpayer is already paying for the lodging and food for that person for the three months, therefore we should suspend that person's OAS or GIS payments for that three-month period?

What about people who are in psychiatric hospitals or under the care of the state for mental health issues? Is that the next argument that the government would make, that we should be stripping OAS and GIS from those people?

I think we have to be very aware of where this bill could take us.

Government Orders

As I pointed out, the bill would have an unavoidable negative financial effect on some spouses of inmates who would lose out on almost half of the joint income used to support them. This may have a significant negative impact on spouses who are under the age of 60 and are being supported by the OAS and GIS payments made to an individual who is subsequently incarcerated, because no federal pension benefits would be provided to them.

In those cases, HRSDC officials have indicated that the provincial social assistance systems would be required to support those individuals. Once again, I think we are seeing a case where a piece of federal legislation may have a deleterious effect on the provinces by downloading onto them the requirement to use their welfare programs to support certain people who otherwise would not need that support.

I think this is very similar to the two-for-one piece of legislation where the result of us taking away the two-for-one credit for pretrial custody would no doubt result in many more prisoners spending much more time in provincial remand centres and provincial institutions and cost the provinces much more money.

● (1705)

Suspending pensions for inmates may also affect their ability to make court-ordered restitution payments to victims, something that is widely recognized by victims' advocates as a key component of healing, and what criminal justice experts regard as an important rehabilitative process for offenders.

We must also remember that most offenders are already poor. In fact, poverty is one of the determinative causes of crime. For those individuals who are released back into society, there is a positive social benefit in having their difficult reintegration process aided by savings of several thousand dollars. This is true particularly for seniors, who will be even less likely to quickly find employment after release.

This government bill was targeted at individuals like Clifford Olson, which every member of this House agrees has committed crimes of unspeakable evil. We all agree that Mr. Olson should never, ever see the light of day, and that Mr. Olson should not get any entitlements beyond the bare minimum that a humane society would accord a prisoner like him. But whether or not that is a sound basis upon which to make policy is a different question.

I would have preferred to see the government introduce legislation that targeted the removal of pensions for people serving life sentences. That would have been a more measured approach that would have accomplished what I think is the goal. But this bill takes away OAS and GIS from every single senior in the federal system. We could have a member of our society who is 59 or 60 years old and who gets sentenced to 2, 3, or 4 years. That person may have an interest in maintaining an apartment or house, because he or she is going to come out in perhaps two or three years. This bill would have a very deleterious effect on such people.

This legislation was motivated by a desire to reflect Canadians' great distaste and horror at the prospect of Clifford Olson receiving a pension. But we must realize that this has broader effects.

I want to talk about something my hon. colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley brought up. It is a positive suggestion by our party

that ought to be considered by the government, namely, if we support this bill and it is passed, we should take that \$2 million to \$10 million a year and, instead of putting it back into general revenue, put it into programs that aid the rehabilitation of senior prisoners.

We can leave aside the people who have life sentences, people like Clifford Olson. Rehabilitation is not an option for those individuals. We all agree on that. But there are 300 or so senior citizens in the federal system who are going to come out, and who did not commit crimes like Mr. Olson. They are not murderers. They have not committed manslaughter. They are people who have been convicted of all manner of crimes, but most of their crimes are not anywhere near those that Clifford Olson committed. Perhaps we can take that money and do some good with it. We can target that money to programming that will help them reintegrate into society.

Steve Sullivan, the victims' ombudsperson, who was not reappointed by the government, has pointed out that victims do not want offenders to serve longer periods of time. They do not want them to suffer unduly. All they want is for those offenders to come back into society and not reoffend. They want to be able to walk safely in their communities and in our streets. That is what those victims want. It is what we all want. Any policy measure, any bill, any piece of legislation that is considered by this House should be measured against that standard. Will it help that offender not to reoffend? If it does not, then we know that we are playing politics. We are not making sound policy.

I also want to talk a bit about pensions. It is interesting that the government has done nothing to improve the pensions or the income security of seniors since it was elected in 2006. The government has been in power for coming up to five years, and that is a decent amount of time for government to reveal what its agenda really—

● (1710)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I will have to stop the hon. member there.

It is time to move on to questions and comments. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to my colleague across the floor. He frequently mentions that he was a labour lawyer before he came here. What I notice is he talks, as other members of his party have, about not liking the short-form titles of bills. The people in my riding like the short-form titles, because they know what we are talking about and they agree with these bills.

I am puzzled as to why the member would be locked into issues of 31 years ago and why he would think there is something wrong in changing legislation that is 31 years old. In this case, with respect to people doing long sentences in federal institutions, I would like to know why he thinks for one minute that the government should even consider allowing them to continue to receive benefits.

Government Orders

•(1715)

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member a question. He has probably been a member of the Conservative Party for 30 years. I wonder what his position was in 1979 when his Conservative party was giving pensions to prisoners in the federal system. I do not know that there was any great hue and cry.

If this was such a big issue, I wonder why my friend sat on his hands in 2006. Where was the government in 2007, 2008, and 2009 if this was such a big issue? Conservatives sat there, because they gave prisoners pensions. They do not like it when we point that out, because they want to look as if they are tough on prisoners in our federal institutions. They do not want to have Canadians know they are the ones who gave pensions to prisoners.

Of course, that is what Canadians need to know. People should ask the Conservatives why they gave prisoners pensions. If it was a bad idea, what did Conservatives say about it in 1982, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009? That is what Canadians want to ask. Why are they making policy off headlines?

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I often make the mistake of referring to the member as the member for Edmonton Kingsway only because I would like to bring him back to my fair city, but I am glad he is representing his area well. It has been brought to my attention by another one of my colleagues, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, that a critical publication in my city, the *Edmonton Senior*, has spoken out on this issue in a way that does not seem well represented in the House. We heard there are polls where people are saying it is reprehensible that prisoners should receive pensions. But let me repeat the statement in the *Edmonton Senior*, which said that the “concern is not around whether or not senior prisoners should receive pension money, but what the correctional system is doing to prepare offenders for their release”.

I wonder if the member could speak to this very thoughtful commentary, which reflects on a more measured response, reflects on the broader issue of what gets people into prison in the first place and what we are doing to prepare them for their release. Further, I would like to hear his thoughts on where those moneys should go other than to general revenue.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, that is a thoughtful question, as is usually the case, from the member from Edmonton—Strathcona. It gets to the nub of the matter.

I think Canadians want parliamentarians to focus on the programs being delivered in prisons. This is not because we feel bad for them or because we feel a sense of compassion, although that may be the case for many people. It is because we have a vested interest in making sure that people who come out of prison do not reoffend.

A full 96% of those individuals will return to society. It is not a question of if; it is a question of when. Think of that person in federal prison coming out and taking a bus in our communities, or walking near our schools, or shopping in our shopping centres, or walking down our alleys. We have a vested interest in how that person behaves.

I think that the question asked by the seniors in the hon. member's fair city is a thoughtful one. We need to ensure that those people

have the kind of assistance they need in prison, so that when they come out they do not reoffend. That is what I would like all members of this House to focus on. This is how we can best ensure that the people in our federal institutions come out less likely to offend.

Taking away inmates' money may be justified. I understand the argument that the taxpayer is already paying for their stay and their food, and that is a compelling argument. On that basis, our party will support this bill. However, let us not be overpowered by a gut reaction to Clifford Olson and make legislation on the fly, as this government has done. We need a thoughtful, mature, and effective approach to prison policy in this country, and we have not seen that from this government.

Our prisons are full of mentally ill people. They are full of people with addictions and alcoholism. They are full of people with FASD, brain damage, and cognitive malfunctioning of all types. It is an absolute fact that these people are not getting anywhere near the kind of support or programming that they need, not only to improve their lives, but to keep Canadians safe.

