



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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VOLUME 145 • NUMBER 138 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, March 3, 2011**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 3, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

[English]

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[English]

### FREEZING ASSETS OF CORRUPT REGIMES ACT

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (for the Minister of Foreign Affairs)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-61, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of the property of officials and former officials of foreign states and of their family members.

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

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## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

### JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

In accordance with the order of reference of Wednesday, February 9, 2011, the committee has considered Bill C-576, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (personating peace officer) and agreed on Wednesday, March 2, 2011, to report it without amendment.

### TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities in relation to Bill C-511, An Act respecting the reporting of motor vehicle information and to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act (improving public safety).

[Translation]

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

## BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions amongst the parties and I believe that if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, at the conclusion of today's debate on the NDP opposition motion in the name of the member for Hamilton Centre, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, March 8, 2011, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member for Vancouver East have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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## PETITIONS

### AIR CANADA

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I bring forward a petition from constituents who have expressed a great deal of concern regarding Air Canada and the act that was to protect the overhaul maintenance bases, particularly in Winnipeg as well as Mississauga and Montreal.

To be very clear, it was the intent of the law, when it was passed, that these overhaul and maintenance facilities would be maintained by Air Canada and owned by Air Canada. It is the opinion of many, including those individuals who have signed this petition, that Air Canada needs to be held accountable to the law to protect these jobs.

These jobs are of good quality and play an important role in the aerospace industry in Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario. The petitioners ask that the Prime Minister hold Air Canada accountable to the law.

*Business of Supply*

[Translation]

## LOW INCOME HOUSING

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by nearly 500 of my constituents from Trois-Rivières regarding the renovation of low income housing. We know that there are 65,000 low income households in Quebec who are waiting on renovations to improve their quality of life. We know that the housing stock is valued at \$7 billion and that there has been a lack of investment in the maintenance of this housing, which was built in the early 1970s.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to make the required public investment to enable the Société d'habitation du Québec to complete its renovation plan for low income housing, which includes covering an accumulated maintenance deficit.

[English]

## AFGHANISTAN

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by dozens of Canadians calling for an end to Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan.

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

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, money that could have been used to improve health care and seniors pensions 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 upon the Prime Minister to honour the will of Parliament and bring the troops home now.

[Translation]

## LOW INCOME HOUSING

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by the people of Hull-Aylmer, who are calling on the Government of Canada to make the required public investment to enable the Société d'habitation du Québec to complete its renovation plan for low income housing, which includes covering an accumulated maintenance deficit.

These petitioners are urging the government to meet this social housing objective, in order to improve the quality of life of a number of households.

\* \* \*

● (1010)

[English]

**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]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

## OPPOSITION MOTION—REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP)** moved:

That: (a) the House recognize the undemocratic nature of the current form of representation in the Parliament of Canada, specifically the unnecessary Senate and a House of Commons that does not accurately reflect the political preferences of Canadians;

(b) the House call on the government to (i) propose amendments to the Referendum Act in order to allow the holding of a special referendum at the same time as the next general election, (ii) put a simple question, as written by the Special Committee for Democratic Improvement, which would allow Canadians to vote to abolish the Senate;

(c) the House appoint a Special Committee for Democratic Improvement, whose mandate is to (i) engage with Canadians, and make recommendations to the House, on how best to achieve a House of Commons that more accurately reflects the votes of Canadians by combining direct election by electoral district and proportional representation, (ii) advise the government on the wording of a referendum question to abolish the Senate; and

(d) the Special Committee for Democratic Improvement shall consist of 12 members which shall include six members from the government party, three members from the Official Opposition, two members from the Bloc Québécois and one member from the New Democratic Party, provided that the Chair shall be from the government party, and

(1) that in addition to the Chair, there shall be one Vice-Chair elected by committee members, who shall be from an opposition party;

(2) that the members to serve on the said Committee be appointed by the Whip of each party depositing with the Clerk of the House a list of his or her party's members of the Committee no later than three days from the passage of this motion;

(3) that the quorum of the Special Committee be seven members for any proceedings;

(4) that membership substitutions be permitted to be made from time to time, if required, in the manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2);

(5) that the Committee have all of the powers of a standing committee as provided in the Standing Orders; and

(6) that the Committee shall report its recommendations to this House no later than one year from the passage of this motion.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to not only move my motion but also to debate it.

