



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 145 • NUMBER 119 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, December 16, 2010

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, December 16, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development respecting the request for an extension of 30 days to consider Bill C-469, An Act to establish a Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(3)(a) a motion to concur in the report is deemed moved, the question deemed put and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until Wednesday, February 2, 2011, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

* * *

PETITIONS

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by a number of veterans who live in my riding or in my region who make regular use of the Liaison Centre at the Ste. Anne's Hospital for veterans in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue in my riding. They are very concerned about the future of the centre, especially given rumours, which are quite firm, that the present government aims to transfer this last veterans' hospital in Canada to the provincial health authorities.

I would like to present this petition on their behalf today.

[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition in this

House on behalf of seniors who would like to see improvements made to the guaranteed income supplement, the spouse's allowance and the survivor's allowance. They would like to see automatic enrolment for the guaranteed income supplement, spouse's allowance and survivor's allowance; an increase to the guaranteed income supplement of \$110 per month for people who live alone and an increase to the survivor's allowance of \$199 per month; full, unconditional retroactivity; and a six-month extension of the guaranteed income supplement and the spouse's allowance following the death of one of the beneficiaries in the couple. Many of our seniors who live below the poverty line are in desperate need. I am pleased to present this petition to the House on their behalf.

[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to table a petition this morning signed by 74 members of Huron-Perth Presbytery of the United Church of Canada, people associated with the presbytery and people from the local communities that they represent.

These folks are respectfully asking Parliament to pass Bill C-389, my private member's bill that would add gender identity and expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Act and to the Criminal Code provisions on hate crimes and sentencing.

These folks are very concerned for the situation of transgender and transsexual Canadians and they believe that Bill C-389 would go a considerable distance toward helping Canadian society fight discrimination against transgender and transsexual Canadians and their social exclusion.

• (1005)

JUSTICE

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am saddened to table a petition collected in my riding of Etobicoke Centre and by Saint Leopold Mandic Croatian Church in Ottawa related to Boris Cikovic, a teenager who was gunned down in my riding by thugs trying to rob him.

This is a difficult time of year for Boris' parents and his many friends, and for the Bosnian Croatian community in Etobicoke where he lived and where his promising young life was snuffed out by a bullet that terrible day on October 3, 2008.

Routine Proceedings

Including these 70 petitioners, over 1,200 petitioners in my riding have urged the government to pass my private member's Bill C-537. This bill would make offences involving firearms automatically tried by a Superior Court. It would also make bail conditions tougher by forcing those accused of crimes involving firearms to have to demonstrate in court why they should not be detained in custody before trial.

The individual charged with the murder of my constituent allegedly refuses to co-operate by naming his two accomplices and is out on bail. Boris' parents, Vesna and Davorin, struggle daily knowing they may actually be passing their son's murderer in their own neighbourhood.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present.

The first petition calls upon the government to pass legislation to amend Canada's federal animal cruelty legislation. The petitioners strongly feel that our current federal animal cruelty laws are grossly inadequate and do not offer effective protection for animals in this country.

The petitioners are calling upon the Minister of Justice to introduce government legislation amending the Criminal Code provisions on animal cruelty.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition has to do with the Sisters in Spirit initiative. This is a petition to the House of Commons pointing out that for the past five years the Native Women's Association of Canada, the Sisters in Spirit initiative, has worked to identify root causes, trends and circumstances of violence that have led to the disappearance and death of aboriginal women and girls. The Native Women's Association of Canada released a report called, "What Their Stories Tell Us", which provided evidence that 582 aboriginal women and girls have gone missing.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to develop an action plan for aboriginal women.

The final petition is about the stolen sisters. The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to ensure the Native Women's Association of Canada receives sufficient funding to continue its important work of protecting women through its Sister in Spirit initiative.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions.

The first petition has to do with MS patients. I have been asked to present this on behalf of any number of MS patients in my riding and the petition has been signed by individuals who support those MS patients.

The petitioners have said that there is some degree of urgency to this. I know for a fact that there is an urgency because I have witnessed constituents of mine having to travel in order to avail themselves of vascular scans and the resulting surgery. The

petitioners are asking that this be made available in Canada and that follow-up treatments for MS patients be made available in Canada.

One of the issues right now is that when MS patients return to Canada after having had to travel to other countries for the treatment, they are not eligible or invited to be part of any kind of program for follow-ups.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada, through the Minister of Health, to have a look at this.

●(1010)

CANADA POST

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is on behalf of the residents of Burgoynes Cove and surrounding area and it concerns the closing of the post office in Burgoynes Cove. According to the government, there is a moratorium on the closure of post offices in rural Canada but this says otherwise.

In fact, Canada Post put in place roadside mail boxes, which it said were to be a temporary measure. It also did a survey when many of the residents were either working or away. It was held in the middle of the summer, in July, when many were on vacation. There were some underhanded tactics employed to find a way to close down a rural post office, which is of vital importance, especially to seniors, or to anyone who needs to avail of a postal service.

The petitioners are asking the government to look at this issue and instruct Canada Post to reverse that decision.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by hundreds of Canadians who are concerned about the 55,000 to 75,000 Canadians who live with multiple sclerosis. The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to accelerate a greater and broader participation of multiple sclerosis sufferers in pilot testing and treatment and provide fast-track funding for surveillance, research and the dissemination of findings.

The petitioners also call upon the Government of Canada to work immediately with the provinces and territories through the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies to help obtain advice and evidence-based information for the effectiveness of CCSV1 without delay. They also want the federal government to take a leading role on the basis of this evidence and encourage a swift adoption of procedures in territories and provinces.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

PREVENTIVE WITHDRAWAL

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition signed by 576 petitioners from the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers; the Maison Simonne Monet-Chartrand in Chambly; Teamsters Quebec, local 1999; the Agriculture Union; CUPE of Dorval; the Royal Canada Mounted Police; and the Quebec City Integrated Proceeds of Crime. This fifth petition adds to the others already presented for a total of 5,230 signatures. These petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to develop an administrative agreement with the Government of Quebec giving all pregnant women in Quebec the right to access the preventive withdrawal program offered by Quebec's occupational health and safety commission.

[English]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Don Valley West and other parts of Toronto who are concerned about the animal transportation regulations.

The petitioners urge the House of Commons to amend the animal transfer regulations under Canada's Health of Animals Act to be consistent with findings of the EU scientific committee on animal health and welfare to reduce transport time for pigs, poultry, horses, calves and lambs to eight hours and twelve hours for cattle, sheep and goats, and to ensure adequate enforcement of these regulations.

The petitioners ask that these amendments be passed quickly.

AVIATION SAFETY

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of Canadians from across the country who are calling for a commission of inquiry into aviation safety.

The petitioners are concerned about the reduction in traditional oversight and inspection methods by Transport Canada and the delegation of those responsibilities to aviation companies via the safety management systems.

The petitioners are concerned as well that Canada may no longer be compliant with our obligations to the international aviation organization under the Chicago convention. They are worried that the travelling public may be in some danger as a result.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to initiate a commission of inquiry to be headed by a Superior Court judge.

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to bring forward the voices of the people of Thompson and Manitoba. Today I would like to present petitions on their behalf calling for the federal government to stand up for Canadians and Canadian jobs.

On November 17, Vale announced devastating news that it was planning to shut down the smelter and the refinery in Thompson. This announcement means the loss of over 600 jobs and a

devastating impact on the community, the northern region and our province of Manitoba.

The people of Thompson are saying that the federal government must stand up for them. Not only did the Conservative government allow the foreign takeover by Vale, it also gave the company a loan of \$1 billion just two months ago.

The people in Thompson and Manitoba are asking that the government stand up for Canadians rather than foreign companies. They are asking that the government work with all stakeholders to save the 600 jobs at the Thompson Vale smelter and refinery.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to table a petition today signed by hundreds of Canadians with respect to MS and CCSVI treatment, otherwise known as liberation therapy.

Across Canada 55,000 to 75,000 Canadians are living with MS. The disease frequently appears at a prime age when people are most economically active or when they are either starting or supporting a family.

The petitioners point out that the treatment that Dr. Paolo Zamboni has demonstrated of narrowing the major veins of the brain known as chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency can be detected by ultrasound and that this procedure is available in Canada.

The petitioners also point out that Canadians view MS as an issue of national importance and are aware of the major social, financial and medical impact of the failure to provide fundamental support, remedial diagnosis and crucial treatment.

The petitioners call upon the government to accelerate a greater and broader participation in pilot testing of MS sufferers. They are also asking that the government work immediately with the provinces and territories through the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in health. They are also asking the government to take a leading role on the basis of this evidence.

Many people who suffer from MS are very hopeful for this procedure and would like access to it. They do not want to be discriminated against because of their illness.

● (1015)

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by Canadians calling upon the government to end Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan.

In May 2008, Parliament passed a resolution to withdraw the Canadian Forces by July 2011. The Prime Minister, with the agreement of the Liberal Party, broke his oft-repeated promise to honour the parliamentary motion, and furthermore, refuses to put it to a parliamentary vote in the House.

Government Orders

Committing 1,000 soldiers to a training mission still presents a danger to our troops and an unnecessary expense when our country is faced with a \$56 billion deficit. The military mission has cost Canadians more than \$18 billion so far, money that could have been used to improve health care and seniors' pensions right here in Canada.

Polls show that a clear majority of Canadians do not want Canada's military presence to continue after the scheduled removal date of July 2011. Therefore, the petitioners call on the Prime Minister to honour the will of Parliament and bring the troops home now.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ENSURING SAFE VEHICLES IMPORTED FROM MEXICO FOR CANADIANS ACT

Hon. Diane Finley (for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities) moved that Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill S-5, which is an act that would amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999. This would actually allow used vehicles from Mexico that are less than 15 years old to be imported into Canada.

These amendments are very important because they would enable the Canadian government to meet our obligations, as a country, to the North American Free Trade Agreement and create greater choice in the Canadian vehicle market while maintaining the high safety and environmental standards that Canadians expect.

In order to facilitate the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement with respect to vehicles, the Motor Vehicle Safety Act had to be amended in 1993 to enable the Canadian government to establish a regime to regulate and monitor the importation of vehicles under the purview of the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement.

These changes actually resulted in the creation of the Registrar of Imported Vehicles. These changes to the act provided Canadians with more options in the vehicle market.

Following the implementation of the earlier Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed in 1992. The goal of the North American Free Trade

Agreement was, of course, to eliminate barriers to trade and investment between the United States, Canada and Mexico. The agreement came into effect January 1, 1994, which created one of the world's largest free trade zones in the world. That is correct and, in fact, it laid the foundations for strong economic growth and increased prosperity for Canada and Canadians as well as the United States and Mexico.

Since the agreement came into force, the North American Free Trade Agreement has demonstrated how free trade actually increases wealth and competitiveness, delivering real benefits to families, especially here in Canada, to workers, to manufacturers and to consumers who have more choice, more competition, lower prices and a better selection.

It is important to honour the commitments defined in this agreement, as well as to actually deliver on the commitments of the result of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

While this agreement was signed in 1992, the automotive provisions did not come into effect until January 1, 2009.

Now, as with the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement, importation of used Mexican vehicles would begin with older vehicles and gradually expand, over the next 10 years, to include all used vehicles.

Again, I would like to underscore that neither the North American Free Trade Agreement requirements nor the proposed amendments to the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 affect the importation of new vehicles built specifically to Canadian standards, nor used vehicles that are over 15 years of age and are, thus, not subject to those standards.

Similar to what occurred under the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, the existing importation provisions in the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act need to be updated to comply with NAFTA, which makes sense, and to comply with some of the more strenuous provisions in NAFTA to which we have agreed.

Changes to these acts are necessary in order to implement a regime for regulating and monitoring used vehicles originating from Mexico, since the coming into force date of the North American Free Trade Agreement automotive provisions has obviously just passed almost two years ago.

There is, as a result, a heightened need to amend these two acts so that Canada becomes compliant with its trade obligations and is not subjected to a potential challenge under the North American Free Trade Agreement, which obviously would not benefit our country, our consumers or, generally, Canadians, nor would it benefit United States consumers.

Therefore, I appreciate the co-operation of all members here and all parties to get this bill through.

Government Orders

I want to stress, however, that the government's commitment to the health and the safety of all Canadians would not be compromised at all by these changes. Road safety and the environment are, as members know, matters that the Government of Canada treats extremely seriously. Only vehicles that meet these very high standards we have set for motor vehicle safety and the environment would be allowed into the Canadian fleet.

•(1020)

The government is committed to the goal of making Canada's roads the safest in the world, which includes, by extension, the need to keep our vehicles safe. Our road safety program that emanates from the Motor Vehicle Safety Act is actually based on mandatory performance-based regulations and safety standards and an industry self-certification program to attest that those standards are being met.

We conduct research to enhance the level of safety provided by regulations and we conduct independent compliance testing to verify that the safety standards are, indeed, being met. We hold manufacturers to account in this country. The government's job is to do that, and we are making sure that Canadians remain safe on the roads.

Vehicle safety is, of course, a key component of road safety, as I mentioned. The physical attributes of a vehicle work in conjunction with road infrastructure and with user behaviour to create a systems approach to minimize the number of road collisions and their impact on our society. Nothing has gone further for road safety in this country in the last 30 or 40 years than Canada's economic action plan, our answer to the world economic decline. Rehabilitated roads and investments in new roads certainly keep people safer because of less congestion and less wear and tear, et cetera, on vehicles themselves.

I have met with Transport Canada several times, and I can assure everyone that it is researching and developing new safety standards almost on a daily basis. It is investigating these things. For example, the department itself carefully studied the safety potential of electronic stability control, which of course, has been the rage in the news over the last several years. It did this for all new light vehicles sold in Canada and conducted a cost versus benefit study.

Based on the results from our studies, a new Canada motor vehicle safety standard was proposed, which would require such a system be installed on prescribed vehicles with a gross vehicle weight of 4,536 kilograms or less and manufactured on or after September 1, 2011. This is a big step toward the safety of our vehicles.

For people who are interested, this proposal was published in the *Canada Gazette*, part I, in March 2009. Based on stakeholder submissions, a final regulation was published in the *Canada Gazette*, part II, in December 2009. The implementation of this Canadian safety standard will reduce the number of collisions in which the driver loses control of the vehicle.

Once fully implemented, it will save hundreds of lives. That is correct. It will save hundreds of lives and prevent thousands upon thousands of injuries to Canadians on a yearly basis. It is great news, indeed, for Canadians and this was done in conjunction with Transport Canada to make sure Canadians stay safe on our roadways.

Our national road safety plan, road safety vision 2010, encompasses a large number of road safety program areas. Specific targets developed by federal, provincial and territorial governments include decreases in the number of road users killed or seriously injured and an increase in the rate of seat belt use and proper use of child restraints. Of course, everyone knows what we are doing as far as child safety goes.

I am pleased to note that we have indeed achieved significant success in reducing death and injuries on Canadian roads. By 2007, the number of deaths from unbelted occupant fatalities was reduced by almost 15% and the number of road users killed in crashes on rural roads by more than 15% when compared with deaths during the 1996-2001 period. The 2008 deaths and serious injuries tolls were 18% and 22% lower, respectively. That is great news and speaks to the hard work that Transport Canada does.

Even as the road safety vision 2010 plan is nearing its conclusion, the government continues to support this initiative and its successor plan, called road safety strategy 2015, and will work with its partners to continue to improve the safety of Canadian roads.

This government is getting it done for Canadians, keeping Canadians and roadways safe and looking to the future in partnership with the specialties of Transport Canada, et cetera. We are getting the job done.

•(1025)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could give the House and Canadians an idea of how it comes about that we have to import these automobiles to fulfill our NAFTA obligations.

What other options were available to us in order to technically do it? Is there a shortage of used cars, or even vintage cars, in Canada that would justify this particular provision to meet NAFTA requirements?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, as the member is aware, we have had a free trade agreement with the United States and Mexico for some time.

As part of our obligation on the signing of that free trade agreement, it became necessary as of January 2009 to implement these laws to conform with our obligations under NAFTA.

Government Orders

I do want to make it clear, however, that notwithstanding this particular law and our implementation of the law itself, we are not in any way sacrificing the safety standards that we have on our roadways in Canada. In fact, under our current existing law and for it to continue, all imports of vehicles will be required to comply with the high safety standards that Canada expects from its car manufacturers. Indeed, we will not allow vehicles to be brought into the country that do not comply with those safety standards, even with this new law.

• (1030)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary if the government has any studies with respect to how many cars are projected to be imported.

We are starting out with cars that are 10 years old and older. To be honest, I do not really think there are going to be very many involved in this category. However the phase-in over the next few years, up to 2019, when one-year-old cars will be allowed in, may offer greater numbers of vehicles.

To that end, I would also like to ask whether or not the government has done any consulting with motor dealer organizations across the country to, at a minimum, at least inform them of and keep them updated up as to the implementation of this particular measure?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, the government always consults with stakeholders, whether it be the railway industry, shippers, car manufacturers or indeed re-sellers of vehicles. We do that on a continuous basis, because we are required to be good government and to provide full accountability and transparency.

I do share the member's belief that there will be a very limited number of cars that will be eligible to come in. Obviously Mexico's safety standards are different from Canadian safety standards, so it would be somewhat onerous to bring the vehicles up to the standard required in Canada. This may require different brake systems, daytime running lights, et cetera. These are quite onerous because we want to make sure that all vehicles that come into Canada are safe.

I also want to wish that member and all members of this House a merry Christmas and God bless. This is probably my last opportunity to do that, so I would like to do that right now.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to rise on behalf of the Liberal Party to debate Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999.

The purpose of Bill S-5 is to amend these two statutes to allow for the importation of certain used vehicles from Mexico with certain conditions applied.

The amendments are required in order to bring Canada into compliance with its international trade obligations under NAFTA.

Bill S-5 was introduced in the other place on April 14, 2010, and successfully passed third reading on June 8. Simply put, Bill S-5 would bring Canada into compliance with our NAFTA obligations regarding the importation of used cars from Mexico.

Although NAFTA was signed approximately two decades ago several provisions were delayed by up to 20 years in some cases. This is one such provision, a provision that only came into force last year.

When NAFTA was signed Canada reserved the right to maintain all of our restrictions on used vehicles until January 1, 2009. Since then we have embarked on a 10-year process to phase out all of Canada's restrictions.

Currently when used vehicles are imported into Canada from the United States they do not have to meet our environmental and safety standards as they cross the border. However, the owner must commit to ensuring that before he or she registers and licenses the vehicle the necessary repairs and upgrades are made so that the vehicle will be compliant, as we would all expect them to ensure compliance with our safety and environmental regulations.

I would argue that this is a very straightforward concept. What is odd is that the same permission is not granted to vehicles being imported from Mexico, despite the fact that Mexico is a NAFTA partner. It is this very incongruity that Bill S-5 attempts to rectify.

The bill deals specifically with two sets of regulations: Canada's vehicle safety regulations and Canada's environmental regulations. Both sets of rules are critical for the safe and clean operation of motor vehicles in Canada.

Used vehicles imported into Canada from any location absolutely must meet both our safety and environmental regulations. I do not think anyone in the House will oppose that concept. However, it does make sense for us to allow the importers of these used vehicles to bring them into Canada for the upgrades necessary to bring them up to our standards.

We want compliance with our environmental and our safety regulations. How that happens can either benefit certain people in Canada in terms of additional work and additional jobs for our auto mechanics, for example, or we could insist that that happens elsewhere and deny Canadian auto mechanics the ability to have access to this additional work.

I will stress, our concern is the safety of Canadians and the compliance with our environmental regulations. As long as that is done and as long as these cars are compliant or made compliant before they are registered and licensed, then that is a good thing for Canada. We would then argue for allowing them to come into the country first so that Canadian auto mechanics and Canadians have the opportunity for that work. Indeed, allowing this law to continue to prevent the work from being done in Canada only punishes those auto mechanics and other people who might benefit from that work. The only question I have is why it took the government so long to introduce these measures.

A similar story, these NAFTA exemptions were set to expire in 2009. Here we are at the end of 2010. We are on the verge of 2011 and we are only finally getting to this issue. The delay cannot be attributed to the opposition, as the government so often likes to do. Bill S-5 was only introduced in the Senate on April 14, 2010. It moved quickly through the other place, passing on June 8.

Government Orders

It is ultimately most important in the context of the bill that Canada live up to its NAFTA commitments. Bill S-5 will not weaken our environmental or safety laws. The health and safety of Canadians will not be compromised. Indeed, the benefits of Bill S-5 include allowing Canadian auto mechanics and others to benefit from this work. It is for these reasons that we support Bill S-5 and encourage its rapid passage.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill S-5. It is rare for us to say such a thing about a bill. Given its importance, we want to say that we are having a hard time understanding why the government took so long to introduce this bill, which has delayed the implementation of some provisions of NAFTA.

The purpose of this bill is to ensure that used vehicles from Mexico can now be among those imported to Canada. There was already an agreement in place for vehicles from the United States. Under NAFTA, used vehicles from Mexico must also be eligible for importation. This is important since we know that the Mexicans react a certain way.