Cheap politics such as we see practised by this government, politics that prey on people's fear, is not the way to improve safety in our streets.

•(1720)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the answer to the last question was in itself a very good speech. The member has drawn on input received from a large number of parliamentarians today in this debate, at least from the opposition side.

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh raised a concern about whether or not this bill was charter proof. His opinion was that, given the small number of people involved, 600 or less, and taking away all those who have enough resources that they do not want to go into that battle, as well as those who cannot afford to, leaves it to the middle core. These people probably will not do it. His view was that we would not have a charter challenge by any of the people affected by this.

I wonder if the member cares to comment on whether Parliament should be put in this position. The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada has already opined, and signed off on the bill, that it is charter proof. Yet, organizations that came to committee stated, as their first point of concern, that the bill was not charter proof and probably would be challenged.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, one thing that is absolutely clear is there will be a charter challenge to this legislation. I would find it very surprising if there were not an offender or group that deals with offenders or the criminal justice system that does not make a charter challenge. Right then and there it will probably cost the government \$2 million in defending a charter challenge as it inevitably winds its way up to the Supreme Court of Canada.

There is no way to know if the legislation is in compliance with the charter or not at this point. Some of it depends on whether it is applied on a proactive basis. Certainly any person who is in prison now and has his or her pension taken away could argue that this amounts to the imposition of a sentence by Parliament beyond the sentence imposed by the judge.

At the time of sentencing, an offender may have received a fine, a period of incarceration or an order for restitution. If we now say we are taking away his or her pension for a period of time, there very well could be a challenge by that offender, saying that we are attempting to unjustly and illegitimately add to that person's sentence. I am not sure if that will prevail or not, but that is definitely a risk.

I want to make it clear that my party will support the legislation on the basis that taxpayers ought not to be paying twice. I know that people in the community wonder why someone who goes to prison gets to bank his or her old age security and GIS. It could be argued that people are in better shape going to prison than those in the community and we have to be sympathetic to that argument. That is why my party will support the bill. However, let us not pretend that this bill is going to do anything for community safety or is getting at the real issues on the minds of Canadians and the issues taking place in our prisons because the bill does not do that.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-31. I have listened to a number of good presentations today on the bill. The member for Windsor—Tecumseh spoke at length about how the government had missed a good opportunity to offer restitution to victims of crime.

It was either in 1970 or 1971 when the Manitoba NDP government of Ed Schreyer became the first in Canada to bring in the criminal injuries compensation program. The program has been updated since that time. Compensation for victims of crime has been an issue in Manitoba for the NDP since 1971.

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh pointed out that Ontario had a similar fund as did some other provinces, but the federal government did not. For the enterprising Conservatives on the government side, it seems to me that this would be a logical thing for them to consider because they want to align themselves with victims. They want to do the right thing for victims. Setting up a parallel federal compensation program for victims of crime would be a well-received government initiative.

In terms of funding for the initiative, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh has suggested that the moneys that would be received in general revenue by cutting off the pensions to federal inmates could be put into that fund for compensation to the victims.

I know I only have a few minutes today, but tomorrow I can read out a list of the rules and restrictions on the compensation fund for Manitoba and I am sure the federal government could set up a similar type of fund.

In terms of how much money would be put in that fund, the parliamentary secretary mentioned today that the government was looking at saving a potential \$2 million on federal prisoners alone, all 400 of them, and another \$10 million perhaps on the 600

Business of Supply

provincial prisoners provided the government could get all the provinces to sign on to the program.

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh pointed that when the bill went through committee, members were unable to determine exactly how many prisoners were drawing a pension. There is really no way for the government to know how many people are collecting pensions while in prison. This \$2 million may be more or less a bogus figure that the government is perpetuating when it says that it plans to save on the federal portion of the pensions to prisoners.

Nevertheless, this is just another example of the government proceeding on the basis of projections without having them fully worked out, thought through and written down. We proved that with the government's crime bills earlier this year. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has provided information indicating that these bills will cost a lot of money. If we base it on the parliamentary secretary's assumption, we are already proving that \$2 million is not really an accurate figure. Regardless of what the money is, if the government could at least use this opportunity to put the money into a compensation fund for victims that would be a positive thing.

As has been mentioned, there are a number of court ordered restitution orders that prisoners have to follow. They may be impacted when we take away these pensions. There is also the possibility of opening up lawsuits against perpetrators. Russell Williams certainly would have assets that some of the victims could access.

● (1725)

Exposing criminally obtained assets to the victims would be something positive. The government has now sort of missed the opportunity to do this. This is an opportunity on which it should have perhaps followed up.

In terms of why the government—

* * *

● (1730)

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FOREIGN TAKEOVERS

The House resumed from November 4 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., pursuant to an order made on Thursday, November 4 the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

● (1810)

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

(Division No. 127)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Aglukkaq
Allen (Welland)

Ablonczy
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at report stage of Bill C-22.

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If you were to seek it, I believe you would find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with the Conservatives voting yes, as well as the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, Liberal members will be voting no.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, Bloc members will be voting no.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, NDP members will be voting no.

[*English*]

Hon. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, I support this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in favour.

[*English*]

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

(*Division No. 128*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Arthur	Ashfield
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Block	Boucher
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Cadman
Calandra	Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casson	Chong
Clarke	Cummins
Davidson	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fast
Finley	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Généreux	Glover
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guergis
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hiebert	Hoepfner
Holder	Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Lemieux
Lobb	Lukiwski

Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Paradis	Payne
Petit	Poilievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Shea
Shory	Smith
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson
Tilson	Toews
Trost	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Wong	Yelich — 126

Government Orders

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Bagnell	Bains
Beaudin	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Bevington	Bigras
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brisson
Brunelle	Byrne
Canniss	Cardin
Carrier	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coady	Coderre
Comartin	Cotler
Crowder	Cullen
D'Amours	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	DeBellefeuille
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dorion
Dosanjhi	Dryden
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter	Eyking
Faillie	Folco
Foote	Fry
Gagnon	Garneau
Gaudet	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Guay	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Côte-Nord)	
Harris (St. John's East)	Holland
Hughes	Hyer
Jennings	Kania
Karygiannis	Kennedy
Laforest	Laframboise
Lavallée	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Leslie
Lessard	Lévesque
Malhi	Malo
Maloway	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Ménard	Mendes
Minna	Mourani
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)

Private Members' Business

Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nadeau
Neville	Oliphant
Ouellet	Pacetti
Paillé (Hochelaga)	Paquette
Patry	Pearson
Plamondon	Pomerleau
Proulx	Rae
Rafferty	Ratansi
Regan	Rodriguez
Rota	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sgro	Siksay
Silva	Simms
Simson	St-Cyr
Stoffer	Szabo
Thi Lac	Thibeault
Tonks	Trudeau
Valeriotte	Vincent
Volpe	Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj	Zarac— 138

PAIRED

Members

Asselin	Bachand
Baird	Benoit
Blais	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Demers	Freeman
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Lalonde	
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)	Van Loan
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Woodworth	Young— 16

The Deputy Speaker: I declare Motion No. 1 lost.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in.

•(1815)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:15 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

POPE JOHN PAUL II DAY ACT

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.) moved that Bill C-573, An Act to establish Pope John Paul II Day, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, you may recall these words spoken on October 16, 1978:

Dear brothers and sisters, we are still grieved after the death of our most beloved John Paul I. And now the eminent cardinals have called a new bishop of Rome. They have called him from a far country... far, but always near through the communion of faith and in the Christian tradition. (...) I don't know if I can make myself clear in your ... in our Italian language. If I make a mistake, you will correct me.

Those were the first words spoken by the new pope, Pope John Paul II, formerly Karol Wojtyła, the first Slavic pope in the history of

the Roman Catholic church and a pope that reigned for 27 years, one of the longest reigns ever.