New Democrats, and probably most members of the House if they were to admit it, accept the fact that Canadians believe that our Parliament is broken and that we need to do something about it rather than tinkering around the edges. We need to make profound changes that will actually bring modern, true democracy to Parliament Hill.

The current Prime Minister has quite a track record of commenting on the Senate. Prior to the current position he holds, it had been his position that the Senate is a relic of the 19th century. We agree with the Prime Minister on that.

However, it is a relic that was put in place for a very specific purpose. It was created to ensure that Canada's elite, the power brokers of the day, those that have, are protected from whatever the unwashed masses might do should we actually give them control of this country, control of the economy, and control over the laws that govern our day-to-day activities. The Senate was put there to keep this place in check. We believe it is time to remove that, get rid of the Senate, and focus on making this place as democratic as it can be. That is the solution as far as we are concerned.

Citizens in this country go from rage to laughter at the situation that we have in our current Senate. That is why it has been known for many years as the "taskless thanks". Under our Constitution, the Senate is a body that is actually superior to this place. However, there is one little missing piece in that place, the absence of democracy.

I would like to say upfront that there is one exception to the comments that will be made, and that I will make, about unelected senators. In fact, there is one who was elected. Although I acknowledge the exception of the one senator who was elected, I do remind the House that that senator will never have the word "re-elected" appearing after the word "elected" because there is no requirement for that senator to go back to the people and ask, "Am I doing a good job? Am I doing the right thing? Are you happy with what I've done?" I accept that there is an exception there, but it only goes to a certain degree. The whole issue of accountability and reporting to the very people who provided the mandate to be there in the first place is missing.

I also want to say that there are independent senators in that place. Although not many, there are independent senators who go out of their way to maintain that independence and try to keep at arm's length from the partisan aspects. However, that is a very small minority.

An important comment I would make at the outset is that this is not about individual senators. There will be comments made about them. To some degree, they have to be accountable for their actions and what they are doing over there.

However, today is not about individual senators. In fact, I have the greatest admiration for most of the ones with whom I have worked. In particular, a certain senator from Saskatchewan who is a lawyer, a former judge and ambassador, and the co-chair of our Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association, does a magnificent job and is a great Canadian. I am very proud to represent Canada with her and the others on that team. That does not change the fact that this hon. senator still does not have the democratic mandate to be affecting our laws and deciding on whether or not this country will have laws that protect people or whether we have an economy that represents ordinary working people. Senators do not have that mandate. As good as that Canadian is that I am talking about, she still does not have that mandate.

• (1015)

There are some who would argue that by going to an elected Senate, we will solve that entire problem. However, we are arguing here today that if Canadians focused on this issue, we could convince them that the best thing to do is to abolish the Senate completely and focus on bringing proportional representation to the

### *Business of Supply*

House of Commons to more accurately reflect the political will and decisions of the Canadian people. That is what this is all about.

The government has put forward some bills and it looks like its ideas are not going very far. People are asking why they are doing this now. The government is trying to do something and people can see that it is not getting anywhere, and so what is the point? Why are they wasting their time trying to do that? It is too complicated.

Why do we not just go ahead and elect senators and keep the Senate there? It is because we all know that going to an elected Senate, first, would be just as complicated and just as difficult as abolishing it. We also know that it would create gridlock in this place. It was a real eye opener for the Canadian people, and certainly for this party, when Bill C-311 was unilaterally killed without debate, or at least not much if there was any, after being passed by the House twice.

We believe, rather than setting up a system that would complicate things even more by creating permanent gridlock, we ought to abolish that place completely.

How do we go about that, because it is so complex? We could stand up a fleet of constitutional lawyers who would tell us how difficult that would be to do. Agreed. Anything to do with the constitution and this place and that place is complicated. That is a given, but running away from the problem will not solve it.

We in the New Democratic Party are saying that if we have a big problem like this that is so important to the future of the country, why do we not go to the "bosses" and ask them what they think. The bosses in this case are the Canadian people.