I am drawing a parallel with the fact that we are requiring Mexican workers to have visas, particularly when they come to work in Quebec in the summer. Parliamentarians and former parliamentarians of Canada are being turned away at the Mexican border in retaliation. Mexico is taking a fairly tough stance. Its position is understandable since it does not believe that Mexican workers should have to have visas. However, a number of parliamentarians are leaving soon for Mexico and they may run into problems. Last year, former Liberal minister Hélène Scherrer was turned away at the Mexican border as retaliation by the Mexicans, who were applying the same rule.

It is important to fix that situation, especially since it is still only a small problem. Vehicles coming from Mexico may be in good shape. The climate in Mexico is obviously very different from Quebec and Canada. So used vehicles may be in very good shape. This could mean good deals for people here, as long as automobile regulations and Canada's safety regulations are respected, obviously. There probably are not a lot of them, but we do not want to import clunkers that will endanger those driving them and those sharing the roads with these vehicles. Safety and environmental standards must be met.

Will these vehicles be well equipped to deal with the rigorous winters in Quebec and Canada? Will their heating systems be good enough to defog the windows and defrost them in really cold weather? It is important to ask and address these questions before the vehicles get here.

As I said before, this could quite possibly lead to good deals for people here, and that is why we are supporting this bill, as long as the standards are respected.

From a more technical aspect, the primary purpose of Bill S-5 is to upgrade and comply with a NAFTA provision that is being phased in. But, as I said earlier, we are already two years behind because it

should have been implemented on January 1, 2009. It is almost January 1, 2011. That is a delay of nearly two years.

• (1040)

Until very recently, Appendix 300-A.1 of NAFTA allowed Canada to prohibit imports of used Mexican cars. However, this restriction will be phased out, as the wording in the fourth paragraph of the appendix indicates.

According to the wording, Canada must allow imports of used vehicles from Mexico that are at least 10 years old beginning January 1, 2009. Then Canada has to allow imports of newer vehicles—those that are at least eight years old beginning January 1, 2011, then at least six years old beginning January 1, 2013, and so on until all used vehicles are allowed as of January 1, 2019.

Bill S-5 amends the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, which both govern the use and importation of used vehicles from the United States, but not from Mexico, which is why there is some confusion between Canada and the United States, and Canada and Mexico.

In the amendments, Mexican cars have been added and described as “prescribed vehicles”, since the phasing in of the NAFTA appendix allows Canada to regulate this import by restricting the age of the cars imported. In all cases, the used American or Mexican cars will have to comply with the requirements set by Canada. This is what I was emphasizing earlier. It is important to ensure that safety standards are respected, as well as standards regarding emissions and overall state of repair. We do not want any old clunkers; there are already too many on the road.

Failure to comply with NAFTA could result in economic retaliation by Mexico and therefore it is preferable that we conform to NAFTA quickly. That is why the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of Bill S-5.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone in my riding of Saint-Maurice—Champlain all the best of the season.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his comments on this bill.

I do not believe that the government representative actually answered my question earlier because I was asking him for the studies and background information that the government would have, and we know the government has it. Any issues dealing with trade and free trade, the government examines in minute detail. It has studies on this and it will know exactly how many cars are projected to be coming into Canada under this program.

My guess is that because we are starting with vehicles that are 10 years and older to begin with, we are going to see very few, if any, but as the years go by toward 2019, newer and newer cars will be allowed in and that in fact may become an issue at that point, so it is incumbent upon the government to give us the studies that it has on this issue.

Government Orders

We want to make certain that it has talked to the motor dealers associations across the country. We have no guarantees that it has done that. My guess is that it has not done that at all at this point.

• (1045)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, if I have understood correctly, I am being asked to answer a question that the parliamentary secretary was unable to answer.

I completely agree with the member. If the Department of Transport—the government—has research data on the approximate number of used Mexican vehicles that will enter Canada in the future, it should provide them to us. We would then be in a position to inform parliamentarians and the general public, as well as all those who are affected—car dealerships, car resellers and mechanics—so they would be prepared for the arrival of these vehicles even though, right now, very few of these vehicles will be entering the market.

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask questions of my Bloc friend, who used to sit on the same committee with me in finance. I appreciate their comments on today's bill regarding changes to the Motor Vehicle Safety Act.

Based on the last question, there have been issues about Mexico. I want to just clarify what the Bloc's position is, based on the previous answer. There will be more stringent requirements put in place on vehicles from Mexico. What is the Bloc's position as we are dealing with that during our negotiations on other trade agreements with Mexico?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, I find it difficult to understand why the member is asking this question when we are currently talking about the importing of used vehicles from Mexico.

The purpose of this bill is to have Canada, which signed the NAFTA documents, comply with the provision that allows used vehicles to be imported into Canada from Mexico. I believe that we are not necessarily talking about other free trade agreements today, or about anything else in agreements with Mexico, but we are always very open to discussion. I thank the member who asked the question.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate.

Pursuant to an order made Wednesday, December 15, 2010, Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 is deemed read a third time and passed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

• (1050)

DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION ACT

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC) moved that Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to open the second reading debate on Bill C-12, the democratic representation act.

[Translation]

Our government is committed to restoring fairer representation for faster-growing provinces. We made this a throne speech commitment because we believe that to the greatest extent possible, each Canadian's vote should carry equal weight.

[English]

Bill C-12 will do this by restoring the democratic principle of representation by population in the House of Commons. Representation of the provinces in the House is readjusted every 10 years using a formula in our Constitution. At Confederation, representation by population, or as some say, "rep by pop", was the basis for the seat distribution.

The formula has been amended a number of times since Confederation to respond to demographic changes as our country has grown and evolved. Bill C-12 is the next step in that process. It makes key improvements to the existing formula, which has caused faster growing provinces to become under-represented in the House.

So members can fully understand the importance of this legislation, I will describe how the current formula works and how it adversely impacts democratic representation. I will then outline the positive effects of Bill C-12 in moving the House of Commons closer to representation by population, while protecting the representation of smaller and slower growing provinces. I hope that by the end of my remarks opposition members will agree that Bill C-12 is needed to ensure that all provinces are fairly represented in this place.

[Translation]

The existing constitutional formula for readjusting House seats was passed in the Representation Act, 1985.

[English]

The 1985 formula was designed in the context of a seriously flawed formula enacted in 1974. That old formula would have resulted in extremely large numbers of additional seats following the 1981 census. As a result, the formula we now have in our Constitution was deliberately designed to limit the growth of the House of Commons. While this goal was reasonable in theory, in reality it has penalized faster growing provinces. Let me explain.

As a first step, the 1985 Parliament divides the population of the provinces by 279, which was the number of provincial seats in the House at that time.

[Translation]

Then, the population of each province is divided by that quotient to determine the number of seats for each province.

[English]

As a second step, two constitutional seat guarantees provided a top-up for some provinces. The Senate floor, passed in 1915, guarantees that each province will have at least as many seats in the House as it has in the Senate. This protects, for example, P.E.I.'s four seats. Then there is the grandfather clause, which guarantees each province, at a minimum, the number of seats it had as of 1985.

Taken together, the effects of these two seat floors are significant. First, it means that all provinces, except Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, rely on seat floors rather than population to maintain their seat count in the House.

Second, the formula allows the three faster-growing provinces to get a proportional share of only 279 seats, even though the House has expanded to 305 provincial seats since the 1980s. Of course, there are three additional seats for the territories.

Third, the extra four seats for slower-growing provinces, which are not based on population, further erode the relative representation of the faster-growing provinces.

As a result, the three faster-growing provinces have become significantly under-represented in the House. For example, in the last readjustment, Ontario received only 34.8% of the provincial seats while its share of the provincial population was well over 38%.

• (1055)

[Translation]

This is not just a symbolic problem. It has a real impact on MPs and the people they represent.

[English]

Based on the 2006 census, MPs from Ontario, B.C. and Alberta represent, on average, 26,000 more constituents than MPs from other provinces.

As well, because faster growing provinces are prevented from getting a fair number of seats based on population, there are fewer seats to distribute within those provinces. This creates major differences in riding populations when electoral boundaries are drawn.

For example, the member for Brampton West represents over 170,000 constituents based on the 2006 census, whereas the member for Kenora represents about 64,000.

The difference in riding populations between provinces is also significant. For example, the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster represents about 71,000 constituents. Next door, the Alberta MP for Vegreville—Wainwright has more than 111,000 constituents.

These effects on Canada's democratic representation will only get worse if the current formula is not changed.

The Lortie commission on electoral democracy recognized this in 1992, when it stated on page 129 of volume one of its final report:

The Representation Act, 1985 substantially modified the principle of proportionate representation to an extent never before experienced

The report goes on to say, on page 131:

Government Orders

In short, the formula errs in two ways: it fails to give sufficient weight to the constitutional principle of proportionate representation; and its restriction on increases in the number of Commons seats, which works to penalize the provinces experiencing population growth, is not related to any principle of representation.

That is why the government has introduced Bill C-12, to restore the principle of democratic representation in this place.

The democratic representation act would amend the constitutional formula for readjusting seats to bring fair representation to the House, while maintaining the seat counts of slower growing provinces.

First, the bill would remove the artificial ceiling of 279 in the current formula that penalizes Ontario, B.C. and Alberta.

In the next readjustment, after the 2011 census, seats in the House will instead be based on a maximum average riding population of 108,000, which was approximately the average riding size in Canada during the last election.

In other words, seats will be determined by dividing a province's population by 108,000 and rounding up any remainder. This ensures that the average riding population in any province is no greater than 108,000 people.

Compared to the current formula, this means faster growing provinces will receive more seats because of the rise in their population. The exact number of seats cannot be known until after the 2011 census is completed, but under the principles of this bill, the representation of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta will be much closer to representation by population.

• (1100)

[Translation]

It is important I mention another aspect of Bill C-12. This bill protects the constitutional seat guarantees.

[English]

This means no province will lose seats, even though its population may be in relative decline. It also means all provinces except Ontario, B.C. and Alberta will continue to receive extra seats to maintain their current seat counts.

Obviously, if a slower growing province has a sufficient population increase in the future, it could receive additional seats beyond those guaranteed by the seat floors. But in the meantime, the seat floors will continue to ensure that average riding populations in these provinces are lower than in faster growing provinces.

[Translation]

Another major feature of Bill C-12 is that seat counts in subsequent readjustments will increase on a principled basis.

Government Orders

[English]

The maximum average riding population, which will initially be set at 108,000, increases each subsequent readjustment based on the rate of growth in all the provinces. To take an example, the population of all the provinces is projected to grow from more than 34 million in 2011 to over 38 million in 2021. The percentage increase in population would be applied to 108,000 to create a new maximum average population of about 120,000 for the readjustment following 2021 census.

Based on this, only a limited number of new seats would be added to the House for those provinces that have grown faster than the national average.

In contrast, the current formula, which penalizes population growth, Bill C-12 recognizes and reflects it in the House. At the same time, overall growth in the House will be moderated in the future.

Our government is committed to giving fair representation to faster-growing provinces. That is why we have introduced this bill. I believe the opposition can agree with me that some basic principles of fair democratic representation are advanced under Bill C-12.

First, the representation of the elected assembly should be based on population as much as possible. This means that the representation should reflect the population growth and demographic realities of our country. Bill C-12 would strengthen this principle by ensuring that faster-growing provinces receive fair representation in this House.

Second, as a democratic society, we should strive as much as possible for the ideal of one person, one vote. This means that average riding populations should not unduly vary in size from one province to another.

Bill C-12 would significantly reduce the average riding population for faster-growing provinces. In the next readjustment, Ontario, B.C. and Alberta would have average riding populations of less than 108,000 people, compared to more than 120,000 constituents under the current formula. The imbalance that exists under the current formula led the Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation to call Canada one of the worst violators of the principle of one person, one vote among the federations of the world.

A third basic principle of democratic representation is that smaller provinces may need better representation to ensure their opinions and concerns are heard. Bill C-12 would protect the seat counts of all provinces, guaranteeing that slower-growing provinces will not lose any seats.

I would like to make it clear that there are no extra seats being given to faster-growing provinces under Bill C-12. Unlike every other province, Ontario, B.C. and Alberta will receive seats based on their population alone.

It may be tempting for critics to argue that the increase in seats for faster-growing provinces impacts the relative representation of other provinces. I believe this argument is based on a false premise. In fact, it is the other seven provinces that receive more seats than their populations merit, thanks to constitutional seat guarantees.

There is good reason for this, including historic compromises and the recognition of slower-growing and particular smaller provinces need enhanced representation to protect their voices in this place. However, it is these extra four seats that also impact the relative representation of other provinces and prevent strict representation by population in the House.

●(1105)

[Translation]

At its core, representation in this House is a delicate balance between competing democratic principles.

[English]

Bill C-12 strikes a balance that I believe on which all Canadians, no matter where they live, can agree. I urge the opposition parties to support the bill so we can restore representation by population in the House.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member, but I would like to make a few comments first.

The foundation of our democracy is the principle of one person, one vote. All Canadians should expect to have fair, effective representation regardless of where they live.

In Ontario, our vote is worth less than half, in some instances, of other less populated provinces. In my riding of Mississauga—Streetsville there are 130,000 constituents, about 90,000 voters. In rural and less populated provinces there is fewer than half of that in each of those ridings.

We need fairness, transparency and a government that is willing to act to address this issue.

The bill was introduced on April 1. We thought perhaps it was some sort of April Fool's joke. It has gone nowhere in eight months on the order paper since then. Instead, the government leaked to the press that there was a deal among parties that it not proceed. That is just a bald-faced lie. It is a complete utter inaccuracy to justify its inaction.

Why does the government wait eight months to return to this very important issue? Why discriminate against provinces like Ontario?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, we live in a democracy and people are free to say what they will. I will not go down to the level of the member's question other than to answer the most important point.

The member mentioned that her riding has 130,000 people. The average riding in Prince Edward Island is 35,000. That is a discrepancy, but the bill provides a proactive method of bringing down the average number.

Government Orders

We are trying to be democratic here and members from the opposite side are interfering in the democratic discussion with their heckling. Why can we not just have a civil conversation here?

The 108,000 for Ontario is a compromise that will benefit the member's riding. Why does the Liberal Party not stand and support the bill to get it through all the levels of the parliamentary process? The Liberal Party and the coalition have delayed the debate on this issue.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the last question and, more important, the last response.

I do not quite get how the opposition has delayed this when the government has control over when government bills are called. It is a very valid question. Given the importance to our democracy and given the importance to Canadians in our fastest growing population provinces, why did it take so long for the bill to come back to the House?

Having brought it back, why are we not at least getting it to a second reading debate so when we return, it is in committee and we can roll up our sleeves and get to work?

• (1110)

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, again, the government has brought forward a bill that will accurately, as much as possible, bring one member, one vote, for representation by population.

What is astounding about the member's comments is the opposition coalition has delayed legislation in this place on the economy, public safety issues and immigration. Now it is complaining that there has been some sort of delay in bringing forward this important bill. In fact, if it were a little more responsible on the other bills, there would have been House time to deal with it.

If the opposition is really keen, why do the opposition parties not agree to have this bill passed with unanimous consent? We could do it right now.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to commend the minister for tabling the bill. The Liberal Party did not think about it for 13 years. However, this proves that, once again, the media was wrong in speculating that there was a conspiracy to kill this bill.

However, will the bill have a future review clause or a future readjustment clause?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, the bill has been presented. It is a fair bill. It would allow faster-growing provinces that are currently underrepresented in the House to be fairly represented. It would be helpful if the opposition parties would indicate that they would pass the bill in its current form. However, they refuse to do that. Therefore, it makes it difficult for me to answer the question because there is a committee process.

However, again, if the opposition parties wish, I am sure we could get this side of the House to agree to pass the bill at all stages, but the opposition parties are preventing the fast passage of it.

I do not understand what the opposition parties have against democracy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very specific question for the minister, just to make sure I understood him correctly. He said that the number of seats in Quebec will be based on the population of Quebec according to the 2011 census divided by 108,000, but will not be less than the current number, which is 75. Did I understand correctly the purpose and methodology for establishing the number of seats?

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, the seat count in all provinces would be protected. If the average population of Quebec is divided by the 108,000 divisor and that number results in seats over 75, Quebec would receive those seats. If it is below, Quebec would be guaranteed the 75 seats. That is true for all provinces. This principle is key in the bill.

I am not sure what the member is suggesting. I understand the Bloc has some concerns, as it always does, on these types of things. However, if the Bloc had its way, there would be zero seats in the House for Quebec.

• (1115)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer is still not sufficient. The question was why it took so long to come back to the House. To give an argument that other bills have been held up does not work. The government has the right to do extended hours in the last part of a sitting. It did not do that.

To roll in here now and say that it wants unanimous consent to move all stages of the bill is as irresponsible as the government not bringing the bill in, in a timely way.

Why did the minister not bring in the bill in a way that we could have passed second reading and got it to committee?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I will give an example of how the opposition parties delay legislation.

On our other representation bill, the NDP brought forward an amendment to kill our term limit legislation on the Senate. That will take time to debate in the House. However, once that amendment is defeated, the NDP will support our term limit bill in the Senate. Therefore, the hypocrisy lies with the opposition parties and the opposition-led coalition with the Liberals, the separatists and the socialists.

This government is moving forward as fast as possible under very difficult circumstances with these obstructionist opposition members.

Government Orders

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we too as a party are grateful that this has finally come to the House, since it was tabled on April 1. It seems to have been the embarrassment of the civic literacy which arose during the recent by-election where the Toronto riding of Vaughan had 120,864 voters while Winnipeg North had only 51,198. Even children in the grade 5 classrooms in my riding ask why votes in St. Paul's count half as much as those in other ridings across this country. It is disappointing. The government had an opportunity to do something about this. In census after census it has become clear that Ontario, B.C. and Alberta have way fewer seats than they are entitled to. This needs to be fixed and it is hoped that as soon as we have the results of the 2011 census we can get this fixed once and for all.

After the by-elections the government was embarrassed and chose to leak to the media that there was some deal between all the opposition parties to kill the bill instead of doing the right thing and bringing it to the House. As the hon. member from the NDP said, it is impossible for the opposition parties to be accused of stalling when a bill has not even come to the House. That anyone would think that this is merely about arithmetic, that any bill that comes before the House is perfect and does not deserve a proper analysis in committee is truly undemocratic.

Our country will never have a perfect rep by pop system. There are too many differences. The Supreme Court has already decided that the territories have such a big land mass that even though there are fewer people there, they need their own representative per territory.

Because of the Constitution, P.E.I. will always have the same number of seats as it does senators. That will always be the case. That is the floor. In 1985 there was the understanding that no province would ever receive less seats than it had at that floor. Year after year with each census we have been redistributing the ridings within a province as best we can. This bill is the only way we can go forward to get more seats for the provinces like Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, but it is hugely important that we get this right.

The government has refused to deal with the provinces at all. There are no first ministers meetings. There are no conversations. This is not something that one can do by fiat. Ever since I have been here, there has been this idea that governments think they can bring a bill to Parliament as though it were a perfectly baked cake, instead of allowing the good work of committees and witness testimony to proceed. We enhance our democracy by allowing parliamentarians and witnesses to participate at committee. In this case because the government has refused to consult the provinces, we are going to have to hear from the provinces and territories at committee.

Our democracy is founded on the principle of one person, one vote. Canadians expect that they will have fair, effective representation regardless of where they live. Any redistribution of seats must incorporate these ideas.

We believe that any proposal for redistribution must be thoroughly considered in a serious and civil committee setting. This ought not to be an opportunity for political games and one-upmanship. This is about fairness and transparency, but we know that whatever we come up with, there will still be some ridings with a lesser proportion than others, no matter what happens.

Therefore, we need to have a civil conversation to figure out what is the level of compromise, what Canadians would see as fair. At the moment it is worrying because a number of provinces have expressed concerns about their projected level of representation under this proposed redistribution.

● (1120)

This bill fails to provide fair representation for Quebec. This has to be fixed. Using this formula, Quebec will be farther away from rep by pop than it is at the present time. We believe that no province should end up farther away from rep by pop, or less representative, as a result of this bill. Therefore, the bill needs to go to committee to be properly and thoroughly studied.

Yet again, the Prime Minister has failed to properly consult with Canadians. It is completely undemocratic in terms of this proposal that even their elected representatives would not have a chance to study the bill properly. This is extraordinarily important in terms of trying to make our country and its representative democracy more fair. It is ridiculous to think that this is just a lesson in arithmetic and that the government already has the right formula and crib notes.

Liberals will work in committee to ensure the fair representation of all Canadians in the House of Commons as we move forward. I believe it is going to make sure that this is hypothetical, because the results of a census may mean that we would want to adjust the formula, or at least make allowances for less populated provinces, to ensure they have fair representation after this bill passes.

It is hugely important that even though the principle of proportional representation of the provinces is entrenched in section 42(1)(a) of the Constitution, representation by population has never been the sole criteria when distributing seats in the House of Commons. Canada was created through a federation of provinces with the assumption that each would have fair, if not equal, weight. This has led to the basic unit of calculating seats as a province rather than a straight calculation based on population.

In the reference of the Supreme Court on the provincial electoral boundaries of Saskatchewan, the court commented on the issue of the relative parity of voter power and analogous issues of riding boundaries. Relative parity of voting power is a prime condition of effective representation. Deviations from absolute voter parity, however, may be justified on the grounds of practical impossibility or the provision of more effective representation.