I am very honoured to speak to my private member's bill, which is an act to establish Pope John Paul II Day. In essence, it seeks that every April 2, the anniversary of his death, be a day of memory for Pope John Paul II from this point forward in Canadian history. This would not be a formal legal statutory holiday but simply a day of memory.

I have indicated before, and I mean this very sincerely, that I am very moved to introduce this bill, being a proud first generation Polish Canadian and practising Roman Catholic. Words cannot express the significance and importance of Pope John Paul II to the Polish community in particular around the world and in Canada.

There are over one million Polish Canadians in Canada. When Pope John Paul II was elected as pope we celebrated and cried, and when he died we mourned, but in between those dates, the Polish community watched his every move with pride and a sense of destiny.

It must also be remembered that Pope John Paul II is not simply an ordinary pope of the Roman Catholic church. He has now been given the title "venerable" by Pope *Bénédict XVI*, which is a step toward sainthood, a process which it is anticipated will be completed within one to two years.

Beyond his Polish and Roman Catholic faith, Pope John Paul II, now known as venerable, was a world statesperson. He was one of the architects of the defeat of communism. He must be remembered not only for his religious ties and role but for his worldwide historical influence. In terms of his role in the fall of communism, I have some quotes.

Canadian reporter Eric Margolis described going into the central committee's headquarters in Moscow after the election of Pope John Paul II this way:

I was the first Western journalist inside the KGB headquarters in 1990. The generals told me that the Vatican and the Pope above all was regarded as their number one, most dangerous enemy in the world.

They recognized even then that he would play a significant role in terms of being anti-communist, possibly leading toward the downfall of communism in the Soviet Union.

Former priest and writer James Carroll asked this question:

What is the greatest, most unexpected event of the 20th century?

Isn't it that the Soviet Empire was brought down non-violently? Isn't John Paul II's story part of it?

That really is a rhetorical question and the answer obviously is yes. If we think about it from the perspective of our generation which grew up with the Soviet Union, communism, détente and the threat of nuclear annihilation. There was the constant threat and worry as children about this potential fight between the west and the Soviet Union.

•(1820)

Quite unbelievably the Soviet Union fell without one bullet being fired. John Paul's 1979 trip to Poland is described as "the fulcrum of revolution which led to the collapse of communism". Timothy Ash put it this way:

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Without the pope, no solidarity. Without solidarity, no Gorbachev. Without Gorbachev, no fall of communism.

In fact, Mikhail Gorbachev said, "It would have been impossible without the pope". He credits Pope John Paul II for being the key factor in the fall of the Soviet Union.

In addition, I would like Canadians to understand exactly the scourge of communism. Here we read about it. Here we had the threat of nuclear war, but for the people who actually lived it, it was a new life when communism fell.

In my own family, my father grew up in Communist Poland before he managed to come to Canada. My uncle and his family told me stories of their escape from Poland, about going across the border and being shot at by the police. I remember my father sending money in envelopes to his family in Poland from Canada. They were very small amounts of money relatively speaking for us, but they were fortunes for people over there. However, they could not really use the money to buy things because they did not have things to buy in the same way as we do here.

This defeat of communism must always be remembered, and the role of Pope John Paul II in that defeat must be honoured and remembered. The yearning of freedom for Poland is where it started and it spread to the other eastern bloc countries. It began in 1979 with Pope John Paul II going to Poland and standing up to the Communist regime.

There is another major accomplishment of Pope John Paul II. Nobody will agree with everything that any leader does, which is to be expected, but he did bridge the divide between the Roman Catholic church and other religions. I would like to quote people who are not Roman Catholic to prove that point.

In October 2003, the Anti-Defamation League issued a statement congratulating Pope John Paul II on entering his 25th year of the papacy and essentially complimenting him for his role in bridging the divide between the Jewish faith and the Roman Catholic church. Immediately after Pope John Paul II's death, the same Anti-Defamation League issued a statement that Pope John Paul II had revolutionized Catholic-Jewish relations saying that "more change for the better took place in his 27-year papacy than in the nearly 2,000 years before".

There are many other examples of his attempts to bridge with other faith communities. In terms of the Muslim community, Pope John Paul himself, when he was in Casablanca on August 19, 1985, during his journey to Morocco, said:

Christians and Muslims, we have many things in common, as believers and as human beings. We live in the same world, marked by many signs of hope, but also by multiple signs of anguish. For us, Abraham is a very model of faith in God, of submission to his will and of confidence in his goodness. We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection.

He reached out to the Muslim community during the time he was pope. He reached out of course to the Jewish community. Pope John Paul II said to the Jewish community when he was at the great synagogue in Rome on April 13, 1986:

The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain way is 'intrinsic' to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.

● (1825)

He reached out to many other communities as well. On October 27, 1993 in Assisi he held a meeting of over 120 religious leaders from around the world, from different religions and Christian denominations, to try to foster some unity and respect among various religions and sects.

He did more during the time he was Pope to bridge the divide between the Roman Catholic church and to show respect for other religions and other faith communities than, I would argue, any other pope in history.

Pope John Paul II as a person, as a man, was a remarkable world leader. He was known as the travelling pope. He visited 129 countries and he attracted some of the largest crowds in human history, such as over five million people in Manila in 1995. He came to Canada on more than one occasion. When he came to Toronto in 2002, over 800,000 people came out to meet him and to pray with him.

When Pope John Paul II passed away, there were numerous quotes.

Everybody will remember Lech Walesa as the hero and the leader of the solidarity movement in Poland. In referring to Pope John Paul II, he said that without him "there would be no end of communism or at least much later and the end would have been bloody".

Former United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan called the pope a "tireless advocate of peace", while German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, whose own country was long held under the oppressive forces of communism, said, "Pope John Paul II wrote history. By his efforts and through his impressive personality, he changed our world.

Former Israeli president Moshe Katsav said that the pope "bravely put an end to historic injustice by officially rejecting prejudices and accusations against Jews".

On his death, he was honoured with one of the largest funerals in human history. What we are really talking about here is the people of Canada providing some respect, honour and memory for Pope John Paul II. We have done it before. For example, we granted honorary Canadian citizenship to the Dalai Lama.

The Americans honoured Pope John Paul II. In 2004 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which is the highest civilian honour the United States awards to anyone.

In Ontario this bill passed first reading and perhaps even second reading. There was a similar bill to get an honour for Pope John Paul II. Unfortunately it died on prorogation. We are attempting to bring this honour to Pope John Paul II across Canada.

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When Pope John Paul II died, the outpouring of grief and his funeral itself showed how strongly he was respected both as a religious leader but equally important as a world leader. At his funeral, his requiem mass on April 8, 2005 was said to have set world records for both attendance and the number of heads of state present at a funeral. It was the single largest gathering of heads of state in history, surpassing the funerals of Winston Churchill and other world leaders, such as Tito. Four kings, five queens, at least 70 presidents and prime ministers, and more than 14 leaders of other world religions were in attendance.

Many people say it is also likely to have been the largest single pilgrimage of Christianity in history. More than four million people from around the world came to Rome for the requiem mass.

This man must always be remembered and respected for many different reasons. I ask my colleagues to help me bestow this honour upon him in a non-partisan way, and to make April 2, the anniversary of his death, a day of memory each year.

● (1830)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand here next to my colleague who made an incredible speech, one that is very touching about a man who inspired the world, as he pointed out. One of the things, among many, that inspired me about Pope John Paul II was his ability to reach out, to go to all these countries so that people could actually touch, feel and see the pope as an individual. But more than that, he inspired so many people.