We are suggesting that we put a referendum before the Canadian people, a simple question. We believe the first question that needs to be asked if we are to look at changing things is, "Do you still want a Senate, yes or no?" If the answer is yes, then we can move on and start talking about what that would look like and engage Canadians in that discussion. We believe that in an open and fair political battle, we could win that one, because the number of people in Canada who believe that it should be abolished is growing. However, if we put that question to the Canadian people and they said, "No, we do not want the Senate any more", we believe we could move very quickly to implement the will of the Canadian people, because that is where all power derives from in this country, in the will of the Canadian people.

The Prime Minister said he would not appoint anybody who was not elected to the Senate. Let me just give a brief description of some of the people the Prime Minister has appointed, without mentioning names, as that is not my thing. I do not have much time, and so I will just list some of them: a Tory organizer was appointed to sit in cabinet as a Quebec representative, which we all remember; a former director of the PC fund and chair of Tory leadership and policy conventions was appointed senator; as were a Tory campaign director for 2006 and 2008; a former chair of the Conservative Party's fundraising; a former chief of staff to Preston Manning; and an unsuccessful candidate in 1993 and 1997.

*Business of Supply*

That is one of the problems here. The Prime Minister said he would not appoint anyone and then turned around and only appointed, for the most part, with a couple of exceptions, good, loyal Conservatives. That may make the Conservative benches happy, but all it does is put the lie to the claim that the other place is non-partisan. That is not true.

To continue, a former Conservative MP, defeated in the 2008 election, and another unsuccessful Conservative candidate in the 2008 election were also appointed. What is it with the Conservatives who cannot get into Parliament through the front door, but as long as they are good buddies with the Prime Minister of the day, they get to come into Parliament through the back door? Of course, the nice thing about that is they never have to go back to anybody. One bended knee request, and it is over.

• (1020)

There are a few more. We have another unsuccessful Canadian Alliance candidate, and yet another. We have a former president of the Conservative Party, the Quebec co-chair of the Prime Minister's own 2004 leadership campaign, and the Prime Minister's former press secretary. We have a former Newfoundland Progressive Conservative cabinet minister, a former Ontario Progressive Conservative cabinet minister, a New Brunswick Progressive Conservative cabinet minister, another unsuccessful Conservative candidate and yet another, and the list goes on and on.

The Liberals are no better. The Liberals right now, to the best of my knowledge, and if I am wrong I will correct it publicly, have their national campaign co-chair as a senator, their Nova Scotia campaign co-chair as a senator, their New Brunswick campaign co-chair as a senator, and their leader's Alberta and British Columbia outreach coordinators as senators too.

What is interesting about that is that it speaks to the leader's Alberta and British Columbia outreach, but if a senator is to provide a sober second independent thought, how can it be that a senator can also somehow be tied to the leader of the official opposition? There is no politics over there, though: they are all just good Canadians, reflecting soberly with sober second thoughts.

Why do they have a whip? When did we need to start whipping independents? They have a government House leader. We know that a government House leader's job is to shepherd government legislation through the Senate, yet government legislation is partisan. How can that be? There is the leader of the official opposition. How can that be? How can all of these things exist and yet at the same time we can have this independent sober second thought? How?

It is time to give the Canadian people their chance to kill that undemocratic chamber and make this place more democratic. That is what this is about.

As for the other piece of this, it is not as sexy and will not get all the headlines. We knew that. However, in many ways, the proportional representation aspect of this is arguably even more important than the Senate, because the decision about what happens with the Senate will be taken here. We need to make sure that everywhere here is democratically elected and actually reflects the will of the people. This House does not do that right now.

We have a system, and we believe it is time to end it, where if a party goes into a general election and gets 40% of the vote, it gets 100% of the power. What kind of democracy says that 40% of the vote gives a party 100% of the power? Right now, ours does. Right now, that is the way that first past the post works.

Some people are saying that the reason we want proportional representation is that we are one of the smaller parties, that it is the only way we will get into power, et cetera, all of which may or may not be true. However, I would remind the government members who may want to use that argument that in Germany, where they have proportional representation, it is the right wing that has formed a coalition to reach a majority government. So if it is a plot, a secret conspiracy, to help the left and the NDP, we need to rethink our strategy here. That does not seem to be a guarantee with this system.