Factors such as geography, community, history, community interests and minority representations may need to be taken into account to ensure that our legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of our social mosaic beyond this delusion that one citizen's vote as compared with another's should not be countenanced.

Government Orders

Ontario currently has 38.8% of the national population and holds 34.4% of the seats. Alberta has 10.9% of the population and 9.1% of the seats. B.C. has 13.23% of the population and 11.7% of the seats. Quebec currently has 23.2% of the population and 24.35% of the seats, but if the new formula is passed, it will have 22.2% of the seats in the House, which is actually below its proportion of the Canadian population, according to Statistics Canada's 2010 population estimates.

It should also be noted that the legislation sets out a formula for how to determine seat distribution based on population and does not distribute a specific number of seats to provinces. The number of seats currently being used by the government to explain the bill is an estimate of seats based on population projections, and we will not know the actual number of seats these provinces will be allocated until the 2011 census is actually completed.

The existing formula has the two floors, the Senate floor and the grandfathered floor from 1985, and also the decision that each territory will have a seat. We believe that with the effect of the new proposal, there are still some problems that need to be worked out in committee.

● (1125)

We need all Canadians to feel that this was properly studied and that when this bill passes, every single Canadian will understand the reasons for the decisions taken and that it was as fair as it could possibly have been because of the due diligence and proper scrutiny of parliamentarians having heard from witnesses.

It is imperative that this bill go to committee to be properly studied, to bring forward the proper witnesses from Atlantic Canada, for example, Donald Savoie, and other people. The Supreme Court ruling talked about the idea of our social mosaic and how that too is important in any deliberation on allocating seats. We regret that this bill did not come forward in the spring. We regret that we have not received the respect that parliamentarians should be receiving to represent not only their constituents but the future of Canada in all deliberations with respect to a bill as important as this one.

To suggest that we could rush this bill through because the government sat on it since last April is truly disingenuous, ridiculous and undemocratic. I call upon the minister responsible for supposed democratic reform, a member of the Conservative Party, to realize that this proposal flies in the face of anything those of us committed to democratic renewal in this country are trying to do.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy of the member's statement is quite interesting. When I was responding to the member's questions, members of her own party were heckling. So much for civil debate. It would only be worse in committee, I would imagine, based on the other party's record.

Having said that, we want to move forward with this bill. It is based on representation by population. It is a very simple formula. The provinces support it. Ontario, Alberta and B.C. certainly support it. It is a formula that is fair and easily understood and one which provides provinces the seats. How those seats are distributed within the provinces is up to a non-partisan committee under the electoral boundaries act. That is quite separate. All we are trying to do is to determine the number of seats per province.

The member suggests that people are not aware and that there is some sort of delay tactic. She has only to look at her own party's record during the 13 years it was government. What was basically suggested by the member was a filibuster in committee. Will the Liberal Party filibuster when this bill goes to committee? That is sure what it sounded like.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, our party certainly does not need to listen to the minister on the issue of filibuster or dirty tricks in committee. Our party will do what Canadians expect it to do, which is to study this bill properly and make sure it is the best possible assessment of this terrible inequity that has been allowed to fester for some time, such that Ontario, Alberta and B.C. have been seriously underrepresented.

We want the bill to go to committee. We do not believe that we should take the minister's word for which provinces are in favour or not. It is about the citizens of the provinces having a proper understanding of this so that when we come out with the bill in its final form, all Canadians will feel that this was fairly looked at and that this is the right recipe to fix the unfairness that has continued under the Conservatives' watch.

● (1130)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, much of what the hon. member for St. Paul's said we in the NDP agree with, with a couple of important exceptions.

The member mentioned that if this law passes in its current framework, it would effectively give the province of Quebec less-weighted seats than it has right now. We in the NDP have taken a position that the figure of 24.35% should be frozen and locked in out of respect for the motion that we passed recognizing the Québécois as a nation within a united Canada.

Given that that is our position and we intend to move that amendment in committee, will the hon. member be supporting that amendment to give fairness to Quebec? If not, what alternative do the Liberals have to put forward that would ensure that Quebec is not losing what a lot of us believe it ought to be maintaining?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, there may well be a number of proposals that could come forward at committee to ensure that no province, particularly Quebec, goes further away from proper representation than the representation it has now. It is imperative that all members of Parliament understand how important this kind of fairness would be and that the bill would take a province that was at approximately plus 1% in terms of proportional representation by population to minus 1% in representation by population. For the Liberal Party of Canada that is unacceptable.

Government Orders

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest and, I must admit, a little bit of amusement to the member when she made some of her points. She was grumbling about an eight month delay on this side of the House in introducing the bill. She also mentioned that she goes to grade five classes and talks about government and that the students ask her why there is such an imbalance.

What was the answer the member gave those grade five classes when her party was in government? The Liberals had 13 years to address this. This discrepancy in riding size did not occur in the last eight months. It occurred over a long period of time and they had a long time to address it. I am wondering what the member's answer was to the grade five classes because right now those grade five classes are all voting members of the Canadian public.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I believe this disparity has gone on too long. The government of the day had a bill that it tabled in 2007 and then pulled back because it was too nervous. We actually want to get on with this and it should have come to the House in the spring.

The minister had every understanding that all parties wanted it to go to committee but here we are at practically Christmas eve and now the Conservatives want to jam it through. That is where the lack of democracy and the lack of respect for government, for Parliament, for parliamentarians and the good work that we can do to make the bill as good as it can be, instead of this absolute abdication of responsibilities since April 1 and now expecting us to ram it through right now. We will not do that.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased to take part in this debate because that way, I, like my colleagues, am fulfilling the mission for which Quebecers sent us to the House, which is to defend unconditionally the interests of the Quebec nation.

I would like to begin by saying that Bill C-12 on “democratic representation” is a direct attack on the Quebec nation. I am here to say that the Bloc Québécois, as we have been saying for months, will oppose this bill and do everything in its power to prevent the bill from passing. We currently have a minority government, and an election could be called in the next few weeks or the next few months. Our goal is to make this proposed marginalization of the Quebec nation a key issue in Quebec during the next election.

On November 22, 2006, the Conservative government moved a motion recognizing the existence of the Quebec nation. As a nation, we did not need this recognition to exist, but it was nonetheless interesting to see that almost all the parliamentarians in the House recognized the existence of this nation; that was a first. The government should have followed through on this recognition, should have walked the walk by introducing a series of measures.

Naturally, Bill C-12 does not walk the walk when it comes to recognizing the Quebec nation. On the contrary, this bill denies the existence of this nation and marginalizes its representation in federal institutions here, in the House of Commons.

The proportion of the population cannot be the only factor in determining the representation of each of the regions of Canada. If that were the case, Prince Edward Island, which currently has four members of Parliament, would certainly not have as many. Prince Edward Island has approximately the same number of people as a Montreal borough, which generally does not even have one member of Parliament. We understand that, and it is absolutely fine.

We have the same thing with the Îles de la Madeleine in the Quebec National Assembly. We understand that no democratic institution, including the House of Commons, can be an exact mathematical representation of the proportion of the population. This means that an important factor in the debate right now should be that the recognition of the Quebec nation must give it the political weight it requires in federal institutions to ensure that its voice be heard.

Unfortunately, Bill C-12 does the complete opposite. This was mentioned earlier by an NDP member. He said that with Bill C-12, the proportion of members from Quebec in the House will be less than its demographic weight. We believe that Quebec should always have at least 25% of the seats, as was the case at the time of the Charlottetown accords. We should all agree on that. My colleagues know that we are far from agreeing on that.

In Quebec, there is strong, virtually unanimous, opposition to Bill C-12. The Quebec National Assembly has, on several occasions, taken the stance that this bill should be withdrawn. Previously, before the September 2008 election, Bill C-56 gave 26 additional seats to the Canadian nation.

As of the moment the House of Commons acknowledged the existence of the Quebec nation, there have been at least two nations within the Canadian political landscape. In fact, there are more if you consider the first nations, but that is a separate acknowledgement or another way to handle nation-to-nation relationships. In this case, the Canadian political landscape is made up of two major nations: the Canadian nation and the Quebec nation. Bill C-56 would have given the Canadian nation an additional 26 seats, and we were opposed to that. We now have even more reason to object to Bill C-12, which would give it 30 seats.

• (1140)

It should also be mentioned that the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party did not act on Quebec's concerns about Bill C-56. What is worse, Bill C-12 is, in some ways, more reprehensible than Bill C-56. It is clear that this bill is about winning Canadian and Conservative votes. Not only did they not try to find a compromise and a balance to ensure that the Quebec nation is heard in federal institutions, but they introduced a bill that gives more to Ontario, at the expense of the Quebec nation, to ensure that they have more support in the next election in order to perhaps, eventually, win a majority government.

Government Orders

Bill C-12 is even more reprehensible because it adds four seats, which is a slap in the face to the Government of Quebec and the National Assembly after all the submissions they made. I want to remind this House that the 47 Bloc Québécois members and the 125 members of the National Assembly of Quebec are opposed to Bill C-12. That makes 172 out of 200 elected representatives in Quebec who are opposed to this bill, just as they were opposed to Bill C-56. More than 85% of MNAs and MPs from Quebec are opposed to this bill.

Canada should listen to the elected representatives of the Quebec nation and withdraw this bill. In addition, it should keep the proportion of MPs from Quebec at 25%. If the political will is there, formulas will always ensure that the democratic representation in the House reflects Canada's demographic reality, just as it does Quebec's demographic reality. There are other criteria that must be considered, because representation cannot be based on population alone. We can agree on formulas.

For example, if we increase the number of representatives from Canada in the House, we also have to increase the number of representatives from Quebec to keep the proportion at 25%. Quebec would be quite open to this solution, which might make it possible to reflect the demographic realities of faster-growing provinces in western Canada, such as British Columbia and Alberta.

We could also base our approach on what is done in the National Assembly of Quebec, where there are 125 seats and the chief electoral officer of Quebec regularly makes changes to reflect population movements. These are not easy debates. In this case, they take place in Quebec. Sometimes, some regions gain ridings while other regions lose them. But the National Assembly still keeps 125 seats. We could come up with a different breakdown of the current 308 seats in the House, while reserving 25% or so for members from Quebec.

It is not that we do not wish to allow Canada to change its representation to reflect the changing Canadian reality, but rather that this cannot be done at the expense of the interests of the Quebec nation. Benoît Pelletier expressed this very idea, on May 17, 2007, with regard to Bill C-56 which, I will remind members, was the forerunner of Bill C-12, although the latter is even more reprehensible because four more seats are involved. I will thus read what he said when he was intergovernmental affairs minister in the Government of Quebec.

I appreciate that the House is based on proportional representation. But I wonder whether there might be special measures to protect Quebec, which represents the main linguistic minority in Canada, is a founding province of Canada and is losing demographic weight. Why could Quebec not be accommodated because of its status as a nation and a national minority within Canada?

It should be noted that Benoît Pelletier is not a sovereigntist but a federalist. He clearly understood the essence of a true confederation.

• (1145)

I would also like to remind members that in 1840, when the United Province of Canada was founded, the population of Lower Canada was much larger than that of Upper Canada. At that time, there was more talk about the French-Canadian nation than about the Quebec nation. The political leaders of the French-Canadian nation made the argument with French Canadians, with the population of

Lower Canada, for an equal division of seats between Upper Canada and Lower Canada in the central legislature at that time. From the beginning, it was understood that political arrangements were needed to ensure that the two nations could talk to one another as equals.

The spirit that existed in 1840 should have guided us in 2010. Unfortunately, we are forced to acknowledge that we have lost that spirit because the sense of confederation no longer exists. We have a government that is increasingly centralist and, in reality, this is a confederation in name only. It is a political system where the central government, the federal government, has more and more powers, especially because of its pseudo-spending power in provincial areas of jurisdiction.

In this regard, I would like to remind the members of the House that this winter, during this session, the Bloc Québécois introduced a motion to eliminate the federal spending power in areas under the jurisdiction of the provinces and Quebec. The Prime Minister promised that this would be done and the hon. member for Beauce suggested that this action be taken several days before we introduced the motion. Unfortunately, all the Canadian federalist parties opposed the motion. This is yet another sign that the existence of a Quebec nation is not actually recognized.

This lack of recognition is particularly true on the part of the Conservatives, as we later saw. The Conservatives recognized the Quebec nation for opportunistic electoral reasons. They were trying to show Quebecers that they were more open-minded than Jean Chrétien's Liberal government. However, this recognition and open-mindedness was merely a symbolic gesture—like a rose in someone's lapel—with no concrete meaning.

We have seen other examples of the government's refusal to eliminate the federal spending power. I remind the members of the House that I myself introduced a bill to apply the Charter of the French Language to companies under federal jurisdiction in Quebec, companies such as banks, interprovincial and international shipping companies, and broadcasting and telecommunications companies. We proposed this bill so that the 225,000 workers in Quebec who are not currently protected by the Charter of the French Language could be. With the exception of the NDP members, who were divided on the issue, all of the Canadian federalist parties opposed the bill. This just goes to show the lack of recognition of the Quebec nation and its common language and one official language, French. Once again, the parties wanted to perpetuate the myth of bilingualism when we know full well that, in the rest of Canada, the French-Canadian minority is, unfortunately, gradually being assimilated, despite the laws that, in theory, are supposed to protect francophones.

Government Orders

This is also quite obvious when it comes to the national culture of Quebec and Quebecers. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages once again introduced Bill C-32, which has been denounced by all creators, artists and singers in Quebec. This government has shown nothing but complete indifference. I must say, Quebec is not the only place that abhors Bill C-32. Many Canadian artists are also denouncing it, but Quebec's voice has been much louder than that of anglophone artists in Canada. So, once again, a direct attack is being launched on Quebec culture. This is another example of the failure to give tangible expression to the recognition of the Quebec nation. Very clearly, the bill before us is meant to favour the major broadcasters and the major Canadian and American producers, to the detriment of artists' copyrights.

Once again, this all proves that tangible expression will never be given to the recognition of the Quebec nation—not under the Conservatives nor under any federalist party.

• (1150)

If the government had really taken the Quebec nation into account, it would never have introduced Bill C-12. Something else would have been arranged, like what was agreed upon in Charlottetown, that is, 25% Quebec representation in federal institutions.

The old Constitution, the 1867 Constitution, contained provisions whereby the French-Canadian nation, which was based in the Lower St. Lawrence region and in Lower Canada as a whole, had accepted that the English-Canadian nation should have equal representation. Things have changed since then.

French-Canadians who live within Quebec's borders now identify themselves as Quebecers. Everyone who lives in Quebec considers themselves part of the Quebec nation. People no longer talk about a nation based on ethnicity. The same is true of the Canadian nation. It is not a nation made up of English-Canadians or people only of British, Scottish or Irish origin. Now everyone agrees that people who live in Quebec, those who are permanent residents, who have citizenship, regardless of their place of birth, their religion or their mother tongue, are Canadians or Quebecers.

We also have to recognize that in that context, Quebec remains the heart of the Francophonie, not just in the Canadian body politic, but in all of North America and even the Americas. Except for Haiti, Martinique and Guadeloupe, where French is spoken, the only place where French is the primary language is Quebec.

We have to take this reality into account in order to make the political voice of Quebec heard in the House. Mr. Gérin-Lajoie made the same arguments when he was education minister in the early 1960s under the Liberal government of Jean Lesage in Quebec, during the quiet revolution. He said that Quebec's domestic jurisdictions should be extended to the world stage. He was particularly interested in the issue of education. He said that since Quebec was responsible for education, which is central to the development of a nation and its culture, then Quebec should be heard with its own voice on issues of education and culture in international institutions. Unfortunately, that did not happen. Let us not forget that at UNESCO, we were offered a small ejection seat. If there is no agreement within the Canadian delegation between the representatives from Quebec and those from Canada, then Quebec has to keep

and Canada gets to speak on behalf of Quebec even if their positions differ.

This bill is insulting to us. It has to be withdrawn and I will amend it in the following way: I move, seconded by the hon. member for Laval, that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), because the bill would unacceptably reduce the political weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons and does not set out that Quebec must hold 25 percent of the seats in the House of Commons.

I am moving this amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The amendment is in order.

• (1155)

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard in this House that, regardless of the differences among the federalist parties, we would like to see this bill move forward.

However, we all know that the Bloc's ultimate goal is not to have any seats in the House of Commons. This bill is just another example of why a federalist MP from any province does more for Quebec than the entire Bloc Québécois has done in 20 years.

Having said that, will the member agree that his motion is a delay of the inevitable? That is, we will move forward to ensure that all provinces, including Quebec, are fairly represented in the House of Commons, and the motion is really just a delay tactic to prevent proper representation from Quebec and for other provinces throughout our country, which is most important. We live in the best country in the world and this is just another way for the Bloc to slow things down.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, the minister of "democratic reform" is saying that the Bloc has done nothing in the past 20 years. That is untrue. I remind him that his party has been around for 144 years and the report card we saw yesterday was pretty damning. We have accomplished things in 20 years. The proof is that in the last elections, we have received the support of the majority of the Quebec nation. We have had that support seven times, while his party is hovering around 16% in the polls.

That said, nothing in the Canadian Constitution mandates a strict proportionality, and the proof is that when provinces see their demographic weight decrease, their representation does not decrease. So proportionality does not exist, and certainly not strict proportionality. It completely makes sense, in terms of politics, for the House of Commons to decide to protect the percentage of seats for the Quebec nation. It would be possible, if there was a political will, to ensure that Quebec had around 25% of the seats.

This is a debate that we want to keep going for as long as possible and to turn into a major campaign issue in Quebec in the next election a few months from now.

Government Orders

I cannot wait to hear our Conservative Quebecers defend the interests of the Canadian nation in Quebec. That will be fun to see.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's speech and the historical context that he provided. He said that when Lower Canada and Upper Canada joined—this is the concept of the two founding peoples—it was easily decided that Upper Canada and Lower Canada would have equal weight in the House, in the central government, even though Lower Canada was much more populous than Upper Canada.

This said, the government opposite, with its question and the heckling from certain Conservative members at the back of the room, seem to be saying that this is a sovereigntist debate. But it seems to me—and my colleague can correct me if I am wrong—that this is not a debate between sovereigntists and federalists, but between the Quebec nation and the Canadian nation. There is a strong consensus in Quebec among all political parties, sovereigntist as well as federalist, and all of Quebec's civil society, that 25% of the members in the House of Commons must come from Quebec, and that proportion must be protected.

The handful of people from Quebec who oppose that are here in the House. They are the dozen or so Conservative members and some Liberals as well. Apart from those federalist members here in the House of Commons, the other federalist members and a huge majority of Quebecers oppose this bill.

• (1200)

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber for his question. This gives me the opportunity to come back to this important point. I mentioned that the Quebec National Assembly had adopted two unanimous motions against Bill C-56, calling on the Conservative government to withdraw it. On April 22, 2010, not too long ago, for the third time, the Quebec National Assembly unanimously adopted the following motion:

That the National Assembly reaffirms that Québec, as a nation, must be able to enjoy special protection for the weight of its representation in the House of Commons;

That the National Assembly asks the elected Members from all political parties to abandon the passage of any bill whose effect would be to diminish the weight of the representation of Québec in the House of Commons.

This motion is not directed only at us, as the hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber mentioned, but rather at all members from Quebec. All members of the Quebec National Assembly—be they Liberal, ADQ, PQ or Québec solidaire—asked their representatives in Ottawa to call for the withdrawal of this bill or to vote against it. I hope that is what will happen.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier in previous remarks, we in the NDP are very sympathetic and very supportive of the notion that, on the one hand having recognized, unanimously, in this House the Québécois as a nation within a united Canada, it cannot then be watered down and belittled by a motion that gives them less relative strength.

It is not just a nation within Canada, quite frankly, but in all of North America. It is a distinct culture, although that word has connotations; but it is. We believe that if we are eventually going to create the conditions in Canada that will bring Quebec to sign,

willingly and voluntarily, the Constitution, because as we know it has not yet, then there needs to be a lot more respect for those motions.

My question is this. Given the fact that the member, if I understood his remarks and I listened very carefully, was not interested in being seen as obstructionist in denying B.C., Alberta and Ontario the seats they should have, why then this heavy-handed motion of getting rid of 12?

Is there not some other way that the Bloc can look to work with us to get to committee so that we can find a way to ensure that those provinces that deserve and need these seats can get them, but at the same time we find a common ground that we can all live with vis-à-vis Quebec?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that very pertinent question. Our feeling is that neither the government nor the official opposition is open to trying to find solutions. We did not sense any openness during the debate on Bill C-56, and we still do not sense any openness in what we have heard this morning.

We therefore cannot run the risk of rushing the debate at second reading to send the bill to committee. As I said, our goal is very clear: we want this debate to take place in the political arena in the next election. We are going to do what we can to make that happen.

That said, I want to thank the NDP for their openness. If the other parties were as open as the NDP, the situation would obviously be quite different. Barring any evidence to the contrary, the majority of the House is completely unwilling to compromise. We may see some openness during the debate, but I doubt it very much.

The hon. member mentioned something that I think is very important. If, historically, in the Canadian political landscape, there had been some tangible recognition of the Quebec nation within the nation of Canada in a common space, we might not be in this situation today. But that never happened.