He came to Newfoundland and Labrador many years ago and inspired us. He came to this country, as my colleague pointed out, on several occasions. His ability to do that brought the Roman Catholic Church out to the people who are members all over the world, and by doing so he has made the world a much better place as a result of it. It is truly an inspiration, which was shown, as my colleague pointed out, when one of the greatest Christian pilgrimages of all time was to go to Rome to attend his requiem mass.

I would like my colleague to touch on, once again, and perhaps explore further the idea of just how far he would go, to what great lengths he would go, in order to bring the Roman Catholic Church from the Vatican out to the world.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Mr. Speaker, throughout my life, from when Pope John Paul II was elected pope, we watched him travel to a record number of countries. I think the number was 129 countries. We watched him going before and praying with millions and millions of people. Imagine having a mass in a country such as Manila with five million people attending. Considering the size of Toronto in 2002, imagine having 800,000 people in one location coming to see him and pray with him.

This was a pope who will go down in history as not only one of the greatest popes, but one of the greatest world leaders, somebody who did try to reach out to different communities and different religions and show respect. He did not go around saying that the Roman Catholic Church was right and other religions were wrong. He went around saying let us work together and try to be good, help and respect one another and show love and compassion. This is a pope who is missed, and this is a pope who will always be

remembered. In terms of the Roman Catholic Church, he is already on his way to becoming a saint. This is not simply an ordinary pope.

● (1835)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is not specific to my colleague's motion, but I wonder if he has considered that the problem we are going to have with motions naming certain days in Canada after certain leaders, religious figures and whatnot, is where the line gets drawn. Who do we say we name a day after and who do we not? We would fill up the whole calendar. What criteria is the member suggesting be used? Is it prominence? Is it the particular person's influence on Canada? Is it religious significance?

What I am trying to understand in the motion is what principle the member is putting forward that would then guide future Parliaments and future decision makers about who to have days named after and so on.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to respectfully point out to my friend that this is a private member's bill, not a motion. However, in terms of answering his question, in terms of setting standards, each case would have to be decided on its own merits and basis. I do not think we could have one standard that would apply to everyone at all times. The answer to this question would be that we would know it when we saw it.

We had no difficulty bestowing the honour upon the Dalai Lama in terms of becoming an honorary Canadian citizen. So if we look at the facts of this case, in terms of religious significance and the fact that he is a world leader who helped to end communism and the fact that, already with the title of venerable, he is on his way to sainthood, respectfully, in this case it is clear that we know it when we see it and this case is obvious.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak today about Bill C-573 that seeks to designate April 2 of each year as Pope John Paul II Day.

Pope John Paul II had influence that extended well beyond the doors of the church. He was revered and admired by people of many different faiths, and the impact of his actions is still being felt around the world.

During his lifetime, John Paul II worked to further understanding and co-operation among people of different faiths. His legacy is a new global movement of interfaith dialogue. People of different religions are focusing on the values they have in common while forging new ties and lasting relationships.

In his years as pope, he visited 129 countries and redefined the papacy for a modern age. Three of those trips were taken here to Canada. He was in fact the first pope to visit Canada, and one of his many gifts was his ability to reach out to people of other faiths and inspire reconciliation after centuries of hostility and suspicion.

Pope John Paul II was a man of action as well as a man of words. He was the first pope to enter a Jewish synagogue. He was the first pope to enter a mosque. He initiated and participated in many events and conferences and promoted a message of peace and harmony among different religions.

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In October 1986, the pope convened and led a multifaith service involving leaders of the world's religions. During this conference he said:

I wish to make an earnest call to everyone, Christians and the followers of other religions, that we all work together to build a world without violence, a world that loves life, and grows in solidarity and justice.

The event led to interfaith activities all over the world and to yearly interfaith prayer on the annual feast of Saint Francis.

In 1994, the pope gave the inaugural address at the World Conference on Religion and Peace, an organization led by a UN-accredited global movement dedicated to co-operation among the world's religions for peace, all the while maintaining respect for the religious differences contained within this group.

In January 2002, following the terror attacks of 9/11, Pope John Paul II convened a multifaith service that united 200 religious leaders from all over the globe so that we could have a day of prayer for the world in crisis. During that day-long retreat, these leaders agreed on a joint 10-point pledge that proclaims that religion must never be used again to justify violence on this planet.

These are only a few examples of his efforts for interfaith dialogue. His ground-breaking overtures towards other world religions were unprecedented. Complemented by his efforts to achieve unity among Christian denominations, these efforts have spawned a variety of organizations that promote further dialogue and common action.

On the world stage, Pope John Paul II was a diplomat of peace and a supporter of diversity. Canada continues to build an inclusive society that values differences and fosters a sense of belonging. Pope John Paul II lived by and advocated these same principles that we treasure in Canada.

Pope John Paul II made a lasting impact on our country. During the first of his three official visits, in 1984, he made a 12-day pilgrimage across Canada. He visited eight provinces, and this tour was the longest he made to any single country on the planet.

His second visit to Canada was in 1987. The primary purpose for this visit was to fulfill a promise he made to visit Fort Simpson, a remote community, showing that he cared not only about large historic cities but also about small villages where the common people live.

The pope's third visit to Canada was in 2002, when he attended the 17th World Youth Day festivities in Toronto. World Youth Day assembled more than 350,000 pilgrims from across the globe to Canada. The concluding outdoor mass in Downsview, Ontario, attracted one of the largest gatherings in Canadian history. The crowd numbered more than 800,000 people. The response of the young people was full of enthusiasm, love and respect for the man and the office. This would be the last time that Pope John Paul II attended World Youth Day events.

Throughout the pope's travels, people were very taken by the man himself, for this man exuded warmth and a generosity of spirit and he was genuinely concerned for all people on this planet.

● (1840)

The world's reaction to his death is a strong indication of the esteem in which he was held and how he reached people from all religions and backgrounds.

Upon his death, Pope John Paul II was mourned by people around the world, and it is estimated that two million people made the pilgrimage to Vatican City to pay their respects. From presidents and prime ministers to kings and queens, dignitaries from 138 countries were present at his funeral. This is a true testament to the pope's global impact and reach.

Another testament to his global impact is the presence of many national and municipal public projects, airports, parks, squares, schools, roads and avenues that are all named in his honour. There is even a peninsula in Antarctica that is named after Pope John Paul II for his contribution to world peace and understanding among people.

We are very fortunate that in this country Canadians of all faiths are encouraged to follow the religious practices of their own choosing. We are a country of many faiths. Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and many others are free to celebrate their holy days without fear of persecution. Our calendar reflects many of these holidays. Days like Good Friday, Easter Monday and Christmas Day are statutory holidays. But in more recent years here in Canada, other faith holidays like the month of Ramadan, the Jewish high holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and the festival of Diwali in the Sikh and Hindu faiths are now recognized and observed by an ever-expanding number of Canadians.

Declaring Pope John Paul II Day in Canada would recognize a leader who advocated understanding and acceptance of people of all faiths and backgrounds, a man who initiated a global movement of interfaith dialogue, who had a lasting impact on Canada and the rest of the world, and a man whose message mirrors Canada's own experiences with diversity, both cultural and ethnic.

Canada has a history of recognizing outstanding world leaders. Raoul Wallenberg, who was instrumental in ensuring the safety of more than 100,000 Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust, was granted a special day of recognition and was also granted honorary citizenship.

Honorary citizenship has also been granted to other world leaders, including Nelson Mandela and Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama. In 2007, Aung San Suu Kyi, while still under house arrest, was awarded honorary citizenship for her fight for democracy in Burma. On November 13, 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi was released after 7.5 years of house arrest. Upon her release, her message to her followers was not one of revenge. It was one seeking national reconciliation. She embodies the same values that Canada promotes and, much like John Paul II, she is a world leader who advocates non-violence and equality for all.

By recognizing Pope John Paul II Day, we can encourage Canadians across this great nation to embrace diversity, respect people of other faiths and celebrate what truly unites us as Canadians.