What is a guarantee, though, is having people's votes reflected. Right now there are hundreds of thousands of votes cast in a general election that virtually do not count. In my own riding, I hope that all of those who voted for me are happy but all of the people who voted against me are unhappy, and where is what they wanted reflected? Where is it? It is legitimate, too.

Just because one's favoured candidate does not win, does not mean that one's vote is worth less than somebody else's vote. Yet that is what our current system does.

• (1025)

If we had proportional representation, under one of the more prevalent models, here is how it would help the Conservatives. Granted, the Conservatives would have fewer seats. They would have 119. However, in terms of democracy and representing the will of the Canadian people, the 26% of the votes they received in Toronto would have elected members for them. The Conservative Party received 26% of the votes cast in Toronto but did not get one seat. That is not an accurate reflection of the entire electorate in Toronto.

The Liberals would have won 83 seats. They would have gained a few. However, more importantly, in the 2008 election, the Liberals had 28% of the votes in south central Ontario but did not get a single seat. That is not right.

The NDP would have won 56 seats. Granted, that would be an increase. Fair enough, but the important thing is that 25% of the vote that it got in Saskatchewan would have been reflected in a seat from Saskatchewan. How can a party get a quarter, a full 25%, of the votes cast and have nothing to show for it?

The Bloc would have had 31 seats. What is interesting is that in 2008 the Bloc received 38% of the Quebec vote but got 65% of the Quebec seats.

The Green Party I want to mention. Based on the last vote, the Greens would have had 17 seats, because they received 6.8% of the vote, and yet there is no Green voice here. Yet the Bloc got 10% of the national vote and got 49 seats. Think about it: the Green Party got 6.8% and no seats, and the Bloc got 10% and 49 seats.

The system just does not work. It does not work for Canadians. It certainly does not work for women, aboriginals and minorities.

People are somewhat concerned about how complicated the system might be. Well, it is certainly no more complicated than trying to figure out what is going on between here and that place over there. We know that Canadians are pretty good at dealing with strategic voting, so they are not going to have any problem, in the NDP's opinion, mastering proportional representation. It is in 74 other countries already.

When people vote, they will get two votes. One will be for their local candidate in their geographical riding. People will cast their votes for the person they want to be their MP for their area, just like now, except there is a way that we can polish the first past the post system. Then people will get a second vote, allowing them to pick their party preference. Then, at the end of the day, there will be a calculation made.

One of the models that has been looked at is the two-thirds/one-third system. Two-thirds of the seats would be like these, and one-third would come from the PR lists. Then the proportion of everybody's vote, as I have already said, would be reflected in the House. There would be the candidate of people's choice and a reflection of the party weight in the House, thereby giving people the democracy they are craving, demanding and looking for.

I urge my colleagues to look at adopting this motion. It is a bite-sized measure. It is saying that we should take one step at a time, that we should put the question about whether the Senate should exist to the Canadian people and that a committee should engage Canadians in modernizing our democracy and bringing proportional representation to this place we love.

• (1030)

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his impassioned remarks and for bringing forward this important topic.

The government recognizes that the Senate needs to be reformed and we are taking steps to allow it to be reformed, including term limits and senatorial elections.

I wonder if the member would agree that abolishing the Senate, which is what the NDP is proposing, is not possible in the current political context where vast agreement among the provinces would be needed and huge constitutional discussions would need to be held, which is just not realistic.

With respect to PR, I wonder if the member would be open to having a discussion on senatorial selection, which is Bill S-8 in the other chamber, if we suggest a framework. It does not need to be a first past the post election in the upper House if that moves forward. It could be some sort of PR system. I wonder if the member would be open to the government and the provinces engaging in discussions on how senatorial elections could happen.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for staying here and listening to our comments. The minister and I have worked closely together. While we have a huge gap in terms of what we believe Parliament should look like moving forward, I have the greatest respect for him as an individual. In my experience with him so far, he is a man of his word and I am very pleased to work with someone of his calibre.

### *Business of Supply*

Having said that, I will jump into the gap between the minister and I.

I will answer the minister's last question first. I hear what the minister is saying and I fully understand why he asked that question. Notwithstanding that we could make the Senate better, our party policy is, and has been forever, that we do not need it. We do not need the kind of gridlock that will happen. Let us make no mistake that people from this House will run for that House and when they get there they will utilize every constitutional power they have, and that is the upper House. The only reason it works right now is that it dare not use all the power it has or this would be Egypt.