The unilateral repatriation of the Constitution in 1982, which imposed on us a charter we did not want and had not discussed, was intended to marginalize Quebec. Bill C-12 follows on Pierre Elliott Trudeau's 1982 repatriation of the Constitution, which treats Quebec as just another province. We do not accept that, and for the same reasons, we will not accept Bill C-12.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate.

Let me just state at the outset, for the record, that I am not going to repeat everything that has been said. It does not need a second go-round. However, we do believe strongly in the principle of representation by population, rep by pop. I am from Ontario, the province that, quite frankly, is in the greatest need of more seats to recognize the growing population.

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Christopherson: You guys applaud easily. Do you do that for B.C. and Alberta, too? I will mention them. There we go. And one for Alberta. Okay. Now, we have got through that. One would think it would be motherhood, given all that applause, that we would not be stuck in this position where we are.

Mr. Speaker, let me also say that we believe, as we approach this, that we need to be recognizing the constitutional structure of Canada, our history, as well as community of interest, as defined by the Supreme Court. Those are fundamental principles that we hold out as we move forward in reviewing this bill.

Before I leave that, let me also say, and this is important, that this is like fixing one-third of the democratic deficit we have in Canada. The other two-thirds are comprised of, ultimately, getting rid of that other place down the hall that we do not need and, second, getting proportional representation, which would truly give us a House representative of population.

We need to go to a PR House, get rid of the other place, increase the seats that the provinces need to reflect their population, and then all we have done is a major repair work. Then there is the actual onward building of the country. That is the kind of work we need to do. However, this is an important piece of it. That is why we are holding the government to account on not having brought this bill forward for eight months. This argument, because there have been some keruffles around other bills, that somehow the opposition denied the minister and the government the opportunity to bring in this bill is just nonsense.

First, most of the time that we took up in this place in the last year was to make up for the ground we lost because the government prorogued. So a lot of the time that was here was time that the government wasted, and those bills have been in here three and four times. The government also could have extended the hours in the last days of the sitting. It did not do that.

I hear the minister over there laughing. I do not know what he is laughing about. It is important work. The hours were there. The time was there to do it. Given that I heard the Minister of Democratic Reform say the reason the bill did not come in was because the government did not have House time, I am pointing out that is not accurate. There was a lot of House time. What was missing was the political will to bring it forward, which brings me to the article that triggered all of this.

I have made the comments here that we had a fulsome debate on April 20, for anybody who is following these things, about the Bloc position and an amendment that we put. I think it very clearly states where we are on this issue. It expands on the principles that I have already mentioned this morning. We support not the 25%, and there is a reason for that, but indeed the 24.35%, which represents the relative strength of Quebec now when this bill is introduced. But more important, that represents the relative weight of the seats for Quebec in the House of Commons as it was at the time that this House unanimously said we recognize the Québécois as a nation within a united Canada.

The reason we are even debating this today, in the last dying moments of the House, is an article in the December 2 *Globe and*

Mail, by John Ibbitson. I realize the reporters do not write the headlines, but the headline is “Federal parties agree to scrap bill to correct voting inequalities”.

I was interviewed for that, and I have to tell members it was one of those moments. We get going through an interview and the reporter throws a piece of information at us that we did not know or that is new or maybe it is something that is thrown out there to throw us off. It is a whole art unto itself, interviewing us types.

I am going to be straight upfront about where we are here, how we got here and the confusion around this article. That is my fashion, as people who know me know.

The reporter was going along sort of normal, so to speak. I do not have a tape but I suspect the reporter does. In the midst of the interview, the reporter said, “I want you to know that I've talked to one your party strategists, who I can't name but who tells me that there's an unofficial, a wink-and-a-nod deal to make sure that C-12 doesn't become law, doesn't carry, doesn't move”.

● (1210)

That caught me flat-footed because I had heard no such thing from anyone. However, I have been around long enough in government and in opposition to know that sometimes decisions are taken at higher levels up the food chain than me and we are not always notified in a quite timely way.

I was sort of dancing a little, thinking maybe there was something going on and I did not know about it. I said as much to the reporter. I said, “To the best of my knowledge all I can do is reflect where the elected caucus is. Unnamed, unknown, confidential party strategists I do not know about. The position of the NDP on Bill C-12 is that, as an elected member, as the elected chair of the Ontario caucus within our federal caucus and as a member from Ontario, I can tell you that we are supportive of Bill C-12 getting to committee so that we can do the work that needs to be done. Nothing has changed”.

I said that. I did not know how the article would turn out. When I looked at it, the whole article was what these strategists in the background said. I know I am wading into waters that I am going to regret.

Hon. Vic Toews: Go ahead.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks a lot. “Go ahead”, good friends from across the way holler.

One does not mess with someone else's profession. We interact with reporters but it is not our world, not our profession.

I have to say that the comments from the elected people, while in some cases may not have been as clear as one might hope, certainly did not reflect that headline and it certainly did not reflect what the so-called party strategists were talking about. That is what disturbs me.

Government Orders

I want to make sure that I get this in. I am actually glad in the long run that it happened because it did bring about debate. However I would feel a lot better about it if we had actually got to a vote and sent it to committee so that when we returned in the new year we were landing ready to go, ready to start working at committee. As it is, I do not know where we are going to go.

What I do know is, if there are NDP strategists who are saying differently than I am right now, then they should come out of the shadows, come into public and put their comments forward, because those are not true.

What happened was, given the importance of this issue in our country, that there was an avalanche of articles in which people took that starting point as the gospel, then moved from there, and we all got dumped on from all the four parties because the message was out there that there was this secret deal by backroom folk to make sure that the bill died.

I am putting on the record right now for the NDP that there is no such position, no such wink and a nod, no nudge-nudge. The fact is that we desperately need to get the bill to committee. Ultimately we have to get it enacted.

There are 30 members of Parliament who are not here who should be representing Canadians and speaking for them, just as we are. The reason they are not is that collectively, and it is the government's fault because it is the lead, collectively we have not found a way to change the law to allow that to happen.

Here we are in the last few minutes of the last day. Normally the government puts sort of unimportant things here. It shoehorns them in. My sense is the government brought this in today so that it could put forward words about how it wants to make this move forward. Again, in the absence of a vote it really does not mean much other than it is now on the political agenda of Canadians, especially those Canadians in Ontario, Alberta and B.C. who are waiting for their right to democracy and fairness and representation in this place to be delivered to them.

We are the only ones who can do that. That is why I ask the question of the Bloc. I believe if we could get this bill to committee, given the importance, we would be forced to find a way to have common ground to get this through so we can get those MPs into the House doing their job on behalf of the Canadians who have yet to elect them.

We in the NDP believe that the issue around Quebec ought not to be such a huge matter. It is sort of the second part of what we already did with the declaration.

•(1215)

We fervently believe that one of the medium- and long-term goals of all of us from outside of Quebec is to continue to try to create the conditions, with limitations, I am not suggesting we write a cheque and let everything go, but at the end of the day if we truly want a united Canada, all the provinces have to be signed on to the Constitution. In this country, that is not going to happen at the end of a gun and it is not going to happen through any kind of coercion. It would only happen if the people of Quebec decide in their hearts that their future is with Canada as federalists as opposed to sovereignists and an independent Quebec. That is the battle. It seems to us in the

NDP that it is only fair that if we are going to go as far as we did on the motion earlier, we at least lock in that relative weight. This is a culture that is trying to survive surrounded by umpteen hundred other cultures and beyond our borders too, and we are proud of what that means for Canada.

That to us ought not to be such a big deal. It looks as though it is going to turn into that. It is a shame. I want to emphasize that I did appreciate the positive remarks of the House leader for the Bloc. He offered, I think, some constructive tone and opportunity as well as his other concerns. My words, not theirs, but I got the sense, and when I did use the word I was not corrected by the member, that they are not looking to be obstructionist about this, that they recognize the need for Ontario, Alberta and B.C. to get these extra seats so they are properly weighted and represented in the House, but Bloc members want to do it in a way that makes sure that it is not the slippery slope so that 50, 75 or 100 years from now they are down to a fraction, percentage-wise, if theirs is not one of the provinces that grows in population. We do not know what those numbers are going to be.

We are in a bit of a spot here. I am glad we are debating it. We will not know until we get back, assuming we do come back, how serious the government is about this. We in the NDP will be looking for the government to put Bill C-12 front and centre when we come back, rather than tagging it into the last day in the final dying hours of the House before we rise for the Christmas break. When we get back, I really hope that some of the positiveness here can be focused and that we can get a quick vote to get the bill to committee, because that is where the real work is. We all know that. Then we can bring in the provinces and all the experts. We can do all that we need to do but try to do it in a timely fashion so that we are not just stuck here, because that is where we are.

We look to the government. It has all the levers of power. We look to it to correct its mistake of letting this languish for so long and give action to its words that this is a priority, that it cares about the people of Ontario, Alberta and B.C. If so, then we would like to see that reflected in government business when we return, that this is up there for debate and we spend as much time as it takes to get to a second reading vote so that hopefully we can get this to committee, and as quickly as possible, get our work done there and then get it back.

Remember, democracy is not perfect. One of its negatives is that it is slow. So we need to recognize that, as quickly as we move in each of the pieces, there are a lot of pieces that need to be dealt with. If anybody is causing us to drag our heels at any of these stages, this is just not going to get fixed, and then, quite frankly, those headlines out there will be probably well deserved.

This is a minority House, a minority government, but everybody is talking about wanting to ensure that Ontario, Alberta and B.C. get the seats they could. Everyone is pretty much treating that as motherhood, so let us find out, what are the rubs; where are the problems? Let us try to get a little bit of grease, a little bit of oil, on that problem and get it dealt with. If the Bloc members are not going to vote for this on second reading no matter what, fair enough, that is their right, but that is not the majority of the House. We can still get it to committee where we can deal with their issues and all the other issues, but that is only going to happen if the government puts the bill on government business in a timely enough fashion such that we can actually do the work.

Government Orders

I will leave it there and I look forward to any comments and questions from colleagues.

• (1220)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, what we see here are the federalist parties wishing this bill could get to committee as soon as possible.

The member talked about some sort of secret deal. There certainly was no secret deal with the Conservatives, and the Liberals, the NDP and Bloc members have said there was no secret deal with them. Obviously there have been no secret deals, otherwise it would be a super-duper secret, because nobody knows about it and it would still be secret. So I think we can move on from that.

The NDP member said he wants to deal with this bill as soon as possible in committee. Then would the member vote in favour of time allocation, which would reduce the amount of time spent debating the Bloc amendment? Would the NDP support time allocation, yes or no? If the answer is yes, great; if the answer is no, that would demonstrate that the NDP is disingenuous in bringing this bill to committee.

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I am awfully disappointed. The minister is starting to play games here and that is the last thing we need right now. I am not going to give him a definitive answer and he knows that. I do not know exactly what the minister is doing.

If the minister is asking whether we are ready to move as quickly as possible at second reading to get this bill to committee, then as I have said over and over on behalf of the caucus, yes, we are prepared. We are not going to drag anything out. We will participate in whatever debates are necessary. We will give respect to any caucus that introduces motions. But at the end of the day, the government should try to do something other than either ignore Quebec or come in here with a great big bat and force everybody to do what it wants.

Why will the minister not take an approach of co-operation and collegiality and try to find out where we can work together?

We cannot afford a win-lose situation with respect to this bill. This is about building Canada. We need a win-win situation and that is only going to happen when there is an attitude of respect for each other and each other's positions and thinking, rather than coming in here and ordering that it will be either a yes or a no, cut off debate and ram this legislation through. That is the kind of stuff that drives Canadians nuts.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, as the chair of the NDP's British Columbia caucus I want to say how important this legislation is to people in British Columbia. We want to make sure that the folks in British Columbia have the appropriate representation in this place so that their views can be appropriately represented to the rest of Canada, to all the parties here in the House of Commons.

The member mentioned that changing the electoral map, adding these seats in British Columbia, is only one piece of the electoral reform puzzle. He has talked about the other things that New Democrats have strongly argued for, such as abolishing the Senate, as well as the importance of proportional representation.

I wonder if he could say a few words about the importance of proportional representation. Is that something that should also be on the agenda of this Parliament to ensure that we have real democratic reform here in Canada?

• (1225)

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, Ontario, B.C. and Alberta members are going to speak about the importance of this issue to them. Whether a member is from those provinces or not, it behooves all of us to find a way to get this resolved. That is our major message here today.

With regard to my colleague's direct question about proportional representation, if we had proportional representation in the House we would have a much fairer House, a House that better reflects the political will of the Canadian people. I will give some examples.

Given the amount of votes that the Liberals received west of Ontario, they ought to have more seats, because enough people voted for the Liberal candidates that the numbers dictate they should have that representation here. We could say the same thing about the Conservatives. There are parts of the country where they get a meaningful, significant share of the votes but not enough to win the seat, because of first past the post. Of course, the same applies to the NDP and the Green Party. Enough Canadians have voted for the Green Party that there ought to be at least a couple of MPs here to reflect its point of view.

So this is not just about the NDP worrying about the NDP; it is about the NDP looking at Canada and our electoral system and saying we could do better. Proportional representation would be better.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my colleague question. I know this effort has been around for some time and I understand there were three separate versions of this bill. We have been experiencing this delay since the bill was first introduced in April and there have been three different versions of it. Can he comment on why that is, and how serious is the government about it if it cannot seem to get it right?

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, that is a really critical question in terms of the process and why we are here. This is the third version of the bill. It speaks to the lack of consultation on the part of the government. If the government had done its job and talked properly to the provinces and talked to the other parties in the House, we would have a lot clearer idea of where everybody is from the get-go. However, the government did not do that. The government once again followed its usual heavy-handed, our-way-or-the-door way and that is why we are at this point.

Now we are here debating the third version and we are sort of stuck. We are ending the year having a debate, which is good because we get to put our positions forward and it gets us a little closer to second reading, but without a vote at second reading to get this to committee where the real work will happen, it is all but meaningless.

Government Orders

So a lot of the problem we have is not just the complexity of the issue, which is part of it, but the government's heavy-handed approach to everything it does, the lack of respect and lack of recognition that other people have points of view and that the provinces need an opportunity to express what they want to have expressed here. If the government had done that ahead of time, it would have been a lot easier for the House of Commons to deal with this in a more expedited fashion.

That brings us all the way around to the question of whether the government is really serious about doing this or just trying to find ways to justify not making it the law of the land.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Madam Speaker, obviously the rhetoric from the gentleman is off, but we expect that from the NDP.

The bottom line is that we would like the bill to move forward. Will the NDP help the government deal with the issue of time allocation, which will be necessary to deal with the obstructionist Bloc amendment?

By the way, a lot of consultation has gone on in regard to this bill. Let us get it to committee and continue the process. However, we need the help of the other federalist parties to move it forward. Are they going to help?

• (1230)

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, the position of the NDP is to help Canada have the kind of governance structure that reflects what people are entitled to and need in order to have a proper, modern, functioning democracy. That is what the NDP is interested in. I am not going to engage in any kind of gamesmanship with the minister about shutting down debate and who is going to gang up on whom. Let us just focus on the fact that this is about Canada.

It is not about any of our caucuses. It is about the importance of having a democracy that works and is strong and up to date. Right now, it is not, and in a minority government it is going to take all of us working together to correct this and move it along. The attitude and approach that the minister is taking is exactly opposite to the kind of leadership needed on Bill C-12.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is an amendment before us from the Bloc Québécois to defeat this bill at second reading, so it my honour to speak to that amendment and to the broader bill behind the amendment, Bill C-12, the Democratic Representation Act.

My party is supporting the bill and the Bloc clearly is not. Therefore, my comments today are directed toward the Liberals and the New Democrats.

Before I begin, I am splitting my time with the member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

For my colleagues across the aisle, this is one of the most important pieces of legislation introduced into the House of Commons in the last 10 years. It is so important because it ensures compliance with a fundamental constitutional principle, and that is representation by population in this chamber.

The idea in the Constitution is that this is the people's chamber and this principle is fundamental to democracy and an essential

element of the Canadian Constitution. Representation by population is the notion that all Canadian citizens are equal and they all should have an equal say in who governs our country.

It is fundamental to our system of government. It is a founding principle of Confederation. In fact, it was the war cry of George Brown, who was the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada from 1857, and post-Confederation, to 1873. He fought for that principle in the United Province of Canada and subsequently in Confederation. It was on that agreement, in part, that Confederation was forged.

Today, however, we have gone a long way from that founding constitutional principle. The gap between how many voters an MP represents in a fast-growing province, such as Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, has never been bigger. The gap today is bigger than at any other point in our country's history since 1867.

Under the current formula by which the seats have been distributed in this very chamber, we have reached a point where the difference between the fast-growing populations in provinces such as Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario and the slower-growing regions has undermined the very principle of representation by population. For example, an MP in the House from Ontario, B.C. or Alberta represents, on average, 26,000 more Canadians than an MP from any of the other 7 provinces.

I acknowledge two other constitutional conditions on representation by population: the senatorial floor and the grandfather clause. The senatorial floor ensures that there must be at least as many members in this chamber from a particular provincial division as there are senators represented in the next chamber. The grandfather clause in section 51 ensures that in no circumstance can the number of MPs in any provincial division fall below the number of MPs that the provincial division had in place in 1986.

While the Constitution contains these two conditions on representation by population, the essential element is there and the essential element is clear and overwhelming that this chamber should be representative of the population of each provincial division.

The current situation may very well be unconstitutional. In 1991 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled on proposed changes to the electoral boundaries in the provincial division of Saskatchewan. The court stated:

A system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly as compared with another citizen's vote runs the risk of providing inadequate representation to the citizen whose vote is diluted....The result will be uneven and unfair representation.

When MPs from faster and larger-growing provinces represent tens of thousands more constituents than their colleagues from smaller provinces, it is a violation of the fundamental constitutional principle of representation by population. It is also a denial of a voice for new Canadians and for visible minorities. That fact is when we look at the 30 most populous ridings in the country, more than half of them have greater than 25% visible minority populations. The fact is these 30 largest ridings are disproportionately from Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver. Those ridings are disproportionately made up of new Canadians and visible minorities.

Government Orders

•(1235)

Denying these rapidly-growing regions new seats is to deny new Canadians, and visible minorities in particular, a voice in this chamber. The new Canada is growing, the new Canada needs a voice and the new Canada wants in. This is where the democratic representation act comes in.

By bringing faster-growing regions closer to representation by population in the House, Bill C-12 would restore the balance in this chamber. By adding seats to faster-growing regions, the gap in average riding populations in the country will be reduced.

For my New Democrat and Liberal colleagues, the longer we wait to make these changes, the more difficult, the more politically tenuous, they will become. The longer we wait to address this inequity, the more difficult it will be to achieve politically, because the gap will only continue to grow.

Population projections confirm this. The GTA, the region which I represent, has eight million people. It is going to grow by 50% in the next 20 years. The greater Toronto area will go from 8 million Canadians to 12 million Canadians by 2031. The same story can be told of Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton.

The number of visible minorities in the country will also continue to grow. In fact, Statistics Canada recently released a report that said by 2031, one in three Canadians would be a visible minority, up to 14.4 million citizens.

The effects of this imbalance are very real. They are real for Canadians in faster-growing provinces whose voices are not in this chamber, whose voices are not represented here and whose voices are not heard as strongly as they should be. By allowing under-representation to continue, we are sending a signal to these Canadians that their interests are not as important as those from other regions of the country and that they somehow count for less.

This act would strike a good balance between providing fair representation for those slower-growing provinces and recognizing the galloping heterogeneity of the new Canada. It would recognize the demographic realities in faster growing regions of the country.

I encourage my Liberal and New Democratic colleagues to support the bill, to defeat the amendment in front of us and to restore the fundamental constitutional principle, representation by population.

Provinces like Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario have experienced significant population growth and that trend needs to be reflected in the makeup of the House. Under this bill, all other provinces and territories would have their seat counts protected and would continue to enjoy better representation than the three faster-growing provinces. They would continue to be better represented in the House than the three faster-growing provinces.

This act strikes a good balance between the different interests across the country and restores a fundamental constitutional principle.

•(1240)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there is very little in the member's speech with which I

would disagree. In fact, I thought he was supremely articulate about the necessity to redress the balance among the provinces.

I have listened to the representative of the Liberal Party, my hon. friend from St. Paul's. I have listened to the hon. member from the New Democratic Party. In all three federalist parties, there does not seem to be much daylight among the various positions. There is a recognition that some inequities will inevitably occur, particularly with P.E.I., the territories and things of that nature, and some niggling around Quebec. However, by and large, there does not seem to be that much disagreement.

The member said that this was one of the most important, if not the most important, bills that had been introduced in the House.

This comment is for the former minister. There would have been a lot less heat about the bill and possibly a lot more light had there been some preliminary discussions with the various parties so the differences could have been narrowed and dealt with in a bill.

I would be interested to hear the member's comments on that.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, the government has consulted outside of the chamber on the bill. In fact, I commend the government for listening and taking into account various views outside the chamber.

I note the government, in a former Parliament, introduced Bill C-22. At the time there was much criticism that while it brought Alberta and British Columbia's numbers up, it did not do the same for Ontario. The government listened and, as a result, Bill C-12 has been introduced. It takes into account that criticism. All three provinces will be lifted to the same extent in their proportionate representation.