Private Members' Business

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be speaking about Bill C-573, which is titled An Act to establish Pope John Paul II Day. It was introduced in the House by the Liberal member for Brampton West and would establish April 2 as Pope John Paul II Day.

The Bloc Québécois supports this bill and sees it as a tribute to the considerable role that John Paul II played internationally as a promoter of peace.

The Bloc Québécois would also like to use this bill as an opportunity to highlight the Polish community's contribution to modern Quebec, for one, and its role in Quebec culture. I am thinking, for example, of Alice Parizeau, Jacques Parizeau's late wife, and Bernard Adamus, who was recently named the 2010 new artist of the year and received his Félix award last week at the ADISQ gala.

The Bloc Québécois would also like to acknowledge the contribution made by Catholics in building Quebec, despite abuses in the church's dogma concerning the rights of women and homosexuals and despite having hidden cases of pedophilia in the church.

John Paul II spoke about the fact that doing good deeds does not come naturally. He was absolutely correct, and I should say that his quote on this topic is one of my favourites.

Karol Józef Wojtyła was born in Poland on May 18, 1920, and died in the Vatican on April 2, 2005, the date to be commemorated by this bill. He was a priest in Poland, became the Bishop and Archbishop of Krakow, was elevated to Cardinal, and was elected Pope of the Roman Catholic Church on October 16, 1978, choosing the name John Paul II.

His pontificate lasted 26 years and was the third-longest in the history of the Church, following that of St. Peter and of Pius IX, which was 31 years.

His desire to reconcile different faiths led to a marked improvement in the Catholic Church's relations with Jews, members of the Orthodox Church and Anglicans. He initiated the first interfaith gathering at Assisi in 1984, bringing together more than 194 religious leaders.

This travelling pope visited more than 129 countries during his pontificate, was seen by more than 150 million people, and established major gatherings such as World Youth Day. He beatified 1,340 people and canonized 483 saints, more than in the previous five centuries.

He defended the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, in which he had participated as a bishop. His desire to defend human dignity led him to promote human rights. He opposed communism and his actions, especially in Poland, led to the fall of the Iron Curtain. He also attacked the excesses of capitalism.

According to Wikipedia, John Paul II is considered one of the most influential leaders of the 20th century and, I would add, an ambassador of peace.

But his work for peace is not finished. The Catholic church suffers from serious flaws and iniquities that alienate people who believe in equality and social justice.

Three serious flaws still mar this great international institution.

The first, and perhaps the least serious of the three, is the requirement that priests be celibate. This is an anachronistic requirement whose usefulness has never been proven, but it has long made the church a refuge for men who do not want to marry women.

The sordid cases of pedophilia in the Catholic church—which have been documented and proven and in some instances have gone to court—are too numerous to be ignored. The international community is still waiting for the Vatican to make a public confession and an act of contrition and take real, transparent steps with the legal authorities in every country affected, in addition to promising that this will never happen again.

Moreover, the Catholic church still does not consider women to be equal to men. Still today, in 2010, it is one of the few institutions where the fact that women cannot hold the same positions as men is tolerated: no female priests, no female cardinals, no female popes. It is forbidden.

It is incomprehensible that in 2010, we should allow an institution that is such an integral part of our communities and our parishes to so blatantly flout rights as fundamental as male-female equality.

The bill introduced by the member for Brampton West would establish a day to recognize Pope John Paul II for being an ambassador of peace. If ever there were a pope who put an end to the anachronistic abuses I just spoke of and restored respect and human dignity, he would deserve a week at the very least.

When we look at everything that still remains to be done in the Catholic church and everything that has not been done over the centuries, we can see that John Paul II was right when he said, "Good, in fact, is not easy."

• (1850)

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity this evening to speak to this bill and its subject, John Paul II. I remember being at his funeral, reflecting on the plain wooden casket and thinking how appropriate for him, a humble servant. I remember the two million mostly young people attracted to how he lived out a set of values inspired by the gospels and the social gospels.

We have a wonderfully effective relationship in Canada between church and state unlike that of the United States, where separation is enshrined in the constitution. There is this respectful, honest and direct dialogue that serves us well.

We honour and listen to and converse with all faiths and religions. We give no one tradition or denomination precedence over another. Each has a place at the table.

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There are many wonderful world leaders to inform and inspire us. I think of Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Aung San Suu Kyi. Some of them we have made honorary citizens.

I know there is a tradition in my Catholic church to have feast days for saints. However, we are the national government and act on behalf of all the people.

John Paul II lived his life out of a very clear set of values. The most obvious ones for me were his call to reconciliation, forgiving and healing. He forgave personally the man who tried to kill him. His commitment to peace and his stance as a world leader against the war in Iraq was inspirational and instructive. The way he carried himself in his latter years spoke to his great respect for all of humanity however frail or infirm.

He also, however, presided over an institution that, as we have come to see, was flawed and imperfect. I do not think he would be comfortable with the designation proposed here today, given his obvious humility and his penchant for challenging governments that did not, or do not, understand the importance of the values he so obviously espoused, as I said, peace, reconciliation and respect for all humanity.

We do not have a formal separation of church and state in Canada. However, there is a respectful dialogue and distancing at times on issues such as human rights, women's rights, the rights of gays and lesbians. I do not think John Paul II would want to be that closely aligned and I do not think it is healthy to give special recognition to the leader of one faith tradition, however revered by the world he or she served in.

I remember standing in Saint Peter's Square with all the world's leaders, civic and religious, paying respect to this very human and humble shepherd. I thought, wow, as I felt the waves of emotion back and forth from the front to the back and back again every time his name was mentioned.

Let us leave it there to be thought about by the world. Allow it to inspire us to continue his obviously unfinished work but not tie it to one day, or one country or one government.

Because of his struggles in his early years with the people of Poland, his willingness to stand up for what he believed in, that belief rooted in meditation and prayer, his obvious human limitations and frailty and willingness to forgive and reconcile in the interest of healing and all of humanity, for me, qualifies him as a mystic activist out there with people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nelson Mandela, Elie Wiesel, Dorothy Day, Jean Vanier and the so many other men and women who have lived lives of struggle and meaning.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Brampton West for bringing this bill forward. It is a worthy debate.

The role of religious figures in a pluralist society is an important debate and one that I believe our so-called secular Canadian society needs to address. I say "so-called secular society" because polls indicate that well over 80% of Canadians have some form of faith expression and, indeed, well over 30%, on a weekly basis, participate in some form of religious activity.

Pope John Paul II was one of the 20th century's most important historical and religious figures. He lived life large and his life bears examining by even those of us who are not Catholic.

He made an immense contribution to interfaith dialogue, including overt efforts to reach out to the Muslim community, to the Jewish community and to the Orthodox faith community. He was a world traveller. He visited over 129 countries, including Canada. I was privileged to hear him speak at the World Youth Day on the Downsview Lands, with something in the order of 800,000 other people. I was also privileged to be part of the greeting party at Pearson airport.

He was an overt Christian and a staunch moral voice in the face of the brutalities of Nazism and Communism. Yet John Paul II challenged a secular Canadian society like few others. His challenges were not always welcome. His ethic of life challenged those who promoted capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. He alienated many by his refusal to include women in the structure of the Catholic church. He defended the celibacy of the priesthood, even while many were being accused of deviant sexuality. His stand against homosexual marriage was not well received.

Pope John Paul II can be criticized for many things. There are those who dismiss him as being out of touch with modernity. I am not one of them. My guess is that Pope John Paul II did not view modernity as an important touchstone.

Our current Canadian society has a very immature understanding of the historic role of faith leaders in our society. William Wilberforce, for instance, challenged the British society and challenged its core economic underpinnings over a course of 20 to 30 years in the parliament of Great Britain until, finally, slavery was abolished. Similarly, Desmond Tutu challenged the core values of an apartheid society. Martin Luther King challenged the core racism that permeated the United States.