We want to go with our first preference, which is to improve the House of Commons so that it has proportional representation. We want to eliminate the second House. When the minister says that it is not possible, it reminds me of the old joke that one cannot get there from here. Everything is possible. The Constitution is there to serve the people, not the other way around.

• (1035)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP has been in government in the province of Manitoba since 1999. A couple of years ago, it put together a committee made up of seven members of the New Democratic Party, four members of the Conservative Party and I happened to be the Liberal representative at the time to deal with Senate reform. We held consultations in every corner of the province of Manitoba. The general consensus was that a reformed Senate would be better than an abolished Senate. For provinces like Manitoba, there is a vested interest in ensuring there is representation in Ottawa based on regions. There is a great deal of value to that.

I presented a minority report in which I argued for proportional representation. The biggest stumbling block was the NDP which wanted first past the post.

We need to be realistic. We need to do what is in the best interests of all regions. Provinces like Manitoba could have a valued Senate if it were reformed in the proper way.

There is an alternative and the alternative is not to abolish the Senate. We need to listen to the people who took the time to express their opinions to the all party committee in Manitoba. Does my colleague think we should be listening to what the people in Manitoba said?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, since the main thread through the member's question was about consulting the people, I would assume that he would be very supportive of at least the second part of our motion, which is to strike a committee to engage with Canadians in terms of how we can modernize this place.

I respect everything the member said but I also want to respect what the people in the other nine provinces and three territories have to say. I would also like to know what the expressed national will of Canada is.

*Business of Supply*

This is not at all to give the back of the hand to the work in Manitoba, which is a positive contribution, but we cannot do it province by province. Part of the problem is that the government is trying to do it piecemeal. What we are saying is that we need to ask Canadians one fundamental question, which is whether there should even be a Senate, and then we can take our marching orders from there.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Hamilton Centre for such a great overview of this issue and a very passionate speech on why we need to engage in democratic improvement.

He did mention that proportional representation is a real benefit for electing women. I think he said that 74 countries already have proportional representation and that in those elected assemblies we have seen an increase in representation from women. In this House of Commons, it has been an ongoing struggle. We are still at about only 20% representation in this House.

I wonder if the member could explain why a system of proportional representation actually increases the diversity of elected bodies, such as the House of Commons, and ensures that women are getting elected, as well as other members of Canadian society who right now are completely under-represented in this place.

• (1040)

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, it has been shown in a number of examples that the first thing that happens is that there are more women, more aboriginals and more minorities in Parliament to reflect the population of our country.

The reason that happens is that when Canadians have that second vote for the party, the names of the candidates on the lists of each of the parties are there for them to see. We would hope that we would build in federal laws that would dictate the governance of electing people to those lists so that we would all have the basic fundamental tenet of democracy and that it would not just be the whim of party leaders to put their buddies on the lists. All that would do is replicate what we are doing in the Senate.

We want to ensure there is a level playing field in the hope that, and this is what actually happens and we hope it would happen here, parties wanting to appeal to the electorate, of course, are putting on women, minorities and aboriginals and electing them to their list, and then, from there, they would find their way here. The reason for that is that the current system, as has been shown in study after study and is plain common sense, is stacked against women. There are so many challenges, and I know there are some who will argue that. Nonetheless, the responsibilities for families still fall mostly on women. Women still make less money, so there is less disposable income to invest in a political career. There is a whole host of real challenges and blockages that have prevented women from getting here. What gives? Over 50% of the population is women but there are less than 20% in the House. That is a major deficiency.

One of the benefits of proportional representation is that it would, if we take the example in other countries, increase the number of women, aboriginals and minorities in this House, and that can only make it stronger.

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to the opposition

day motion on electoral reform and Senate abolition that was moved by the hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

The motion that we are considering calls on the House to recognize the undemocratic nature of the current form of representation in the Parliament of Canada. It asks that the government propose amendments to the Referendum Act in order to allow the holding of a referendum on the Senate abolition at the same time as the next general election. It also calls for the establishment of a special committee on democratic improvement whose mandate would be to engage with Canadians and make recommendations to the House on how to implement a new electoral system that would combine direct elections with electoral districts and proportional representation.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. member for moving this motion. As Minister of State for Democratic Reform, I am always pleased to have a robust discussion about democratic reform issues and I look forward to today's debate.