With respect to consultations with other parties in the chamber, the whole process is for that. We are debating this today. We are consulting today. There is a chance for parties to move amendments. The Bloc has moved an amendment in the chamber, with which I do not agree. However, there is an opportunity for members to be consulted at committee and to propose amendments to further improve the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was listening to the hon. member's speech. At least we can say he is consistent. He was one of the few MPs who voted against recognizing the Quebec nation, and his speech was quite consistent with that. According to him, the Quebec nation does not exist and there is no reason to give it any special protection. Nevertheless, does he agree that his colleagues who recognized the Quebec nation are being inconsistent when they say that the nation exists, but there will be no provision in this bill to protect that nation?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Bloc Québécois member for his question. This is a constitutional issue. The idea is that all the regions of the country have the same representation in the House of Commons.

Government Orders

[English]

Regardless of what the views are on that issue, the recognition of nationhood is not in the Constitution. However, the principle of representation by population is a key constitutional provision, as the Supreme Court of Canada indicated in its 1991 ruling. It spoke about the need to ensure that there were no large gaps between the different regions of the country in terms of their representation in this chamber.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the comments from my colleague who is very learned on this topic.

I know the member does his research. The amendment from the Bloc is to end this discussion completely. Does the member have an understanding of rep by pop by province? Do Quebecers expect rep by pop in their province for provincial legislation? Is the member able to comment on—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I will have to allow the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills to respond very briefly.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I think all Canadians, including Canadians living in Quebec, understand the principle that this chamber should be representative of the population across the country. Canadians in Quebec understand that. They are fair-minded. They believe in equality and they believe this chamber should be the people's chamber.

• (1245)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure for me to rise to speak in favour of Bill C-12, the Democratic Representation Act, and to speak against the Bloc amendment that would prevent it from going any further.

The bill proposes a formula that would address the representation gap in the House of Commons affecting provinces with faster growing populations.

Our government is taking a principled approach. The bill, if passed unamended, will increase the number of MPs for faster growing provinces to bring them closer to representation by population while protecting the current seat counts of slower growing provinces.

Under the current formula for readjusting seats in the House, my province, the province of Alberta, has become significantly under-represented, despite a population surge in the last two decades. However, the democratic representation act recognizes the growing populations of Ontario, of B.C. and of Alberta by providing additional seats for the provinces on a principled basis, ensuring that all residents are fairly represented in this hallowed chamber.

I support the bill unamended, because it guarantees provinces whose populations are in relative decline will not lose any seats.

All members in this place would like their provinces to have as much representation as possible. That is only natural. However, we also have to look at the national interest by ensuring, to the greatest extent possible, that Canadians have fair representation, no matter in what portion of Canada they live from coast to coast to coast.

The need to balance effective representation of smaller provinces with the demographic realities in faster growing provinces has underpinned each formula for distributing seats in the House ever since Confederation.

On the one hand, historically we have recognized that each province should have a number of seats in the House that roughly reflects its population, relative to the rest of the provinces. On the other hand we acknowledge that smaller, or slower growing, provinces need to have sufficient weight in the House to ensure that their voices are heard in decisions affecting the entire country. My remarks today will look at the historic evolution of the constitutional formula for distributing seats in the House of Commons.

The Fathers of Confederation agreed that the House of Commons should reflect democratic principles of representation, or rep by pop, as it is colloquially known. Accordingly, the Constitution Act, 1867, gave Quebec a fixed number of 65 seats, with the other provinces receiving the number of seats in proportion to their population that 65 represented in relation to Quebec's. This calculation was based entirely on the concept of rep by pop.

Each province received the number of seats it deserved, based on its share of the Canadian population. However, from the beginning it was recognized that situations might, and in fact did, arise where it would be necessary to break away from the principles of pure rep by pop. For example, there was a rule in the 1867 Constitution that stated that no province would lose seats unless its population had decreased by 5% or more relative to Canada's total population.

Shortly after Confederation, new provinces entered the confederation. When the new provinces of Manitoba and British Columbia entered in the early 1870s, they received a number of seats much higher than they would have based on pure rep by pop. This was an early example of Parliament recognizing that each province required a number of seats to have an effective say in the governance of this country. For example, the province of British Columbia joined Confederation with six seats in 1871 when its population at the time would have resulted in only two seats.

B.C. continued to have six seats, protected thanks to the "5% rule" I mentioned earlier, until the significant population growth in British Columbia resulted in more seats in 1903.

Then there was the senatorial clause. Apart from the core seats that were allocated when new provinces entered Confederation, the formula for readjusting seats essentially stayed constant until 1915. At that point, a new rule was added to the Constitution that provided no province could have fewer seats in the House of Commons than it had in the upper House. This new Senate floor rule came about after Prince Edward Island lost its court challenge seeking a larger share of seats in this House.

Government Orders

•(1250)

Prince Edward Island strongly maintained it should have a minimum number of seats in the House regardless of its population to ensure it could effectively participate in the governance of the country.

Although Prince Edward Island lost the court challenge the province won a political victory in 1915 when the Constitution was amended to guarantee its seat count would never fall below the limit of four members of Parliament.

There have been other changes in the formula. The constitutional formula was again changed in 1946 and then again in 1952 in an effort to guarantee a level of representation for Saskatchewan and Quebec, which had both seen relative declines in their population. The 1952 amendment created a new rule where no province could lose more than 15% of the seats it had under the previous census.

Finally, in 1974 a very complicated formula, the amalgam formula, was adopted. I hope no one during the questions and answers period asks me to explain it.

The amalgam formula applied different rules for allocating seats in the House depending on whether a province was large, intermediate or small. While in theory the amalgam formula was designed to protect provinces with decreasing relative populations, it was soon discovered that applying the rules to the results of the 1981 census would have led to a huge number of new MPs being added to the House.

Because of the problems with the amalgam formula the current formula was adopted by Parliament in 1985. The 1985 formula starts with the fixed number of 279 seats, which was the number of MPs in the House in 1985. Those seats are allocated among the provinces based on their share of the Canadian population at that time. This basically mirrors the rep by pop principle in the 1867 Constitution Act.

Next, the Senate floor was applied to ensure that no province received fewer seats in this House than it has in the upper House.

Finally, the grandfather clause guarantees all provinces receive at a minimum the number of seats they had when the new formula came into effect in 1985.

The seat top-up provided to some provinces represents the belief of the Fathers of Confederation that every Canadian deserves to have an effective voice in the governance of their country.

Ironically, the very rules meant to protect the representation of smaller and slower growing provinces have caused the faster growing provinces to become under-represented. Because of the distortions created by the current formula, MPs in Ontario, British Columbia and myself representing Alberta on average represent 26,000 more constituents than MPs in the remaining provinces.

This balance between effective representation and demographic reality, which our predecessors saw as so essential to Canadian democracy, is now being threatened. Under-representation of people in faster growing provinces will grow worse each time the current formula is applied unless Parliament acts now.

In conclusion, the democratic representation act will bring Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta closer to representation by population while protecting the current seat counts of the remaining provinces. The new formula is principled, fair and will not cause an undue increase in the number of members of Parliament in the House of Commons.

I sincerely believe this solution balances the rights and expectations of all Canadians. As members of Parliament representing every part of this country it is our responsibility to ensure our democratic institutions are inclusive and representative.

Bill C-12 will go a long way toward achieving these important goals. I encourage all members of the House to vote against the Bloc amendment and pass Bill C-12 unamended as expeditiously as possible.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member across for his comments. They were certainly well researched, thoughtful and very reflective on this issue.

However, I have one curiosity that I would ask the member to address. That is, given the importance of the bill, the previous member stated in his opinion that it was the most important bill to come before the House in 10 years and as such it would deserve the discussion in the House, the discussion in committee and probably consultation in the general public.

I do not think we have heard about the bill since at least April. It is the government House leader who decides what the legislative priorities of the government are. Here we are 125 minutes before adjourning for Christmas break and we are discussing this bill.

My question for the member is, and again I want to thank him for his very thoughtful comments, is there any reason why the bill did not receive any priority from the government?

•(1255)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Madam Speaker, as the hon. member can appreciate, the decisions of what bills get debated in what order are made at a pay grade significantly above mine. That being said, I have not been here for 10 years so I cannot even comment on what the hon. member who preceded me said on whether or not this is the most important bill in the last 10 years. I have only been here for a little more than two years.

This is an important bill. There was a reference made to a *Globe and Mail* article that appeared a little over a week ago, and when that article appeared my phone rang and my email box was filled with constituents from Edmonton—St. Albert and other places in Alberta who encouraged me in the strongest possible terms not to abandon Bill C-12, and as the minister said, there was no plan to abandon it but nonetheless the rumours were out there, and to pass it as expeditiously as possible. That is why I am standing today. That is why I am encouraging all members to proceed expeditiously with the bill, vote down the Bloc amendment and get the bill to committee ASAP.

Government Orders

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Madam Speaker, there are a number of pressures today that erode confidence in democratic systems generally, and certainly in Canada, though we have a great democratic system, there are those pressures. One of the founding fathers of the democratic movement 250 years said that his greatest concern was that democracy would one day collapse under the weight of its constituents' demands, so that is certainly something that we have to keep in mind.

However, one of the greatest demands of constituents is a sense of equality in their voting power and in their voting privilege. No government and no prime minister have done more to recognize Quebec as a people and a nation than this government and this Prime Minister have, but the fact remains that as parts of the country continue to grow in population significantly there is under-representation. British Columbia is one of those, and the weight of voters in B.C. has been diminished.

There are other constitutional items, as the member for Edmonton—St. Albert has already outlined, that reach out and try to address some of these issues in provinces that are losing population. I wonder if the member could tell me, in regard to the calls he has had, if he has had an opportunity to reflect on whether there are some means that we should be using to communicate to Canadians in parts of the country where the population is diminishing that what they are witnessing is the ongoing evolution of demographic shifts here, not a diminishing of anybody's constitutional right to vote. Should there be some measures that we take to reach out and to point out the other constitutional provisions in areas of the country where the vote by numbers is diminishing somewhat?

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Madam Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board is quite right. Certainly populations and demographics distribute over time and there are ebbs and flows with provinces. I grew up in Saskatchewan, which has seen relative declines in its population over periods of history and then it was relatively stable for the last half century. Now we are seeing some population increases as a result of the significant economic growth in that province.

Certainly with respect to modern communications and the ability to phone and email members of Parliament from any part of the country, all Canadians can be represented by their own member, but also by other members of the House of Commons. I believe the bill is fair, it is a reasoned approach and it ought to be passed and amended.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government is sending mixed messages with regard to Bill C-12. If we think about what it is saying, it is trying to emphasize how important it is for this bill to go to committee and ultimately to continue through the process to become law. One can reflect on the fact that the Conservative Party has been in government for a number of years, and many would argue too many years, but that is another debate for another time. From what I understand, the bill has been on the order paper since April, yet today is the first day that members are afforded the opportunity to participate in second reading debate. One has to question the rationale and why it is the bill is before us today.

Most, if not all, members would recognize the importance of democracy and the manner in which members of Parliament or other parliamentarians are elected. There is a responsibility. I am really disappointed in the government's style of approach in dealing with this issue.

There is a responsibility for ministers to do their homework. I do not believe the minister has done his homework. There is a responsibility for the minister to have consultations to try to build a consensus. Different types of legislation will come before the House. The type such as the bill before us today is one that should be done in a more apolitical fashion.

Either the government House leader or the minister should have been having discussions with members of all political entities in the chamber to get a better understanding as to how we move forward in order to achieve the necessary consensus to make the changes that will be beneficial for all Canadians. Had the government approached it in that fashion, I would argue there would have been a higher sense of co-operation among the different political entities in the House of Commons.

If the minister had done his homework, as he should have, I suspect that having the bill pass quickly in a couple of hours in order for it to go to committee would have been that much more achievable. There are aspects of legislation the government needs to think twice about in terms of the type of work that has been done.

Whether it is Bill C-12 or reforms to our electoral laws, the onus is on the government to work with all political parties and build on that consensus. That point has been lost.

I had the privilege of working on electoral reform and Senate reform in different capacities. In fact, I was part of an all party task force just over a year ago that dealt with Senate reform. Actually, it was indirectly mandated through the current Prime Minister.

I bring that up because there is a great deal of merit in the way in which Manitoba initially attempted to deal with the issue. It was recognized that, given the very nature of the issue, it was important that legislators meet with the public. Public meetings were set up all over the province of Manitoba and a committee of individuals was put together. I happened to be the one representing the Liberal Party.

The committee went to different communities to hear first-hand what the public had to say about Senate reform and what role Manitoba should play. The government would have done well had it used a similar approach of working with political parties and seeking the opinions and thoughts of Canadians about legislation such as this.

● (1300)

It would be good to draw upon some of the comparisons. There is the whole issue of why one province has x number of senators while another province with a far greater population only has y number of senators. There seems to be some injustice.

The public, as a whole, within the province of Manitoba recognized that. It was great to be able to get the feedback, in terms of what real people had to say about that issue.

Government Orders

I listened very carefully to members from the government caucus and the Liberal caucus with regard to rep by pop. In theory, yes, rep by pop is a great way to go. However, we are a nation of different regions. We have to be sensitive to the constitutional history of our country. We have to be sensitive to the needs of the different regions, the uniqueness of all of our provinces. Whether it be Manitoba, P.E. I., Quebec or British Columbia, all provinces are unique in their own way, I would ultimately argue. In listening to the presentations from the public with regard to this issue, I found that the public was very sympathetic to those arguments. They understand that representation by population is a positive thing. They also were sympathetic, as I believe a majority of Canadians would be, to the rationale that was being used to try to justify the numbers. It did not mean they agreed with the numbers, but it meant they were open to some sort of fluctuation.

Canadians as a whole are very reasonable people. The government had nothing to fear by working with opposition parties and listening to what the public might have to say. There has been a great deal of reluctance from the current government to engage the public.

When I reflect on the by-election, the different styles in leadership amaze me. The Liberal Party has a leader who is prepared to go out and engage with people, whether it is at town hall meetings, Internet town halls, or just getting out into the community unscripted. Compare that to the little glass bubble the current Prime Minister seems to be in and the amount of control he insists on. I suspect maybe it was the Prime Minister's Office that said to the minister, "No, no, no. Don't go out and consult with the public because we might not want to hear what they have to say. We have our script and that is the script that has to be".

It is very clear that is the type of comment we hear with the current government, "Here is the course we are taking". It does not matter what is actually happening and what people have to say about legislation the government is talking about. The government is determined that this is the direction in which we have to go.

I respect that the government members said that this is an important bill. However, what is really lacking is any recognition that Canadians have a role to play in terms of providing input. I do not believe the government has factored that in. And there are other things the government could have done.

At the end of the day, as I say, if the government is not prepared to have an all-party working group go into the communities to get the feedback, we can work with the different political parties to try to get that consensus. In this way, at least those other political entities have the option to do the consultation, which I believe is critically important when we are making changes of this nature.

• (1305)

In my opinion, that is a lost opportunity, which is unfortunate. It could have taken advantage of that opportunity to go out and consult. I will go back to the task force. When we went into the community, often the media would take an interest and there would be a report in different media outlets. People were better informed and more in the loop in terms of what it is that the legislators were talking about. There was no big surprise at the end of the day.

The government caucus has lost that opportunity. There was an opportunity to go out in a fair and open fashion to engage people, perhaps in town hall meetings. In that way there would be a better understanding in terms of what it is the government is trying to do.

Instead, it is almost as if the government wanted to try to build on wedge issues, issues that would cause a division. That causes concern. I do not believe that is in the long-term national best interest. I would have much preferred a government that was prepared to work with the parties in the House of Commons and with the public in dealing with bills of this nature.

Representation is one of the fundamental pillars of our democracy. I expected better from the government of the day. I am disappointed that it did not do its homework. To add insult to injury, after waiting, as one of my colleagues said, 160 days or since April or however long it has been, the Conservative government expects everyone to give it a pat on the back and say, "Good job".

We know that the government has dropped the ball in terms of doing what it could have done to really improve democratic reform in the country. This is a very important issue. One of the great challenges we have as parliamentarians is trying to get more people engaged in the democratic process.

I had an opportunity a number of years ago in a different task force to deal with democratic reform at the grassroots level. Some interesting things came out of that.

We should be looking for ways in which we can have a healthier system. One of the recommendations that was brought forward was the idea allowing individuals to vote in malls. Generally speaking, it was felt that we need to make voting more accessible. In the last provincial election that is in fact what was done. Elections Manitoba allowed people to vote in locations where people were going to be, to make it more convenient. The system worked. People appreciated that.

There is so much more we could be doing to make our system that much better. Ultimately, I would argue that there is no such thing as perfect system. I think it was Winston Churchill who once commented on the overall ugliness in terms of how the parliamentary system works, but at the end of the day it was the best system in the world.

I believe, as many do, that we need to stand on guard and look at ways in which we can make our system work better. We need to look at ways in which we can improve the system. We need to look at ways in which we can engage people.

The more we engage people in a process like this one, the more interest they are going to have and the more they are going to want to participate in the process.

Government Orders

•(1310)

It always saddens me when I think of the number of young people who, for whatever reason, do not get out to vote. We could be doing so much more to engage our young people in the system. I suspect that if we brought a bill of this nature to a university campus or to a town hall meeting and young people were invited to provide their views on the kind of representation they want in our country, they would participate in the process. That is what we are missing. The government does not see the value of getting engaged with the public. It is good to see legislation that recognizes the need and tries to address that need but we could do so much more.

I encourage the government to step outside the box, step outside the Prime Minister's Office. The government needs to start thinking of ways to better serve Canadians as a whole.

Canadians should be engaged with respect to this legislation. A political party does not have the right to hijack legislation of this type and say that it is the only party that understands democracy and the way in which it works. All political parties have a vested interest in ensuring we have the best system in the world and in looking at ways in which we can improve upon it.

The government was wrong not to engage the different political parties. The government was wrong not to engage the public. As a result, I suspect the legislation is not as good as it could have been or as it should have been.

I am partial to this legislation but I personally appeal to government members that when they bring forward legislation in general that they look at better ways to get people involved in the process.

I would challenge the government to give serious thought to how we can improve the wonderful system that we currently have and to approach it with an open mind. By approaching it with an open mind and working within the system and engaging the people of our country, the system can be improved. We must never take it for granted.

One of the most touching things I have ever experienced happened one day inside the Manitoba legislature. As we were sitting on the front benches giving speeches, some vets were sitting behind us. It prompted me to remember that our veterans gave us the right to be where we are today. We should never take them for granted.

When it comes to issues such as this, it is important that we provide the best type of legislation we can so we can all feel good about the democracy in which we live and the democracy which we are proud to be a part of in this chamber, as I am.

•(1315)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government has consulted. In the last Parliament, the government introduced previous incarnations of Bill C-12, which gave Ontario 10 new seats, British Columbia 7 new seats and Alberta 5 new seats. There was much criticism from stakeholders, the opposition and the public about that bill. The government reintroduced the bill and made modifications based on

those consultations. Ontario will now get 18 new seats, British Columbia 7 seats and Alberta 5 seats.

As far as consulting the members of this House, that is what this public process is all about, that is what second reading is about and that is what committee work is about. This is part of the public consultation process. This is part of the process and we value the oppositions' input.

I have a simple question for the member. Will the Liberal Party of Canada support Bill C-12? If not, what will it say to all of those new Canadians, those visible minorities who are under-represented in this chamber? Only 20 members of this chamber are visible minorities when there should be 60. In 20 years, one-third will be visible minorities. Only 6% of the members of this chamber are visible minorities in a country where 20% of the population are visible minorities. What will the Liberal Party say to those new Canadians, those visible minorities who want a voice and a new Canada that wants in?

•(1320)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the Liberal Party supports democratic representation. The Liberal Party supports the need to engage people and would have loved to have seen more of a sense of co-operation in dealing with this legislation.

I am very familiar with the purpose and the reason we have second reading. It gives us the opportunity to provide some direct input. There is no doubt about that. However, I am not naive. I understand the benefits of a critic approaching a caucus or a House leader approaching a House leader to talk about the types of things they want to move forward on. We need to work with opposition parties in advance and look at bills that should be done in an apolitical fashion and doing them in an apolitical fashion as opposed to bringing forward a bill with one thought and then trying to say that any other changes need to be done through amendments.

The member made reference to consultations. What consultation was there in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, P.E.I. or any of the other provinces? Who did you actually consult with?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I would ask all hon. members to direct their comments through the chair rather than directly to other members.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to welcome our colleague from Winnipeg North, who is new to the House. His eloquence suggests that he is used to participating in debates. He gave an impassioned and eloquent speech that led us to believe he was going to vote against Bill C-12. To our surprise, when asked by our Conservative colleague, he said that he will support it. Why put on such a show if only to arrive at the same conclusion as the Conservatives?

Government Orders

All the same, he made some very important points in his speech. One of the things he reiterated was the need to consult the people and to consider the opinion of the opposition, of the other parties in this House. He is quite right about that. Ours is one of those parties. It represents the entire Quebec nation. On three occasions, the National Assembly of Quebec voted unanimously that this bill should not be adopted in the House of Commons. We convey the opinion of the National Assembly of Quebec. That is our mandate. Furthermore, two-thirds of Quebec's representatives in this House are members of our party, and we are opposed to the bill based on the will of the National Assembly.