All of these men moved their societies in directions that their societies did not want to go on the basis of their prophetic vision. Sometimes they paid for their vision with ridicule, sometimes with hostility and sometimes with their lives. Each was profoundly Christian and each was deeply flawed. God, for some reason, does not choose the perfect to do His work here on this earth. For whatever reason, He chooses the imperfect and sometimes the deeply flawed to speak out.

Pope John Paul II, the successor to St. Peter, was an imperfect man, as was St. Peter. After all, St. Peter denied his association with Christ three times prior to the crucifixion. King David, the patriarch of the Jews, was an adulterer who tried to arrange for the murder of his lover's husband. St. Paul was a vigilante hunting down Christians before he had his road to Damascus experience. Many of Muhammad's "peace be upon him" teachings have been roundly criticized by modern scholars.

The point is that all three monotheistic religions have been led by human beings whose lives have not always been exemplary. For whatever reason, God seems to like it that way. In a strange sort of way, that is quite encouraging for those of us who do not live exemplary lives.

Private Members' Business

• (1855)

That brings me back to John Paul II. Criticism of his life by faith and non-faith people alike miss the point. By anyone's standards, he lived a remarkable life, and against all kinds of pressure, he spoke with power and authority into the depths of people's lives. He challenged the 21st century like no one else. He was called to speak with a prophetic voice and he disturbed us all in our comfort zones.

Canadians have a deep-seated ambivalence to religious leaders. Very few would darken the door of a church, let alone a Baptist church. Yet a few years ago, a Baptist minister was voted the most popular Canadian ever. John Paul II's church is in precipitous decline in some parts of our country, yet millions came to hear him preach around the world and indeed in Toronto.

I believe that if we look at the life of John Paul II, we will find a prophetic voice and great Christian, a flawed but great man.

Our own age is beset by serious challenges. We look in vain for voices of moral leadership. Canada has traditionally provided that voice through, for example, leadership in peacekeeping and championing nuclear non-proliferation. But as Jeffrey Sachs recently remarked, these days Canada has a wobbly moral compass.

There are those who will disagree with John Paul II's positions on various issues, but his legacy is bigger than any one issue or debate. It is a legacy of a man of virtue who had the courage to stand for what he believed was good and moral in the face of opposition, a man who never shied away from following the direction of his moral compass.

By creating a day to celebrate such a man, we encourage others to follow in his footsteps and to be the moral leaders that their communities so urgently need. Therefore I believe that this bill is worthy of our support.

• (1900)

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be here to speak with you and my colleagues about Bill C-573, which seeks to designate April 2 of each year as Pope John Paul II Day.

John Paul II served as the pope of the Roman Catholic Church from October 16, 1978 until his death on April 2, 2005. He played an influential and vital role, promoting international understanding, peace-building, and helping defeat communism in Poland. He was a remarkable man of many accomplishments, who has left a permanent mark upon the world.

Pope John Paul II touched the lives of millions of people and was one of the most influential leaders of the 20th century. He is also known for his work with youth. He is called by some the pope for youth.

In 1986, he established World Youth Day with the intention of bringing young people from all parts of the world together. This global movement has transformed into week-long meetings held every two or three years and attracting hundreds of thousands of young people. The pope won their hearts and minds because of his belief in their ability to change the world for the better, and his respect for them.

Canada is recognized as a world leader in bridging different communities from different backgrounds. Our country is respected and admired internationally for its fundamental characteristics of multiculturalism and multi-faith. Canada currently celebrates many religious holidays. Some are legislated, such as Good Friday and Easter Monday and Christmas Day. Other religious holidays, widely observed in Canada, include Ramadan, the commemoration of Mohammed's reception of the divine revelation recorded in the Koran; Eid al-Adha, the Islamic Feast of Sacrifice; Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights; Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement; and Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights.

Every day, religious and cultural communities celebrate their culture and their faith. This freedom provides Canadians across the country with a sense of belonging, pride, and attachment to this beautiful country that respects and accepts all religions and cultures as equal.

Like our country, Pope John Paul II is recognized internationally as a leader who advocated the understanding and acceptance of people of all faiths and backgrounds, and who was known for his work in interfaith dialogue. During his visits to 129 different countries around the world, Pope John Paul II met with the Coptic pope, Pope Shenouda III, and the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria. He was also the first pope in history to pray in Islamic mosques, at the Western Wall, and in synagogues. He called for Muslims, Christians, and Jews to work together toward peace, mutual understanding, and unity.

Pope John Paul II convened and led many multi-faith prayer services involving over 200 religious leaders from 16 churches and ecclesial communities, urging everyone to work together to build a world without violence, a world that loves life and grows in solidarity and justice.

There are many national and municipal projects that are named in Pope John Paul II's honour, including airports, parks, squares, schools, roads, and avenues. A peninsula in Antarctica, as was mentioned earlier, is named after John Paul II for his contribution to world peace and understanding among people.

Canada has always been dedicated to supporting commemorations and celebrations, recognizing that those celebrations contribute to the identity, the cohesion, and the sense of belonging of Canadians.

In addition to designating special days, Canada has also used the granting of honorary Canadian citizenship to recognize international world leaders who embody the values that Canada stands for. To date the following people have been granted this honour: In 1985, Raoul Wallenberg, in recognition of his heroism during the Holocaust; in 2001, Nelson Mandela for his leadership and his fight for equality and human rights; in 2006, the 14th Dalai Lama; in 2007, Aung San Suu Kyi, still under house arrest, for her leadership, peace-building, promotion of democracy, and defence of human rights; and in 2009, the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslims and an active philanthropist.

Recognizing Pope John Paul II Day in Canada would commemorate a world leader who advocated for understanding and acceptance of people of all faiths and backgrounds. The day would highlight the Pope's vital role in ending communism in Poland and his leadership in interfaith dialogue. It would be in line with the pope's widespread international recognition.

For all these reasons, I urge my fellow members of the House to support this legislation.

• (1905)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-573, calling on the government to designate the second day of April in each and every year as the National Pope John Paul II Day.

Pope John Paul II is without doubt a figure who has a strong influence, not just here in Canada, but in the rest of the world as well. He was unpretentious, close to the people and was a champion of multiculturalism, bringing people from different religions closer together.

His difficult childhood and inner strength undoubtedly contributed to his empathy with others. The pope was born in Poland in 1920 and his early years were marked by many difficult events. His mother died when he was just nine years old and his older brother's untimely death a few years later was followed by his father's death in 1941, forcing him at an early age to learn to deal with loss and grief.

These unfortunate events took place during a difficult time in history. Poland had just lost its autonomy and joined a communist totalitarian regime. During these years of war, Pope John Paul II began his studies in Cracow but was forced to suspend them for a year of compulsory labour for the state. He later returned to his studies while working in a quarry and then in a factory. We can only imagine what he went through.

During the war, he began to express himself through cultural activities such as theatre and poetry. These difficult experiences during the pope's early life undoubtedly contributed to making him the man he became, a pope recognized and respected throughout the world, a champion of the poor and of human rights, a dedicated and sensible man who was very down to earth, deeply spiritual, and extremely determined.

Pope John Paul II's influence can be felt in many ways across all age groups and cultures. His message of love and peace transcended borders and broke down barriers. He was especially concerned with young people and the poor. This is why the pope established World Youth Day during spontaneous youth gatherings in Rome in 1986. The objective of this day dedicated to youth, actually a number of days today, is to empower youth and promote solidarity and openness to other cultures. This day is celebrated every year in all Catholic dioceses around the world.

In 2002, the pope visited Canada for the third and last time during the 17th World Youth Day, which was held in Toronto July 18 to 28. Over 350,000 pilgrims, including 200,000 young people from 150 different countries around the world, took part in this event. On the last day, the pope also celebrated a mass attended by over 800,000 people. Illness had already begun to take its toll on the pope, but his

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advanced years did nothing to diminish the passion of his speech. Young people participated in great numbers and were extremely impressed with the model of courage and hope that Pope John Paul II provided.

The pope loved to meet people and was an excellent speaker. During his time as pope, he made 200 trips abroad and visited 129 countries, including Canada, which he visited three times, in 1984, 1987, and 2002.

Pope John Paul II was a promoter of tolerance and helped to increase dialogue between various religions. From the very first few months of his time as Pope, he promoted respect for all religious beliefs. He did so in 1979 during his first official trip to Poland, and in the same year in Turkey, he established the first connections with Muslim communities. Over the years, he built bridges between the heads of the largest religions. In 1986, he was the first Pope to pray in a synagogue in Rome; the first to visit a Muslim country; to visit a mainly orthodox country, Romania; to visit Israel, where no Pope had gone for 30 years; and to visit a mosque in Syria.

• (1910)

The pope brought together nearly 200 representatives from all continents and religions, including Orthodox and Protestant Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs.

This dedicated man also defended peace with respect to politicians. In 1982, he granted an audience to Yasser Arafat, then head of the Palestine Liberation Organization. He also welcomed Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989, and defended freedom of religion and conscience in the U.S.S.R.. In 1998, he travelled to Cuba and met with Communist leader, Fidel Castro. He also spoke on many occasions to officials from world organizations, particularly at the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and 1995, and at the UNESCO General Assembly in 1980.

He defended democracy before the European parliament by supporting the arrival of a democratic regime in the Philippines, and he worked for peace with various countries, urging them to negotiate and find common ground. This was the case in a variety of situations, including Chile and Argentina, Israel and Palestine, and even our neighbours, the United States and Iraq.

Like Canadians, the pope was an ardent defender of human rights, encouraged respect for beliefs and valued cultural differences.

I believe establishing a Pope John Paul II day would help Canadians remember the pope's commitment to defending the principles of an inclusive society and strengthen our own sense of belonging.

I will support Bill C-573 which calls on the government to designate April 2 in each and every year as Pope John Paul II Day.

I need to go back over some of the things I previously mentioned because it is important to understand the wide variety of things in which the pope was very active. He brought not only Canadians but people from around the world into closer touch with one another. It did not really matter whether it dealt with religion or nationalities, he was a bridge that brought people together.

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Perhaps one of the more important aspects in the life of Pope John Paul II was his dealings with young people who over the years have lost their way and have lost touch with religion. I recall when Pope John Paul II was in Toronto and all of the young people who came forward on world youth day. I think all of us were purely amazed that one human being, who was in this country at that time, brought all these young people together for a cause that they perhaps would not have felt otherwise inclined to do. I think it was the man who truly made the difference.

I hope that all colleagues in the House will support Pope John Paul II day.

● (1915)

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL AID

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation for taking the time to look at the issue of CIDA and its list of priority countries.

As official opposition critic for La Francophonie, I believe that we have an obligation to consider how we can help strengthen the ties between member countries of La Francophonie. That said, I know very well that CIDA has obligations that go beyond our country's membership in an international organization. It must first ensure that priority countries have a real need and must then predict the impact of Canadian aid on the quality of life of people in developing countries. We will have to review the decision to include or exclude certain countries from CIDA's priority list, according to the aforementioned criteria.

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa, members of la Francophonie, must be part of this discussion because, unfortunately, they are among the poorest countries in the world. For instance, in May 2009, eight African countries were taken off the list of priority countries for development assistance. It would appear that francophone countries were targeted in particular, since five of the eight countries are members of la Francophonie: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Niger and Rwanda. The question is: were those francophone countries targeted and, if so, why? Even African nations were wondering why this measure seemed to target francophone countries in particular.

A review of the countries' performance based on their development level does not justify this exclusion. According to the United Nations 2009 human development report, African countries that are members of la Francophonie are among the poorest of the 182 countries listed. I will name five: Benin, 161st out of 182; Cameroon, 153rd; Niger, the poorest country in the world, 182nd; Rwanda, 167th; and Burkina Faso, 177th out of 182.

When I compare this list to the Latin American countries that are not members of the Francophonie and that received aid from CIDA, I see a remarkable difference. The five countries that received aid from CIDA are: Peru, which is 78th on the list; Colombia, 77th; Bolivia, 113th; Honduras, which was 106th in 2010; and Dominican Republic, 73rd.

Why were the poorest countries in the world excluded when they need international aid the most? Even a list of our national and international agreements does not explain the exclusion of many sub-Saharan African countries.

Canada is a member country of la Francophonie. This obliges us to strengthen our ties with other member countries of this vast network, but CIDA's new strategy excludes, as I said, the five poorest member countries of la Francophonie in the world.

This decision has certainly had a serious impact on our diplomatic relations with member countries of la Francophonie. After the Minister of International Cooperation announced CIDA's new strategy in 2009, 17 ambassadors appeared before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on May 27 this year. According to some—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade.

● (1920)

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for bringing this question forward but the question she had for the late show this evening did not deal with the Francophonie and was not the question she had asked in the House. She seems to have taken a different tack tonight but I will try to drill down into the crux of what she is actually asking.

The point is that we are an accountable government and we take international development seriously. This is an extremely serious issue. It is not sufficient to give aid to all countries and expect nothing in return. There are certain standards that countries must meet.

I listened very closely to what the hon. member said and I believe the argument she made is a fairly simple one, which is that because certain groups received money in the past they should receive it in the future. I am sorry but that is simply not the way that we do business. We want to ensure the programs we fund are putting food in the mouths of those who are hungry. We want to provide medicine to those who are sick. We will fund programs that train teachers to educate, farmers to grow food and doctors to care for the sick.

Our government is working diligently to ensure that Canada's international development funding is being allocated appropriately and in a way that makes a significant difference for those in the developing world who most count on our assistance.

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The Government of Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency, is delivering aid accountably and effectively by putting taxpayer dollars toward initiatives that show results and improve lives. We are making Canada's international assistance more targeted and effective, while also improving on how we report development results to Canadians.

As we work to fully untie aid by 2012-13, Canada's multilateral partner agencies can already use our money to buy the most appropriate and well-priced food from suppliers located closest to the area in need. We have also focused our aid more sharply by investing 80% of our bilateral resources in 20 developing countries. This has ensured that Canadian aid is targeted to parts of the world that will most benefit from our support.

Beyond focusing geographically, we have focused thematically as well with three key priorities guiding our work. The first is to secure the future of children and youth, arguably the key agents of change in the developing world. To reach our objectives, we have devised a children and youth strategy that focuses on child survival, including maternal health, access to quality education, particularly for girls, and the safety and security of children and youth.

Our second thematic priority is to increase food security, an area in which Canada has shown consistent leadership. Through our food security strategy, we are concentrating our efforts over the next three years on sustainable agriculture development, food assistance and nutrition, and research and innovation.

Our third priority is to stimulate sustainable economic growth through a strategy that puts the focus on building economic foundations, growing businesses and investing in people. These priority areas are tied together by our government's commitment to use development dollars in an efficient and effective way so we can best demonstrate to Canadians that the money we invest in the developing world is well spent and delivering results that justify the spending.

It is within this context that we review all proposals for development programming, even those—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Laval—Les Îles.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I hear what the parliamentary secretary is saying, and he seems to be quoting me, but I have never said that. I have never said that if we gave money to a certain country in the past that it should continue to receive funding. In fact, I agree entirely with some of the goals that the parliamentary secretary just mentioned. But how can we measure this effectiveness that they talk so much about? I do not understand how we can measure that. It is not absolute.