I will close by commenting on the other strong point the member made in his speech, that is, the need to take into account Canada's regional differences. That has been done in the past. Why, this time, would that not be taken into account in the case of Quebec, which has been deemed a distinct society by Parliament?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, at times, legislators from across Canada unanimously pass different forms of resolutions. I think the House of Commons has a responsibility to at least listen to what is being said and, ultimately, to do the homework.

I have respect for the Bloc Québécois in the sense that a great number of Canadians support the Bloc. I respect all opinions. However, sometimes I must agree to disagree.

However, I would welcome the opportunity to do consultations in the province of Quebec on important legislation. I like to think that we are all inclusive. Much like the provinces of Manitoba and Quebec, we all have a very important role to play. I have always acknowledged the important uniqueness of the province of Quebec, a province in which I have ancestry.

• (1325)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the member for 20 years and I thought I had left him in Manitoba but now I think I will be listening to him for another 20 years. He certainly has a wealth of experience being part of a caucus of, at one time, 20, then 7, then 2 and then probably 1. He has been in all sorts of roles but it is a different environment here.

The all party committee process in Manitoba started with Gary Filmon and involved all the party leaders. Anytime there was a controversial issue, anything from Meech Lake to Charlottetown to smoking issues, the leaders sent it off to a committee and they managed to solve the issue. I have mentioned this to the government on many occasions but it is not resonating here. However, I am certainly familiar with it when the member talks about it.

In terms of second reading, when a bill went to second reading in the Manitoba legislature, we allowed any member of the public to make a 10-minute presentation and answer a couple of questions. We did not exclude anybody. That is not the way it works here. The committee only invites experts. When we send this bill to committee, which we should do, the committee will not invite all the people who the member thinks would show up, which is what he was used to seeing in the last 20 years. The witness list will be very limited and it will be experts only. That is a big change for him to get used to.

I would invite a response from him on this matter.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it is a novel idea to look across other jurisdictions and see something that has worked or appeared to have worked somewhat effectively and think, "Why not adopt it?"

I suspect there are many things that take place here in the House of Commons that the Manitoba legislature could learn. I also suspect that there might be the odd thing that the House of Commons could learn from the Manitoba legislature.

I would suggest that we should always look at ways in which we can improve the system. When we do that, we need to ensure that we have all parties working together when looking at things such as changing rules, the issues of Elections Canada, the Auditor General's office and things that are supposed to be truly independent.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have not had the opportunity to meet the new member for Winnipeg North but he and the previous member obviously train in verbal skills in Manitoba. I welcome him to the House of Commons.

I want to ask the Liberal member whether he and his party will support the time allocation request that we are making on this bill so that we can get it to second reading.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, having been here for two weeks, I do not want to claim to know all the rules as of yet. I would have to take that as a notice of sorts.

However, I think the Liberal Party does support the need for changes. I will leave it in the most capable hands of our House leader to work with the government House leader so that, from the Liberal Party's perspective, the right thing is done.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, today, my colleague from Joliette and I are taking on a great responsibility that is very broad in scope by conveying the Quebec consensus to the House. The only people who disagree with this consensus are the Conservative and Liberal members from Quebec who sit in this House.

Quebec's National Assembly voted unanimously against this bill three times, and again, just recently, in May. The 120 members of the National Assembly unanimously oppose this bill, and the 48 Bloc members, who account for two-thirds of the Quebec representatives in this House, share their opinion.

As did my colleague from Joliette, I would like to remind the members of the House of the negative and undemocratic effects that this bill will have. It will significantly reduce Quebec's political weight in terms of democratic representation. Bill C-12 is a bill on democratic representation that amends the formula provided in the Constitution for adjusting the number of seats in the House of Commons for each province after each decennial census or every 10 years.

This brings us back to the rule on proportionality under which some provinces are respected and others are not. We understand the rule and we agree with it.

Prince Edward Island's population is quite small. We accept the fact that the number of PEI members is not in keeping with the population-based proportion rules, which means that PEI members sometimes represent less than 50% of the number of voters that we have in each of our ridings, including the riding of the member for Winnipeg North. This is something we accept because we recognize that geographic characteristics should be represented by an electoral college that reflects the views of the people.

However, this representation should not be limited to geographical representation because if we had used that argument, we would have called for this long ago even though we recognize it for others. Some Quebec ridings, such as Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, are as big as Israel, for example. And then there is all of northern Quebec with ridings like Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. These areas are bigger than many countries. If that were a factor, Quebec as a whole would have far more members than it does currently. However, this criterion is applied to others because we acknowledge that the electoral college of certain provinces is large enough to represent an opinion. I do not know if the hon. member is following what I am saying. This criterion can be applied to certain regions, but not everywhere.

Should other criteria be taken into consideration? Special criteria should be considered in certain regions of the country.

Of course we want our own country, Quebec, but in the meantime we live in a country with a constitution, Canada. We have the right to representation that must take into consideration our distinct character, which is based on two major features.

• (1330)

One is our language, because we have that distinguishing characteristic. We are also one of the founding provinces of Canada. The other distinguishing characteristic is that since Confederation, there has always been a concern that Quebec not go below 25% of the number of seats. We are not asking for a majority of seats or a number that is disproportionate to our representation, but we must have an electoral college that is sufficiently representative to reflect these two distinguishing features: our geography and the special nature of the Quebec nation.

In Canada there are two nations: the Canadian nation and the Quebec nation. It took us I do not know how many decades to have that recognized here in the House. Once it was recognized, we realized that it did not mean anything to the Conservative government. Not only was the recognition meaningless, but the government stepped up its efforts to reduce Quebec's weight within the democracy. Bill C-12 is a perfect example. I was not here, because I had other responsibilities, but my colleague who spoke before me must have talked about that. We do not have any objection per se to additional seats for provinces whose populations have grown significantly, provided that there is still a rule on democratic representation that reflects the two distinguishing characteristics I mentioned earlier. Bill C-12 does not do that.

That is why my colleague from Joliette moved the amendment I will reread:

That the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), because the Bill would unacceptably reduce the political weight of the Quebec nation in the House of

Government Orders

Commons and does not set out that Quebec must hold 25 percent of the seats in the House of Commons.

Of course I see many parliamentarians look the other way or sigh impatiently whenever we talk about the Quebec nation. This illustrates just how indifferent this particular government is towards Quebec. It comes down to more than just the documents; it also shows in their attitude. Attitude speaks volumes about how our colleagues in the other parties do not want to take into account either the two polar opposites I was talking about earlier or the recognized tradition of ensuring that Quebec does not fall below 25% representation in the House.

On November 22, 2006, the Conservative government moved a motion to recognize the Quebec nation. Since then, the Conservatives have been systematically attacking the Quebec nation and have rejected every proposal to bring tangible expression to that recognition. They introduced Bill C-12, currently before us, which would marginalize the Quebec nation even further within the whole of Canada. The Prime Minister wants to continue reducing our political weight in the House of Commons. Thus, from the 36% of seats it had in 1867, Quebec will have only 22.4% in 2014. The Prime Minister who promised us open federalism is muzzling us instead.

I said this in a question earlier, but it cannot be overstated: we are debating a bill that is supposed to pave the way for even greater democracy and instead we are realizing that, in this debate, the expression of democracy, as expressed by the Quebec National Assembly, is being denied.

• (1335)

Quebec's National Assembly unanimously demanded withdrawal of Bill C-56, which gave 26 seats to English Canada and none to Quebec. I am talking about the previous bill, which in essence is the same bill. All the elected members of Quebec's National Assembly and the 49 Bloc Québécois members who make up two-thirds of elected Quebecers in the House of Commons, are calling for this bill to be withdrawn. In total, 87% of the elected members from the nation of Quebec are calling for this bill to be withdrawn.

Again, it is quite ironic that they claim to be expanding democracy for other regions in Canada when they are denying democratic expression from Quebec by all the elected members there. I am talking about 87%. There is something unacceptable about the way the government is acting. That is why we will repeat ad nauseum that this bill needs to be rejected and our amendment adopted.

I am not sure if the hon. members in the House are familiar with Benoît Pelletier. He was a cabinet minister in the Charest government in Quebec. He is a Liberal and a federalist and not someone who would lobby for the nation of Quebec to become a country. When he was intergovernmental affairs minister he said the following on May 17, 2007, when Bill C-56 was being debated. He was on the show *Maisonneuve en direct* talking about the number of seats in the House of Commons. This might interest the hon. member over there because if she ever intends to say something about this, she might not repeat what I am about to say. Mr. Pelletier said:

Government Orders

I appreciate that the House is based on proportional representation. But I wonder whether there might be special measures to protect Quebec, which represents the main linguistic minority in Canada, is a founding province of Canada and is losing demographic weight...Why could Quebec not be accommodated because of its status as a nation and a national minority within Canada?

I think that summarizes the situation. He is a federalist and a constitutionalist who teaches and was a minister in Mr. Charest's cabinet. He very eloquently expressed the feelings of all elected officials in Quebec and, of course, of the Quebec National Assembly.

Here, it is as though that did not exist. There is only one opinion that goes with that notion of federalism, and you either believe in it or you suffer the consequences. We have to believe in federalism, otherwise we will gradually end up in a funnel, where, democratically, we no longer have the ability to meaningfully express how we would like things to go. That is where we are today.

I remind members that, in response to the Conservatives and the Liberals voting against the Bloc Québécois motion to not pass the bill, the Quebec National Assembly adopted a third unanimous motion on April 22, 2010. I will repeat it, in the hopes that one day, people will listen to what Quebec has to say. It said, "That the National Assembly reaffirms that Québec, as a nation, must be able to enjoy special protection for the weight of its representation in the House of Commons" and asked "...the elected Members from all political parties [sitting in Ottawa] to abandon the passage of any bill whose effect would be to diminish the weight of the representation of Québec in the House of Commons."

● (1340)

An Angus Reid poll from April 7, 2010, also indicated that 71% of Quebecers were against such a bill and that barely 15% of Conservatives were in favour of it. In all of Canada, barely 37% of respondents were in favour of the bill, while 45% were against it. The rest remained silent. So once again, the majority is against it. The Conservatives and the Liberals always claim to be introducing a bill that would create a better democracy. But this debate contradicts the very idea of democracy and goes against the popular opinion in Quebec and the majority opinion in the rest of Canada. What are we supposed to make of that? As I was saying earlier, the goal is to limit Quebec's presence in Ottawa as much as possible, in terms of democracy, so that the government can continue to dictate what happens.

I will not go into all the arguments I have in mind. I will try to restrain myself as my time is limited. I would remind members that the government has acknowledged the existence of the Quebec nation, but that it refuses to deal with Quebec accordingly. It refuses to recognize that our nation has a language—French. It continues to use all its powers in an attempt to make Quebec bilingual. It refuses to ensure that corporations under its jurisdiction are required to respect the Quebec Charter of the French Language: 250,000 workers under federal jurisdiction work in Quebec without being subject to the Charter of the French Language. Even if it is one of the major political acts, one of the most important political measures, they just ignore it, they do not comply.

By continuing to promote multiculturalism, the Canadian government also refuses to acknowledge that the continuity of our national culture depends on our ability to ensure that immigrants embrace it. It refuses to recognize our society because it has

developed as a different nation. It even refuses to consider allowing Quebec to have a radio-television and telecommunications commission that would look after its own interests and its own challenges. It also refuses to limit federal spending power in Quebec's jurisdictions.

How does it manage to impose such views on Quebec? Conservative members from Quebec have made disrespectful statements about Quebec institutions. It is truly shameful. If I have the opportunity during the questions and comments period, I will talk about some of the statements made by the member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

In closing, because I may not have the time to do so later, I would like to wish all my constituents in Chambly—Borduas, as well as my colleagues here in the House, wonderful holidays and a very happy New Year.

I welcome any questions.

● (1345)

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Yesterday in question period a Liberal MP faulted the Conservatives for the lack of a prebudget report this year. The Conservative members of the finance committee want to complete this prebudget report and table it in the House. Conservative members of this committee will make themselves available in late December and early January for as many meetings as are necessary so this report can be completed.

I am therefore requesting unanimous consent to move the following: That notwithstanding Standing Order 83.1 the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to present its report on prebudget consultations no later than January 19, 2011 and when that report is deposited with the Clerk of the House, it shall be deemed to have been duly presented to the House.

● (1350)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the Bloc Québécois member and, although I found that he stated his position articulately, I disagree with that position.

[English]

I have a question for the member. He stated that the provincial division of Quebec in the House of Commons was guaranteed 25% of the seats. I want to know where in the Constitution that is indicated.

If we look at the preamble of the 1867 act, it says that Canada's Constitution should be similar in principle to that of the United Kingdom. In the Westminster Parliament in the House of Commons in the United Kingdom, representation by population is a fundamental principle. Section 51 talks about proportionate representation. In other words, the provincial divisions represented in the House of members should be proportionate to their populations as part of the Canadian whole.

In section 1 of the charter talks about a free and democratic society and section 3 talks about the right to vote. We cannot have a proper right to vote if an individual's vote does not count in the same way that votes in other parts of the country count.

What part of the Constitution guarantees Quebec 25% of the seats in the House?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Conservative member for his question, which allows me to provide clarification.

He is correct. This information is not found verbatim in the Constitution. However, in any legislative forum like ours, conventions develop over time. If he rereads the speeches and discussions that have taken place—we can provide him with some—he will see that there is a convention under which this minimum is respected.

That being said, he is right about the written text. Years ago, the rule of fair play also existed but we do not invoke it today because it has been broken so often here in the House. We saw an example of this earlier when a member tried to prevent me from being asked a question.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I invite the hon. member to show some trust. Just because the bill is bad and sets Quebec back does not mean that it is an attack on Quebec and all Quebecers.

I believe that this bill sets Quebec back in terms of representation simply because the bill is ill-advised. This does not mean that we have it in for Quebecers. I think the Conservatives simply did not do their work properly.

That being said and given that the bill has a negative effect on Quebec's representation, are we currently working on an amendment that will at least give Quebec the number of seats corresponding to its proportional representation?

Will the hon. member work with us to pass a bill that will strengthen and improve the Conservative bill so that it is more favourable to Quebec?

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, this question is important enough that we should not improvise. That approach was never suggested to us, yet the member for Winnipeg North spoke so eloquently about it earlier.

The opening part of my colleague's question worries me a bit. Often people tell someone they are taking something away for their own good. That is what it sounded like he was saying.

Government Orders

I know that was not his intention, but they are taking something away and saying that it is for our own good. But the feeling in Quebec is unanimous: it is not for our own good.

• (1355)

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Chambly—Borduas for his great speech about how Quebecers feel about this bill.

He underscored the question of the Quebec nation, which was recognized here in the House of Commons in 2006. I was one of those who was proud to see that, for once, our Parliament officially acknowledged that Quebec forms a nation within this large country called Canada.

I would like him to elaborate on whether it is important, given the date when the nation was recognized, that its political weight within Canada be maintained in terms of the proportion of members in the House of Commons.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Alfred-Pellan who does an excellent job for his constituents in this House and at home, I am sure.

The question might surprise some people, those who think it goes without saying, and therein lies the nuance of my colleague's question. We always have to repeat this over and over. There is a world of difference between recognizing a nation in a motion and recognizing a nation de facto through actions. To date, we have seen nothing in this Parliament since the 2007 recognition that would suggest that the members who voted in favour of that motion would like to give it any concrete expression. One member was even honest enough to admit that he was against it. It was the member across the floor. We were insulted and angry, but at least he was honest and consistent. He has not changed his perspective. But what were the others thinking, those who voted in favour of it?

[*English*]

NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I apologize to my colleague in the House of Commons.

Given that the second reading amendment moved to Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), earlier today makes it virtually impossible to send Bill C-12 to committee without the use of time allocation, I would like to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading of Bill C-12, An act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation).

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at this stage.

Statements by Members

SECOND READING

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do not think anyone in this chamber or any Canadian watching this could possibly miss the irony of the speech we just heard.

On this side, we believe, to the greatest extent possible, that the vote of every Canadian should carry equal weight. The irony is if the Bloc party had its way, it would have no representatives in the House at all.

How can the member stand and say that it is fair for a member in a riding like mine of 120,000 would have the same weight as a member in a riding of 35,000?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas has 30 seconds to answer the question.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, I will try to answer in 30 seconds if my colleague over there would actually listen, because if we were to apply what he said, one province would end up with one member instead of the four it has now. Some provinces, like Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, have greater representation. That is fine for geographic representation. He has to be consistent with his logic. If he had paid attention to my speech, he would have understood that there are two options: geographic situations and specific cases like those of the Quebec nation and the issue of the French language.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas will have two minutes left for questions and comments when debate on this bill resumes.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

COMMUNITY POLICING

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Madam Speaker, Armand La Barge, one of York Region's greatest communities leaders, has retired. He leaves behind a stellar 37-year policing career with York Regional Police, the last 8 of them as chief. His contribution to our region is immeasurable. Under his watch, York Region has become one of Canada's safest communities. His legacy is reflected in the actions he has taken toward improving the quality of life in our community. He took community policing to new heights. York Region now has a chief's youth council, a youth opportunities and leadership camp and the community safety village.

Armand La Barge will be remembered for his passion, his professionalism and his tireless dedication to his community. Under his leadership, the motto "deeds speak" has spoken loudly.

I invite all my colleagues to join me in congratulating Armand La Barge on a job well done.

MILITARY FAMILIES

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Rob Gasgoine is back at the rink and at the gym with his kids.

Major Robert Gasgoine was serving as officer commanding the tactical air control party in Kandahar since April, part of his exemplary 24.5-year military career.

We all know the tremendous sacrifices made by our serving CF personnel and their families. Spouses like Kathy manage their families, keep their jobs, keep the crazy schedules, drive their kids to everything and stay optimistic and productive, all the while waiting for the family to be reunited again. This is done with little complaint.

I know all members of this House will join me in thanking all of our Canadian military families and wishing them a fabulous and well-deserved Christmas. For those who are currently serving, we pray for their safe return and hope they have a wonderful Christmas together next year.

To the Gasgoines, to Rob, Kathy, Josie, Malcom, who is playing some great hockey these days, and Clara, it is great to see them together for Christmas. We thank them and all military families for what they do for Canada. And it is great to see Rob back at the rink.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INFORMAL CAREGIVERS

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to commend the invaluable work done by informal caregivers. With the vital care they provide, these people support their loved ones when they need it most. Informal caregivers look after an ill or disabled child or parent with generosity and compassion. Caregiving involves huge sacrifices and can have a serious impact on caregivers' income, health and professional and social lives.

At this time of the year, my Bloc Québécois colleagues join me in paying tribute to caregivers for their courage. We invite all the members of the House to work together to find solutions that will reduce the burden on informal caregivers, while respecting the jurisdictions of the provinces and Quebec, of course.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Madam Speaker, the outcome of the recent Canadian Wheat Board directors' election proved once again that farmers are overwhelmingly committed to maintaining a strong Canadian Wheat Board. Four of the five successful candidates are strong supporters of the CWB single desk marketing advantage.

I hope this House will join me in congratulating Stewart Wells, John Sandborn, Allen Oberg, Kyle Korneychuk and Henry Vos.

Farmers have made it pretty clear that they do not appreciate the Conservative government's relentless attacks against their venerated marketing board.

I would suggest that it is high time the government showed some respect for prairie grain farmers. It can start by immediately dropping the gag order prohibiting the board from advocating for the single desk; instructing our negotiators to take the wheat board off the table in the Doha negotiations; making it abundantly clear to the EU that our board will not be traded away in CETA; and moving quickly on the CWB's latest initial prices request.

I urge the Prime Minister to get off the farmers' backs once and for all and let them make their own decisions.

* * *

●(1405)

HOLIDAY WISHES

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Madam Speaker, as we wind down this year, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the constituents of Calgary East for the support they have given to me throughout the year.

I have had the honour of representing Calgary East for nearly 14 years. Although 14 years have passed, I am still as committed to defending the interests of and representing my constituents as when I was first elected in 1997.

I wish to recognize all the volunteers who have worked tirelessly to improve their community.

I would also like to thank my countless friends and supporters from all across the country who have assisted me in performing my duties.

As I reflect on this year, I would like to also thank my staff in Calgary and Ottawa. Their dedication has enabled my office to meet the expectations of constituents and Canadians alike.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to my family who have shown patience and understanding for me, in particular my wife, Neena.

I would like to wish happy holidays to all, merry Christmas and happy new year to all.

* * *

MOUNT ALLISON UNIVERSITY

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fall session for university students across the country is ending.

In my riding of Beauséjour, students from Mount Allison University are finishing their exams and preparing to hand in their term papers.

[Translation]

Those students have the opportunity to study at one of the best universities in the country.

[English]

This was proven when Mount Allison University in Sackville was once again named Canada's top primarily undergraduate university. I

Statements by Members

say once again, because it is the 14th time in the past 20 years it received this prestigious award.

[Translation]

I know many members of the staff and the faculty and I know how proud they are of the work they do.

[English]

This award confirms what many of us already know. Mount Allison University has outstanding students, world-class professors, staff and researchers and a well-deserved reputation for excellence.