However, I can say that in Benin, a country that is part of the Francophonie, the annual growth rate over the past five years has been between 4% and 4.5%. The growth rate in Rwanda has increased each year over the past five years. We see that countries that have received aid from CIDA already have a growth rate that is exceptional for them.

I am simply asking for the criteria used in choosing these countries and asking that the Francophonie countries not be forgotten.

• (1925)

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's interest in this subject, but this is a very difficult issue. Obviously there is not enough foreign aid to go in all the areas where we would like it to go. Somewhere there has to be criteria to judge individual applications for aid. It is within this context that we review all proposals for development programming, even those that come from partners who have received funding in the past, to determine if they align with the priority areas that I mentioned earlier.

We do this because ultimately we are accountable to Canadian taxpayers, but also because millions of people in all corners of the world count on us to deliver aid that is effective and that responds to the needs of those who need it most.

G8 AND G20 SUMMITS

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last June I raised the issue of out-of-control G8-G20 spending. Five months and dozens of questions later, some of the information is coming from the Conservative government, but a lot is still left unsaid.

The Thursday afternoon before the House was to rise for a week, Conservatives quietly released the expenditures of many of the contracts associated with the summits. The government finally got around to doing what we had asked for. It was pushed by the Liberal opposition in committee. I had to put forward a motion demanding all the documentation. The government came back and asked for two extensions and then made it more public.

When the government made it public, it offered a technical briefing for the media, but only for the media, and only with two hours notice.

This is the kind of accountability we have come to expect from the Conservative government. It begrudgingly gives in and provides the information to the Liberals, the media and to all Canadians that we should expect and rightfully demand from the government. It is simply unacceptable. The government should be open, accountable and transparent without reservation.

What is also unacceptable is the total cost of summit, over \$1 billion, and the way in which borrowed taxpayer money was actually wasted. Let me review some of that waste: \$20,000 on flowers and centrepieces; nearly \$300,000 on gifts and promotional items; over \$3 million on a preliminary meeting at a high-priced hotel in Lake Louise and in Ottawa; \$20,000 in ice sculptures; and \$57,000 on lapel pins and zipper pulls. The Conservatives have somehow managed to spend more on zipper pulls and lapel pins than the average Canadian family earns in an entire year.

We can see from this very small sample why even the Conservatives are now saying they are “spending like it is Christmas”.

Too many of the contracts awarded by the Conservatives were sole-sourced and too many of those ended up costing far more than they were estimated.

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For example, Public Works and Government Services Canada estimated it would spend \$172,000 on salaries and fees. In the end it spent \$1.7 million. It estimated it would spend \$1.8 million for leasing and operating costs of various venues and office space. In the end that number was an incredible \$21.6 million. That is over \$19 million more than it thought had budgeted for.

I am sympathetic to the fact that circumstances change, but it is a little outrageous. How can we count on a government that simply cannot count?

Public Works estimated it would have approximately \$142.1 million in goods and services and leasing expenditures. So far, only \$55 million worth of receipts have come in, and this five months later. The Liberals are still waiting on the bills for the rest of the expenditures.

A big part of the Conservative's billion dollar weekend was the security budget. The cost skyrocketed when the Conservatives told security officials, with very short notice, that they had to host a second meeting, the G20 meeting, in Toronto.

The government operations committee heard from the Chief Superintendent of the RCMP, Alphonse MacNeil, who commended the Integrated Security Unit based in Barrie, Ontario. MacNeil was unequivocal when he said, "If you do an event in one place instead of two, the cost would be lower". He is right. That is just plain common sense.

The billion dollar question is this. Why did the Conservatives decide to hold such a high-profile, security-intense summit in the downtown core of Canada's largest, busiest city rather than find the most cost-effective solution?

We know that other countries have held these meetings for much less. Korea just did so. The U.K. and France will too. Meetings like these will continue—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

• (1930)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to what the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl had to say, and once I sifted through the nonsense to get down to a few kernels of truth, the rebuttal is pretty straightforward and pretty easy.

It is certainly not the first summit ever held in Canada, certainly not the first summit ever held in a major city. I understand that the hon. member is new to this place and maybe does not have a full range of knowledge of her Liberal predecessors who actually were in government for a good many years in this country and held a number of summits. So perhaps she should go and check the history books.

The bottom line here is simple. Canada was proud to host the world's most influential leaders at the Muskoka 2010 G8 summit in Huntsville, Ontario, on June 25 and 26. We were equally proud to then host the meeting of those who lead the world's most influential economies at the G20 Toronto summit on June 26 and 27. At both summits, Canada led pragmatic, focused agendas, bringing member states together to forge common solutions to key issues of global importance.

This was the first time that these summits were held back to back. In addition to the visiting leaders, some 8,000 delegates and 3,500 journalists came to Canada from every corner of the planet for these meetings, and let me remind the member opposite that the G8 leaders met in a relatively secluded area while the G20 leaders convened 225 kilometres away in an urban setting. While these meetings shared core resources and personnel to the degree possible, each location had separate and specific considerations for organization, security and logistics.

The latest estimated cost of hosting both the Muskoka G8 summit and the Toronto G20 summit was \$1.13 billion. That includes \$183 million for organizing two summits, \$675 million for providing security for them, and other related costs.

I would agree with the hon. member on one issue that she raises; that is, \$675 million for security is a lot of money. However, what would we do if we would not have spent that money? Is the hon. member suggesting, first of all, that Canada not take its rightful place in the world and host these types of meetings? Or is she suggesting that we simply do not provide security at a meeting where we have the 20 most influential economies of the world present? We live in a world that simply does not allow that. This is no time to ignore our responsibilities as a nation and not provide security for world leaders.

These amounts have been allocated. They have been looked at. We have heard debate in the House. We have heard the questions answered. The reality is that if we are going to take our place in the world, if we are going to be a world leader, if we are going to take our place in the G8, if we are going to participate in the G20, then unfortunately, because of the security involved, these meetings cost money. They will cost money regardless of where they are held in the world.

They can come up with all kinds of false numbers and they can cherry-pick something out of that and say, "You could have done this with that money". Absolutely we could have, but that does not take our responsibility away to provide assurance to world leaders that when they visit Canada, they will have a safe environment, and that we will be able to deal with the important items on the agendas that they have before them.

Rather than criticizing the government, she should be praising the government for doing its job, for doing the job that it is expected to do and taking our place among the leaders of the world.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Mr. Speaker, that was very interesting. I never got an answer to any of the questions that I asked. I guess it is all because the government of today does not want to give answers to questions when it is considered not within its best interests.

It is too bad the government did not consider the bottom line. The meetings of the G8 and the G20, the Conservatives' billion-dollar weekend, were supposed to be focused on reining in government spending. Yet we saw lavish amounts of spending.

I agree with the member when he says that it is Canada's place to host these meetings. Absolutely, we planned to host the G8. Did we need all the lavish spending? Did we need all the signs in front of all the interesting infrastructure that needed to be put in place?

I will remind the member that we know there was a \$1.1 million sidewalk put in, 84 kilometres from the summit site. There was lots of money spent. Why did the Conservatives—

• (1935)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is totally missing the point. These types of events have a high cost. We understand that. They also lend a lot of credibility to the host country. We bring leaders from around the world to Canada. We showcase our country, and there is a cost associated with that.

In 2010, Canada was in the international spotlight. Our country had already hosted hugely successful Olympic and Paralympic

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Games. Moreover, we convened G8 and G20 summits that were just as successful and just as productive.

As members know, Canada holds the presidency of the G8 this year. We believe the G8 is an important force on the world stage. The Muskoka G8 summit provided leadership for development, peace and security, all vitally important areas.

In addition, the G20—

The Deputy Speaker: A motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:36 p.m.)

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