To Robert Campbell, the President of Mount Allison University, and to the Chancellor, Peter Mansbridge, I say congratulations for a job well done.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, most Canadians know that lowering corporate taxes leads to more companies expanding, new businesses moving to Canada and therefore to more jobs for their children, friends and neighbours.

That is why this government has lowered these taxes by more than 30%.

Lower personal taxes leaves more money in the pockets of Canadians to pay down debt and, who knows, maybe even buy some Christmas presents.

That is why our Conservative government has lowered personal taxes by more than \$3,000 per year for a family of four.

Why then is this opposition coalition proposing higher, job-killing corporate taxes and higher personal taxes, including a \$75 iPod tax? That would be some Christmas present.

Is it that they are not in it for Canadians; they are just in it for themselves? Or is it that they simply cannot kick their addiction to big spending?

Canadians should be very careful that they do not accidentally end up with this job-killing group of pick-pockets after the next election.

* * *

[Translation]

BILL C-288

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on May 5, 2010, Bill C-288, to give new graduates a tax credit was passed by a majority of the members of the House of Commons. For the second time in less than three years, it has reached the Senate.

However, it has been debated only twice since it got there. Bill C-288 would help thousands of young students who want to study and stay in the regions, some of which are experiencing economic difficulties.

Statements by Members

The Conservative government is taking advantage of the fact that it controls the Senate in order to control its work. For the Conservative government to oppose such a measure is one thing, but recommending that the Senate block debate on Bill C-288 is unacceptable.

The Conservative government must drop its contemptuous attitude toward the will of democratically elected parliamentarians and immediately authorize debate on Bill C-288 in the Senate.

* * *

[English]

STERLING R. LYON

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise today to acknowledge the passing of the Hon. Sterling R. Lyon, former premier of Manitoba.

This distinguished Canadian proudly served the people of Manitoba for over than 40 years. His remarkable career saw him succeed in many diverse roles, notably as a crown attorney, a member of the legislature, an attorney general, a leader of the opposition, a premier and a judge of the Manitoba Court of Appeal. Sterling fulfilled all of these roles with great leadership and accomplishment.

Among other things, Sterling will be remembered for his firm belief in fiscal responsibility and prudent public investments. Over the years, his achievements and legacy have benefited his constituency, his province and all those who were privileged to work with him. His compassion and commitment to public service make a strong example to our youth in Manitoba and across the country.

I wish to extend our thoughts and prayers to his family, as well as the Manitoba PC caucus and party members at this time. I offer them our sincerest condolences as they mourn his passing and celebrate his remarkable life.

* * *

● (1410)

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the scientific evidence is mounting regarding CCSVI. More clinical trials are about to begin in the United States, and Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Newfoundland are taking action. More important, neurologists are quietly admitting that their patients are improving.

Canada needs clinical trials for CCSVI that are undertaken in multiple centres across our country, and Canada should be tracking the progress of Canadian MS patients, who felt forced to seek liberation treatment overseas, in a registry for efficacy, improvements in quality of life and side effects. Very quickly, we could have more answers regarding patients' progress at one, three, six months, et cetera.

More important, no Canadian should be denied follow-up care here in Canada. It is unconscionable, unethical and clearly a breach of "do no harm". Cancelling of appointments and mandatory tests, denial of treatment and threatening of patients must stop.

2010 IN REVIEW

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 2010 has been Canada's year.

We had the Vancouver Olympics and Paralympics, Canada's games. Our athletes won more gold medals than any country has ever won at a winter Olympics.

We hosted back-to-back gatherings of the G8 and G20.

We took the lead on child and maternal health, fiscal consolidation and deficit reduction, and financial sector reform. We made real progress, with Canadian solutions leading the way.

On Canada's 143rd birthday, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth was joined here on Parliament Hill with 100,000 Canadians.

What I am most proud of is our government's success in steering our country through the worst global economic crisis since the second world war. Canada's economic action plan is creating jobs and strengthening our communities.

What a great year it has been for Canada, our gold medal country.

* * *

THE SALVATION ARMY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on streets and in shopping malls across the country, a very familiar sound is being heard, the trademark bells of the Salvation Army's annual Christmas kettle campaign.

The campaign helps the Salvation Army provide direct, compassionate, hands-on service to more than 1.6 million people in Canada each year. Of course this important campaign would not be possible without the help of thousands of volunteers who donate their time to collect donations at kettles across Canada. Next week I am happy to do my part and help ring the bells at a kettle in Sudbury.

Local businesses in my riding of Sudbury have also been instrumental in raising awareness and funds for the cause. One of Sudbury's radio stations, KICX 91.7, is hosting its annual nickel drive radiothon tomorrow. It will be auctioning off donated items, with 100% of the money raised going directly to the Greater Sudbury Salvation Army.

Many thanks to KICX and other community partners who make Christmas a little brighter for those in need.

* * *

[Translation]

2010 IN REVIEW

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a great year it has been for Canada.

At the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, Alexandre Bilodeau from Quebec started the ball rolling, and our Olympic and Paralympic athletes won more gold medals than any other country in the history of the Winter Olympic Games.

Canada hosted the G8 and G20 and was proactive with its maternal and child health initiative as well as in financial sector reform, where it proposed Canadian solutions that inspired the whole world.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II celebrated Canada's 143rd birthday here in Ottawa, with more than 100,000 Canadians.

But what I am most proud of is the success of our Conservative government in guiding the economy through one of the worst financial crises since the second world war.

The economic action plan was extended from October 31, 2010, to October 31, 2011, and will thus continue to create jobs.

2010 was an exceptional year. Congratulations to the architects of this success. Merry Christmas and a happy new year.

* * *

• (1415)

USE OF WOOD IN FEDERAL BUILDINGS

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, all the Conservative members, including those from Quebec, voted against Bill C-429 regarding the use of wood in federal buildings, thereby turning their backs on Quebec and its forestry industry. Unfortunately, although they unanimously supported our initiative in the past, the Liberals and New Democrats were split on the issue.

The Quebec Conservative members are not only unable to defend the interests of Quebec but they also do not understand the needs of Quebec or its regions.

It is disappointing to see all the Conservative members oppose Bill C-429, a green initiative that would have helped Quebec's forestry industry get back on track and helped to improve the government's poor track record with regard to energy, without the need for any new investments. However, the forestry industry and its workers can count on the Bloc Québécois, which will not give up. The electoral reckoning is not far off.

* * *

[English]

THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the House, the government was tired in bad need of a rouse.

Nothing had been done since Christmas before, like the wishes of Parliament they chose to ignore.

They spent borrowed money and drove up the debt, \$20 billion alone for a single-sourced jet.

Wasting taxpayers' dollars through tough fiscal times, spending billions for prisons on unreported crimes.

Oral Questions

They squandered surpluses the Liberals left in this place. Their mess would make Mulroney turn red in the face.

They stuck it to seniors, to students and vets, spent millions on a fake lake, and showed no regrets.

But there were some Canadians whose spirits were lifted, like contractors on West Block whose contracts were gifted.

With a wink of the eye and a brush of the nose, an old Tory hack was the builder they chose.

Our finances are grimer, our world perception weaker. They have been more naughty than nice, wouldn't you agree, Mr. Speaker?

They have shown no compassion, no heart and no soul. All they deserve Christmas morning is a big lump of coal.

* * *

OPPOSITION COALITION

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP have confirmed what Canadians have known for a long time, namely that they will try to form a coalition government after the next election. That coalition would be led by, as one can guess, the Liberal leader.

The Bloc leader confirmed in his year-end press conference that his party is open to forming a coalition with the Liberals and the NDP. The NDP leader did the same thing in his year-end press conference.

The actions of the coalition parties this fall further prove what we have been saying all along. The coalition is alive and well, and it is dangerous.

The coalition parties have delayed a bill that gets rid of pardons to violent criminals. They are working together to introduce a \$75 iPod tax. They want to give employment insurance to parents of criminals, and they are promising to defeat our Conservative government's efforts to prevent human smuggling.

The coalition is very real and Canadians have every right to be afraid.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

DISABILITY BENEFITS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 15 days from today, more than 400 long-term disability pensioners from Nortel will be cut off their benefits. They will be destitute, quite literally out on the street. But it does not have to be that way. This Parliament is sovereign. Where the law is deficient, the government has the power to fix it.

The member for York West has legislation ready to go to save long-term disability pensions.

Will the government agree to deal with this matter before it begins its Christmas holidays later today?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we look forward to having a chance to review and examine this legislation. As it was just tabled today, it would be premature to comment on its specifics.

Oral Questions

I think I can speak for all members of the House in expressing our deepest sympathies to the recipients in question. There is no question that this is an unfortunate situation. That is why our government has joined with the opposition to study proposed legislation designed to alleviate the difficulties these Canadians are facing. Unfortunately, the opposition's legislation that has already been before the House would not solve the problem.

• (1420)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, excuses do not help.

This issue involves a choice: on one side, hundreds of ordinary Canadians who have worked hard, paid their taxes, played by the rules, and now have the misfortune of Parkinson's disease or other disabilities; and on the other side, the moneylenders, the bondholders, the big banks and the wealthy, the comfortable people who will have a very nice Christmas this year. The Conservatives have made their choice. They stand with the privileged elite.

How can they look themselves in the mirror knowing some disabled pensioners will be going hungry?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, previous legislation tabled by the Liberals on this very point was examined by the Senate. Experts before the Senate committee were in agreement that their legislation would not help the very people that they purport to want to help, that it is retroactive, that it would undo a court decision and a court agreement that cannot be undone. That is what the experts said.

On this side of the House, we want to help people with real legislation and real action, rather than the false hope that the opposition Liberals tend to gallivant around near Christmastime.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has had a year and a half, and retroactivity is not a bad thing when the cause is right.

This is all about choices. The Conservatives could help families take care of sick or disabled loved ones, but instead they risk \$6 billion on extra corporate tax cuts. They could invest in students so everyone who gets the grades gets to go to college or university, but instead they risk \$13 billion on American-style mega-jails. They could help families cope with household debts and make ends meet, but instead they risk \$21 billion on stealth fighter jets.

Why are the Conservatives so stone deaf to ordinary Canadians?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard loud and clear what Canadians' priorities are. That is why we put in place an economic action plan, a two-year plan to get Canadians back to work.

I must share with Canadians who are watching that not everyone in this House supported that plan. Some who did not support it now want to see it extended. We are still struggling with the thought process there.

Since July 2009, over 441,000 more Canadians have a job. That is an important thing at Christmas.

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all year long we have been seeing examples of obscene wastefulness: \$300 million and a military base here, \$1 billion and a fake lake there, \$6 billion for major corporations, on top of \$10 billion for megaprisons. To satisfy the whims of the ministers, the government finds billions of dollars, but when NGOs ask for a simple one-week extension of the application deadline for a homelessness program? Impossible, it says. Why?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have done something that has not been done in the House in a very long time. We made a full five-year commitment to fund housing and homelessness. We do that with the provinces. We work with them.

We recently developed new, more accountable programs and policy to deal with the situation, recognizing that the problems can best be solved close to home. We are working with the provinces closely to make sure that the needs of the homeless can be addressed on a local basis, where it matters most.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative deficit has reached a record high. Consultants, ministers and lobbyists have benefited and the middle class will be stuck with the bill. We already saw it with seniors, we saw it with artists and now we are seeing it with the homeless.

The Conservatives say that family care and the demands of the forestry industry cost too much. But what about moving a military base over a question of ego and purchasing jets without an open competition? They claim that is no big deal because they will borrow.

Where do they think their deficit comes from?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will take no lessons from the Liberals on deficits, because we all know in the House how the Liberals offloaded their deficit in the 1990s on the backs of provinces. They offloaded the debt onto the poor people and those who needed medical care. We have promised Canadians that we will not repeat the mistakes that the Liberals made in the 1990s.

Oral Questions

•(1425)

*[Translation]***ST. LAWRENCE SHORELINE PROTECTION**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is being incredibly insensitive to flood victims when he says that financial assistance from the federal government would be limited to what is covered by existing agreements. The government can take action over and above the Canada-Quebec agreement. For example, it could restore the shoreline protection program and take the extraordinary measure of using the Canada Economic Development fund as it has done in the past.

With Christmas fast approaching, will the Prime Minister agree to do more than the bare minimum by restoring the shoreline protection program and providing financial assistance out of the Canada Economic Development fund to help the victims?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I offer our condolences to the families and businesses affected by the flooding. The first responders have done a good job. If the Government of Quebec needs help, we are always ready to respond. However, there are programs in place to provide financial assistance in such situations. This government will ensure that those measures apply in this case.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not understand or is pretending he does not understand. Over and above the Canada-Quebec agreement, there are programs the federal government has used in the past to help people in situations like this one. People do not need condolences; they need action. For example, the government could restore the shoreline protection program that was abolished in 1997. The problem people are experiencing is affecting the shorelines. The government should restore this program instead of pretending not to understand.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not a political issue; it is a problem that is affecting certain regions, families and communities. I can assure the House that the government will help them in every way possible, in accordance with its programs and legislation.

* * *

FLOODING IN EASTERN QUEBEC

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government could go beyond the Canada-Quebec agreement and immediately help the people in eastern Quebec who are dealing with terrible weather. For example, the government could fully assume its responsibilities in terms of marine infrastructure. The Rimouski wharf needs a new breakwater, and the wharf in Carleton-sur-Mer was seriously damaged in the recent storms.

Will the government do its duty and reinforce wharves in eastern Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we certainly extend our sympathies to the families and businesses along the St. Lawrence that have been affected by this disaster. At DFO, we are currently reviewing and cleaning up

damage at all our small craft harbour facilities and will be responding accordingly.

As I mentioned yesterday, under Canada's economic action plan, our government has invested significant funds in small craft harbours across this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when floods hit Rivière-au-Renard in 2007, in addition to the help provided under the Canada-Quebec agreement, Canada Economic Development provided special financial aid to businesses and non-profit organizations through a special temporary initiative.

Given the scale of this catastrophe, does Canada Economic Development intend, as in 2007, to provide financial help to the businesses and non-profit organizations that were hit by these terrible floods?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again this morning I spoke with the mayors, the regional officials we are currently working with. The Minister of Public Safety and his department are in direct contact with the Government of Quebec. As we all know, the provincial government is responsible for taking the lead. Of course, we congratulate everyone who has helped so far, but the Bloc is in no position to teach us anything about how to treat the regions of Quebec.

* * *

PENSIONS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on this last day of the session, the Conservatives have nothing better to do than quietly announce something that will affect the lives of all Canadians. The Conservatives are preventing Canadians from saving more by refusing to increase Quebec and Canada pension plan contributions and benefits. Pension plans have proven their worth. The private sector is risky and expensive.

Why are the Conservatives putting the interests of the financial industry ahead of improving the public system?

•(1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada pension plan is managed under agreements between the federal government and the provinces. Discussions are under way to improve this program in the long term. These discussions are continuing, but the federal government will negotiate these things with its partners in the system.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are being gouged. They are paying as much as \$25 billion in annual fees to the private sector managers of RRSPs. Fees on mutual funds can eat up 35% of an RRSP over its lifetime. The CPP management costs are a tenth of those of the private sector. This deal is great for the captains of finance, but it is a bad deal for Canadians who are trying to save for their retirement.

Oral Questions

Which financial sector lobbyist got to the government to convince it that banks and fund managers needed help more than Canadians who are trying to save?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the leader of the NDP is talking about, but there is a discussion between the federal government and the provinces concerning the creation of pooled pension arrangements for small business owners and for individual Canadians.

This is a vehicle that a lot of small business owners are interested in, and which the provinces I know are interested in exploring. This is an extremely positive development for all who are concerned about the future of the Canadian retirement income system.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister seemed to be rather clear earlier today in saying that the government was not moving forward with the improvements to the Canada pension plan, something that we need right now because Canadians are at record levels of household debt.

Only 25% of people working in the private sector even have a company pension plan. RRSPs overwhelmingly benefit those who have a lot of money to save, but the squeezed middle class families are having a tougher and tougher time ensuring that they are going to be able to live with some kind of retirement security.

Why does the government not deal with the Canada pension plan now? Most provinces are behind it. The government should show some leadership and help out the middle class.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the announcement made by the Minister of Finance today is precisely because many Canadians do not have a company pension plan. It is to allow changes at both the federal and provincial levels to make the creation of a wider variety of vehicles possible.

As for the Canada pension plan, I think all are agreed that while we will continue to look at improvements, now is not the time for CPP premium increases.

Mr. Speaker, while I am on my feet, it may be the last time in 2010, so let me take the opportunity to wish you and all members of the House a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Joyeuses fêtes et bonne année.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 720 days ago the Conservatives promised to reform pensions within 90 days. Some 365 days ago the finance minister told his provincial counterparts he would get right on it.

Today's announcement is that their plan is to encourage other people to get a plan.

How can the government find the money for over 9,000 signs, find \$130 million for partisan advertising, find \$12 million more for the cabinet and the PMO, but cannot find the resources to fix pensions?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during our consultations with Canadians, and that is something I would like to stress, that we actually consulted with Canadians on what they needed, what they wanted and what their wishes were. Millions of Canadians may now,

under this process, have access to a private sector pension plan that they did not have before.

The pooled registered pension plans would increase access to pension plans to many, many Canadians. The proposed plan would help self-employed, would allow small businesses to team up and pool their resources. That is what Canadians want.

* * *

• (1435)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the failure and incompetence of the Conservative government is becoming legendary. One of the worst is how it is failing our veterans. It skims money from surviving family members of Agent Orange victims. It fired the last veterans ombudsman for standing up for veterans' rights. Returning war heroes have to use food banks and charities. Yet the Minister of Finance can overspend his own budget by almost half a million dollars, and the Prime Minister's Office gets millions more.

When can Canada's military heroes, our veterans, expect to get some respect from the Conservatives?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rather surprised by the hon. member's comments when we are the ones correcting their mistakes.

I want to remind the hon. member that when the new veterans charter came into effect, a number of people were not entitled to the permanent monthly allowance because of an error, a gap that they had introduced in their bill. This government is in the process of rectifying the situation. Soon, 3,500 people will benefit from that. It is this government that has just provided an additional \$2 billion for veterans.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government loves to try to use victims to get votes, but underneath the rhetoric, there is nothing but cuts and efforts to recreate California's disastrous prison system.

The Conservatives slashed 41% from the victims of crime initiative, cut more than 70% from crime prevention efforts that stop victimization before it happens, and refuse to lift a finger to get answers on missing and murdered aboriginal women.

Oral Questions

Why do Conservatives have \$1 billion for a weekend of G8 blowouts, but have nothing but cuts and empty speeches for victims?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it remarkable that that individual would stand in the House and pretend to talk about victims, pretend to express an interest in victims when his consistent pattern of protection has been in respect of criminals and how to ensure that criminals can get out on the street as quickly as possible.

That individual, as can all Canadians, should examine his voting record, compare it against the record of this government and they will see that it is our government that stands for victims.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Here is the difference, Mr. Speaker. I do not pretend; I actually base what I do on the facts.

I take a look at what people like the former ombudsman, Steve Sullivan, had to say about the government. Steve Sullivan said that its plan on crime did nothing for victims, “That it was unbalanced, that it would not work”.

Yet the government continues to pursue an agenda that has failed in California. It has failed in every jurisdiction in which it has been tried. It sucks money from health care, from education, from every priority.

Yet when the minister talks about things like pardons, something that he said the Conservatives would fix four years ago, something that they have been sitting on for four years, it is all talk and no action.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has had quite an agenda this fall. The Liberals started off by wanting a crackdown on people who do not fill out the census. The next week they wanted to decriminalize marijuana. Then they pleaded that they had an aversion to the short titles of bills. Finally, they said their solution to violent crime was to call a public inquiry.

How about this as a novel idea for them: How about putting violent criminals who victimize innocent Canadians behind bars for a change? How about that suggestion?

* * *

[*Translation*]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after Sébastien Togneri, two other members of the Minister of Natural Resources' political staff when he was the Minister of Public Works tried to prevent the release of documents requested under the Access to Information Act.

Will the Minister of Natural Resources admit that the Togneri incident was not an isolated one and, in fact, this was an actual system that he put in place within his department to violate the Access to Information Act?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Access to Information Act is very clear. All ministerial aides and all public servants, no matter where they work, are expected to

comply with the law. The case of the former minister is before an independent commissioner and we are waiting for the report.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the minister, the dismissal of Mr. Togneri resolved the issue of the obstruction of the Access to Information Act. However, such is not the case. The fact that his political staff made at least two other attempts to get around the act constitutes evidence that there was an actual system in place.

Will the Minister of Natural Resources abide by his own definition of ministerial responsibility and resign?

● (1440)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the aide tendered his resignation, which the minister accepted. Everyone, even public servants and political aides, is responsible for abiding by the act. That is the real position of this government.

* * *

RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has been hiding the Deloitte and Touche report for months. This report has finally been turned over to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. The Bloc Québécois demands that it be officially made public to shed light on the Conservatives' ideological hijacking of Rights & Democracy.

If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, will he demand that his members allow the Deloitte and Touche report on Rights & Democracy to be released?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, because Rights & Democracy is an arm's length organization, such decisions are made by the board and the president. At its most recent meeting, the board decided to make this information available. My parliamentary assistant has urged the committee leaders and members to release this report, and that will be done at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is stubbornly refusing to commit to officially releasing the report on Rights & Democracy. That is probably why the Conservative chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development unilaterally cancelled the committee meeting scheduled for this afternoon, without giving any reason for his decision. The committee had decided to meet even though the House was to adjourn.

What is the government trying to hide?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was approached this morning by members of the foreign affairs committee and consulted on future meetings. I asked what was the motion that governed those meetings. I was told the following. This is the motion:

That, in the event of an adjournment of the House prior to the meeting scheduled at 3:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 16, 2010, officials from Rights & Democracy be asked to appear from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. instead, subject to their availability.

Oral Questions

I was told they were not available. I further advised the members that the House is adjourning at 3 p.m. today and all committees will cease operations.

* * *

[Translation]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in October, the Minister of Natural Resources avoided having to resign by passing the buck to Sébastien Togneri. We now know that his office had a system for obstructing access to information requests. There are two possibilities: either he was aware of it and he should resign immediately, or it was done behind his back and he is incompetent, and therefore he must be held responsible and resign immediately.

Did he know what was going on, yes or no?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Access to Information Act is very clear. Every official and political assistant is required to comply with the law. That is the government's policy. The minister has handed over the file to an independent commissioner, who works for the House of Commons. She will study the facts and we are waiting for her report.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not one, not two, but three of the minister's top staffers took part in this illegal information suppression scheme. The minister pretended he had no idea what was going on. That is possible if only one staffer were involved, but there were three, if not more. This has the smell of a cover-up.

How bad does it have to get for the Prime Minister to act? Just what is it going to take for the Prime Minister to fire that minister?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister has been very clear. At no time was this assistant acting on instructions.

There is a policy. There is a law. The Access to Information Act is an important one. It was this government, as a matter of first priority, that sought to expand the access to information laws of this country.

We especially wanted to expand it to the Canadian Wheat Board. However, the Liberal Party fought the efforts to bring a little light where there was darkness every step of the way. Thank goodness Parliament did the right thing and expanded the access to information law.

* * *

• (1445)

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the hearings of the procedure and House affairs committee on the leak of the draft report, the chair has repeatedly ruled out of order all questions related to the business activities of Russell Ulyatt, the former staffer of the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar,

and there is a concern that Mr. Ulyatt was using House of Commons office space and resources to subsidize his private business interests.

Will the chair of the procedure and House affairs committee inform the House whether the upcoming agenda of the committee will allow for questions related to Mr. Ulyatt's business to be asked without interruption?

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always special to get a question.

The procedure and House affairs committee has always worked in a very collegial manner and been able to study what has been given to it by the House. The Speaker has given us no option but to look at a breach of privilege, and that is exactly what we have been doing.

Certainly there have been a lot of fishing missions by some of the other members of the committee. What we need to look for is why there was a breach of privilege and how a secret document got out. That is what the committee has been looking at and it will continue to do so.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, something is not adding up.

The Conservative chair of the committee is going to extraordinary lengths to shut down inquiries into whether or not Mr. Ulyatt was running a private business out of the office of the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar.

That member is now under the supervision and watchful eye of the government House leader who escorted her to the committee meeting today.

There is a serious allegation of potential fraud being conducted out of the member's office. Will the government be calling in the RCMP to investigate?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite would like us to call in the RCMP whenever we have things we are concerned about, we are always prepared to look at that, let me assure the member of that.

If the member opposite has any information that might assist the Liberal chair of the Board of Internal Economy, I would encourage her to provide it.

As for the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, this member has acted in a highly ethical fashion. She acted decisively. She does a fantastic job for her riding, for Saskatchewan and for Canada, and we are very proud to have her as a member of this team.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Bloc suggested that the consensus in Quebec was to maintain the long gun registry. Nothing could be further from the truth. It may be the consensus in Plateau-Mont-Royal, in the Bloc leader's riding, but a few kilometres away from the Champlain Bridge, the consensus is hardly that we should be treating law-abiding hunters and farmers as criminals.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Natural Resources tell us what the government has done to defend Quebeckers in the regions?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during this last parliamentary session, we have seen that the Bloc has disregarded the values and interests of Quebeckers in the regions. The Bloc voted against jobs in our regions. The Bloc voted against farmers and hunters in our regions. The Bloc voted against victims of crime in our regions and voted against consumers in our regions. When the time comes to defend Plateau-Mont-Royal, the Bloc is there, but there is more than that. That is why the Conservative Party, under the leadership of this Prime Minister, is the only option to defend Quebeckers in the regions.

* * *

[*English*]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the International Red Cross in Afghanistan, despite the American troop surge, the war is spreading and there is no end in sight. Civilian casualties are once again on the rise and increasing numbers of Afghans are fleeing the violence. United States intelligence reports an inability to defeat the Taliban as long as it enjoys sanctuary in Pakistan. This is not the time to commit our troops to three more years.

When will the government, along with its Liberal allies, come up with a real plan to work toward peace and nation-building in Afghanistan?

• (1450)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after Canada ends its combat role in July of 2011, as has been widely publicized, we have announced we will continue to provide trainers in the future in the Kabul area.

Clearly even the member opposite would have to acknowledge that security is the vital element for all the development, all the progress we are seeing in Afghanistan in a very difficult situation.

However, we certainly send our best wishes and our hearts and thoughts are with the members of the Canadian Forces and all the civilians who are working to achieve these goals in 2011.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Kandahar is accusing Canada of handing out contracts to companies that are corrupt, and he is right. The security company that we have hired to protect the Dahla Dam is linked to drug trafficking. Last February, the contractors turned their guns on Canadian security personnel.

The Conservatives talk tough against corruption, but, in fact, the government is paying the protection racket. Afghans are desperate to get rid of corruption. Why are the Conservatives allowing aid money to land in the pockets of corrupt officials? Why do they not crack down on that crime?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. There are no Canadian dollars going directly to any government official in Afghanistan. Canada is concerned with the corruption issue in Afghanistan. However, all Canadian dollars do not go directly to the government and all

contracts using Canadian funds follow the Government of Canada's contracting policies and Treasury Board guidelines.

CIDA is always actively challenging corruption and includes anti-corruption clauses in its agreements.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs told us there were more pros than cons to concluding an agreement with the U.S. government for establishing a “security perimeter”. The minister might be right. However, it is not up to him alone to make that decision. A debate and a vote in the House are required.

Since negotiations on the “security perimeter” have a scope comparable to that of a treaty, will the Prime Minister promise to hold a debate and a vote on the issue before signing anything?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so glad to see that the Bloc Québécois is interested in economic issues. The Bloc Québécois is barely ever interested in this issue, while our government has made the economy and job creation a priority ever since it got here. We will continue in that vein with the Americans, while protecting our borders against terrorist attacks.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the same goes for the free trade agreement with the European Union: the government is refusing to be transparent. The Bloc Québécois was the first federal political party to call for such an agreement. We recently met with the Quebec government's negotiator during caucus. The problem is that we got more information about the negotiations with Europe from Quebec's negotiator, Pierre Marc Johnson, than we are getting from the Minister of International Trade.

Does the minister not find that unusual?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are quite proud of having initiated these free trade talks with the European Union. This is something that proffers to Canadians a potential benefit to our economy of \$12 billion annually. What does that mean? It means should we deliver on this agreement, we will have thousands of new jobs for Canadians, the families of Canadians will be more prosperous and the Canadian economy will continue to grow.

It is this focus on the economy, jobs and the prosperity of Canadians that is the focus of this government. That is why we are delivering on a free trade agreement with the European Union.

Oral Questions

● (1455)

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for three days MPs have been debating a question of privilege raised against the CIDA minister who misled the House on the recommended KAIROS funding. For three days, the minister has refused to respond.

Three days ago, her former parliamentary secretary had the integrity to admit that he had misled the House when he spoke on behalf of the minister. Will the minister show the same level of integrity and admit that she misled the House?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Cooperation shows integrity each and every day she enters the House of Commons. She brings a great deal of integrity to work on international development. People around the world and people in our country are very lucky to have her on the job.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, apparently, the minister cannot answer for herself.

Here is a little problem. I have sitting on my desk in front of me, in black and white, a response to an order paper question, signed by the parliamentary secretary for the minister, saying that it was CIDA's decision to cut the funding for KAIROS. This is unequivocally false.

How can Canadians have any confidence that the government is telling them the truth, in light of these serious ethical relapses? Will the Prime Minister demand the minister's resignation?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I remind the House that the parliamentary secretary has apologized.

I also want to remind the House, particularly at this season, our thoughts are with those living in developing countries. That is why we want to ensure that those living in poverty are actually seeing the benefits of the international co-operation and development of Canadians. That is why we want to ensure that next year more children will be helped in their health and more mothers will stay alive, more children will be educated and more people will be fed.

* * *

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that two more Conservative political staff blocked the release of access to information documents. This again reminds us of the failure of the Conservatives to fulfill their promise to be accountable and transparent in government.

Do Conservative political staff routinely argue with public servants who are mandated to uphold access to information laws? How many more are involved in this kind of partisan interference? Has anyone other than Sebastien Tognieri been held responsible?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the individual in question has submitted a resignation. The minister immediately accepted it.

The law is very clear. Every ministerial assistant and every public servant is expected to comply with the law. It was this government, as a matter of priority, that sought to expand the access to information law, and we did. When we wanted to bring a little light to the Canadian Wheat Board, every New Democrat member stood and wanted to keep the cloak of darkness at the Wheat Board. What do they have to hide at the Wheat Board and the NDP?

* * *

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Competition Bureau gave us one more example of the current government choosing Bay Street bankers over Canadian families.

The bureau says that Visa and MasterCard are using their market power to squeeze higher fees out of businesses. The government's voluntary approach to credit card rates is not working for anyone but the credit card companies. Guess who pays the price in the end? Working families.

When will the government end credit card gouging?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, anything we have done to try to protect consumers, the NDP have voted against it. I wanted make everyone aware of that.

We heard concerns from small businesses and from consumers. We put in place a code of conduct that was welcomed by business and by consumers. The opposition voted against that. Obviously they are against consumers and business. We understand that. We do not know why.

We continue to monitor compliance and any possible violation will be investigated.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has a strong record of improving retirement income for Canadians.

First, we have lowered the tax bill for seniors and pensioners by over \$2 billion a year, including pension income splitting and the tax-free savings account.

Second, we consulted and introduced landmark reform to federally-regulated pension plans.

Third, as over 90% of pensions are provincially regulated, we worked with our provincial and territorial counterparts on larger retirement income issues.

Could the parliamentary secretary update the House with the latest news on this front?

Oral Questions

● (1500)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his great work in chairing the finance committee.

We are proposing a landmark, new, pooled registered pension plan. This plan will support millions who do not now have access to private sector pension plans. This will support small businesses, those who work for small businesses, as well as the self-employed. Unlike the Liberals' bureaucratic proposal that they have put forward, and that has already been rejected by the provinces, we are in partnership with the provinces in any pension plan.

* * *

MINING INDUSTRY

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has failed to protect jobs in Thompson and bring Vale to the negotiating table. Vale Inco's decision to shut down its nickel smelting and refining operations in Thompson will eliminate 500 jobs and stifle economic development in northern Manitoba.

The city of Thompson and the province has made it clear that they want to work with Vale to find a solution. Will the nine Manitoba Conservative members finally show some leadership, speak up and stand up for Manitoba?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is a little late to this situation. I have been in contact with the company and with the Manitoba government. The Minister of Public Safety himself attended a meeting with officials of the Manitoba government to see what the federal government could do.

We are on top of this issue. Why are the Liberals not and why is she not? That is what I would like to know.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development refuses to renew the pilot project to ease the criteria for employment insurance. She says she would rather offer more training. We agree with the idea of training more workers. However, to access Emploi Québec programs, you must first qualify for employment insurance. Consequently, many unemployed workers will not have access to benefits or training.

Will the minister stop laughing at the unemployed and renew the pilot project to ease access to employment insurance?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the objective of most of our pilot projects is to encourage people to return to work as quickly as possible because it is best for them and their families. This pilot project did not work well and did not meet these objectives. Therefore, we let it die.

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the environment commissioner said that the federal government was failing in its responsibility to monitor water bodies on reserves.

Grassy Narrows First Nations was recently revisited by Dr. Harada 35 years after his initial visit. Residents still suffer from mercury poisoning and 43% of the people have mercury levels three times over the Health Canada limit.

When will the government finally take first nations' health seriously and take concrete steps to monitor water quality on reserves?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as soon as we took office, our government sought to improve access to clean running water on reserves. That is why our government has invested significant resources in water and waste water infrastructure in aboriginal communities. Thanks to these efforts, much progress has been made.

In 2006, there were almost 200 identified high-risk water systems on reserves. Today that number is below 50. However, more needs to be done and more will be done.

In addition to our investments, our government has introduced another bill, Bill S-11, and I hope all members of the Senate will support that bill when it comes time.

* * *

OPPOSITION COALITION

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Bloc and the NDP confirmed what we have known all along: that after the next election they will try to form a coalition government, led by the Liberal leader. The Bloc House leader and the NDP leader made reference to that fact during their year-end press conference.

Could the Minister of Justice please comment on the pieces of justice legislation and other legislation before this House that these coalition parties have obstructed this fall?

● (1505)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there certainly was no shortage of slowdowns and obstructions from members of the coalition, but I hope, now that there is a break coming, that they will take time to sit down with their constituents and explain to them why they did not support our efforts to get tough on violent crime in this country.

I hope one of their new year's resolutions will be to start supporting this government's efforts to crack down on crime and to stand up for victims and law-abiding Canadians, just for a change.

*Points of Order**[Translation]***POINTS OF ORDER**

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period, I witnessed a verbal exchange that took place apart from the recorded debate. I would like to give the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie the opportunity to do the honourable thing right away: to apologize for the comments he made about the member for Beauport—Limoilou, and I quote: “You are as ignorant as you look.”

As Quebeckers, we make an effort to encourage women to enter politics and we insist that people respect them. His comments were unparliamentary, inappropriate and especially right now, when we are about to break for several weeks.

I simply and respectfully ask the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie to rise in this House and apologize.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what I said was that the Bloc was the first party to call for a free trade agreement in 2000.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: I will explain. They always yell when we are talking, and then they act innocent and try to play Pontius Pilate. That will not work. What I said was that not knowing that showed ignorance. And if someone shows ignorance, it means they are ignorant. Attacking and mocking someone shows ignorance. It is being ignorant. That is what I said. If I am not allowed to say that, then let me know.

[English]

The Speaker: Order, please. I wish to indicate to all hon. members that if they wish to have an opportunity to wish one another happy holiday greetings, they can come to room 216 forthwith.

[Translation]

This is the end of the session. Best wishes to all of you and happy holidays.

[English]

Happy New Year and Merry Christmas.

It being 3:08 p.m., pursuant to order made Wednesday, December 15, the House stands adjourned until Monday, January 31, 2011 at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 3:08 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, December 16, 2010

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

Environment and Sustainable Development

Mr. Bezan	7355
Motion for concurrence	7355
The Speaker	7355
Division deemed demanded and deferred	7355

Petitions

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Scarpaleggia	7355
------------------------	------

Seniors

Mr. Laframboise	7355
-----------------------	------

Human Rights

Mr. Siksay	7355
------------------	------

Justice

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj	7355
------------------------	------

Animal Welfare

Ms. Crowder	7356
-------------------	------

Aboriginal Affairs

Ms. Crowder	7356
-------------------	------

Multiple Sclerosis

Ms. Foote	7356
-----------------	------

Canada Post

Ms. Foote	7356
-----------------	------

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Gravelle	7356
--------------------	------

Preventive Withdrawal

Ms. Demers	7357
------------------	------

Animal Welfare

Mr. Oliphant	7357
--------------------	------

Aviation Safety

Mr. Bevington	7357
---------------------	------

Mining Industry

Ms. Ashton	7357
------------------	------

Multiple Sclerosis

Mrs. Hughes	7357
-------------------	------

Afghanistan

Mr. Maloway	7357
-------------------	------

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lukiwski	7358
--------------------	------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Ensuring Safe Vehicles Imported from Mexico for Canadians Act

Ms. Finley (for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities)	7358
Bill S-5. Third reading	7358
Mr. Jean	7358
Mr. Szabo	7359
Mr. Maloway	7360
Ms. Hall Findlay	7360
Mr. Laforest	7361

Mr. Maloway	7361
Mr. Wallace	7362
(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed) ..	7362

Democratic Representation Act

Mr. Fletcher	7362
Bill C-12. Second reading	7362
Mrs. Crombie	7364
Mr. Christopherson	7365
Mr. Shory	7365
Mr. Garneau	7365
Ms. Bennett	7366
Mr. Fletcher	7367
Mr. Christopherson	7367
Mr. Albrecht	7368
Mr. Paquette	7368
Amendment	7370
Mr. Fletcher	7370
Mr. St-Cyr	7371
Mr. Christopherson	7371
Mr. Christopherson	7371
Mr. Fletcher	7374
Mr. Siksay	7374
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	7374
Mr. Chong	7375
Mr. McKay	7376
Mr. St-Cyr	7376
Mr. Wallace	7377
Mr. Rathgeber	7377
Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	7378
Mr. Day	7379
Mr. Lamoureux	7379
Mr. Chong	7381
Mr. Lessard	7381
Mr. Maloway	7382
Mr. Wallace	7382
Mr. Lessard	7382
Mr. Chong	7384
Mr. Rodriguez	7385
Mr. Carrier	7385
Notice of time allocation motion	
Mr. Baird	7385
Second Reading	
Mr. Albrecht	7386

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Community Policing

Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	7386
------------------------------------	------

Military Families

Mr. Savage	7386
------------------	------

Informal Caregivers

Mr. Lessard	7386
-------------------	------

Canadian Wheat Board		Mr. Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	7391
Mr. Atamanenko	7386	Mr. Lebel	7391
Holiday Wishes		Pensions	
Mr. Obhrai	7387	Mr. Layton	7391
Mount Allison University		Mr. Harper	7391
Mr. LeBlanc	7387	Mr. Layton	7391
Taxation		Mr. Harper	7392
Mr. Benoit	7387	Mr. Layton	7392
Bill C-288		Mr. Harper	7392
Ms. Deschamps	7387	Ms. Coady	7392
Sterling R. Lyon		Mr. Menzies	7392
Mr. Bezan	7388	Veterans Affairs	
Multiple Sclerosis		Ms. Coady	7392
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	7388	Mr. Blackburn	7392
2010 in Review		Justice	
Mrs. Wong	7388	Mr. Holland	7392
The Salvation Army		Mr. Toews	7393
Mr. Thibeault	7388	Mr. Holland	7393
2010 in Review		Mr. Nicholson	7393
Mr. Blaney	7388	Access to Information	
Use of Wood in Federal Buildings		Mr. Paquette	7393
Mr. Bouchard	7389	Mr. Baird	7393
The Government		Mr. Paquette	7393
Mr. Cuzner	7389	Mr. Baird	7393
Opposition Coalition		Rights & Democracy	
Mr. Fast	7389	Mr. Dorion	7393
		Mr. Cannon	7393
		Mr. Dorion	7393
		Mr. O'Connor	7393
		Access to Information	
		Mr. Scarpaleggia	7394
		Mr. Baird	7394
		Mr. Easter	7394
		Mr. Baird	7394
		Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs	
		Ms. Ratansi	7394
		Mr. Preston	7394
		Ms. Ratansi	7394
		Mr. Baird	7394
		Firearms Registry	
		Mr. Généreux	7394
		Mr. Paradis	7395
		Afghanistan	
		Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	7395
		Mr. MacKay	7395
		Mr. Dewar	7395
		Ms. Oda	7395
		Public Safety	
		Ms. Deschamps	7395
		Mr. Cannon	7395
		International Trade	
		Mr. Laforest	7395
ORAL QUESTIONS			
Disability Benefits			
Mr. Goodale	7389		
Mr. Clement	7389		
Mr. Goodale	7390		
Mr. Clement	7390		
Government Priorities			
Mr. Goodale	7390		
Mr. Menzies	7390		
Government Spending			
Mr. Proulx	7390		
Ms. Finley	7390		
Mr. Proulx	7390		
Mr. Menzies	7390		
St. Lawrence Shoreline Protection			
Mr. Duceppe	7391		
Mr. Harper	7391		
Mr. Duceppe	7391		
Mr. Harper	7391		
Flooding in Eastern Quebec			
Mr. Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	7391		
Mrs. Shea	7391		

Mr. Van Loan.....	7395	Mining Industry	
International Co-operation		Ms. Neville.....	7397
Mr. McKay.....	7396	Mr. Clement.....	7397
Mr. Baird.....	7396	Employment Insurance	
Mr. McKay.....	7396	Mr. Lessard.....	7397
Ms. Oda.....	7396	Ms. Finley.....	7397
Access to Information		Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Siksay.....	7396	Ms. Crowder.....	7397
Mr. Baird.....	7396	Mrs. Glover.....	7397
Financial Institutions		Opposition Coalition	
Mr. Thibeault.....	7396	Mr. Armstrong.....	7397
Mr. Menzies.....	7396	Mr. Nicholson.....	7397
Pensions		Points of Order	
Mr. Rajotte.....	7396	Oral Questions	
Mr. Menzies.....	7397	Mr. Blaney.....	7398
		Mr. Duceppe.....	7398

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>