[English]

While I am grateful that today will bring attention to democratic reform issues, I am disappointed that we will be spending time debating the reforms proposed in this motion, rather than working together to achieve real and attainable goals that this government has already set out on this topic.

For example, I point to the premise that representation in the Parliament in Canada is somehow undemocratic. Canada has a long history of democracy and Canadians are lucky to enjoy the very healthy system for which we all can be very proud. For example, all Canadians over the age of 18 hold the right to vote, there are free and fair elections and the administration of such elections is overseen by the independent Elections Canada. Elections are held on a regular basis, which allows citizens to hold government to account.

Therefore, the comment that this place is undemocratic just does not hold water, especially comparing Canada to other countries. Canada was compared to Egypt earlier. That is just not fair to Canadians or even to the people of Egypt because they are really fighting for even the seeds of democracy.

I would also like to talk about the electoral boundaries. These boundaries are redrawn on a regular basis by an independent commission that ensures ridings are designed in a fair, non-partisan way.

Finally, we have Elections Canada that provides for secret ballots, regulates political financing and ensures the integrity of the entire electoral machine.



*Business of Supply*

Despite all the positive aspects of a democratic system, I do agree that there are fundamental elements that can be improved, and that is the principle of representation by population. The government introduced the democratic representation act to ensure that representation in the House of Commons would be fair and that Canadian votes, to the greatest extent possible, would carry equal weight.

The House of Commons no longer reflects fair representation of all provinces. This is particularly the case in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. The democratic representation act would amend the constitutional formula for the re-adjustment of seats in the House of Commons so that future adjustments would better reflect the democratic representation of faster growing provinces while protecting the seat counts of other provinces.

For example, the province of Ontario would receive approximately 18 more seats, Alberta would receive 5 and British Columbia would receive 7, which, of course, depends on the census results. However, it is a step forward and I hope the NDP will support this government's legislation on representation by population.

On the issue of the unnecessary Senate, our government believes that the Senate does play an important role in our parliamentary system, particularly with respect to the reviewing of legislation and the representation of regions and minority interests. We also believe that members of the Senate perform valuable work.

It is no secret that our government believes that the upper chamber, in its current form, does not reflect the ideals of the 21st century democracy in Canada. Furthermore, we believe the Senate has a legitimacy problem that is directly linked to the method of selection of senators.

Rather than simply doing away with a parliamentary institution, we have advocated for its reform. We believe the Senate should be reformed to become a more modern, accountable and effective chamber that Canadians deserve. In order to move forward with such a reform, we have introduced the senatorial selection act which encourages provinces and territories to establish a democratic process to consult voters on candidates they want for Senate appointments. Provinces, such as Manitoba, have looked into this and have suggested senatorial districts.

• (1045)

The member who moved the motion is very keen on proportional representation. Perhaps that is a method that could be used in the upper chamber.

The upper chamber, I will reflect, is quite different than the lower chamber. In the lower chamber, votes of confidence occur and the first past the post system is much more appropriate. In the upper chamber, perhaps there are other methods and we are open to discussing this with Canadians and other parties. Certainly Bill S-8 reflects our willingness to look at other ways of selecting senators.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister has always been clear that he is committed to appointing elected Senators, and has done so at his only opportunity.

• (1050)

[*English*]

The Prime Minister would appoint senators who are directly selected by the people of the provinces. It is very significant that the Prime Minister is willing to give that power to the people, in effect.

Our government has also introduced legislation that would limit senators to eight years in a non-renewable term. This would allow enough time for senators to gain experience while ensuring that the upper chamber would be refreshed with new ideas on a regular basis.

Despite our government's willingness to be flexible on reforms and to work with stakeholders to find common ground, we have not been able to count on the co-operation that is needed from the opposition parties to make Senate reform a reality. Today's motion proposes a referendum on the Senate abolition. I have concerns about this. Specifically, I have concerns about referendums in general and particularly on the issue at hand.

When we talk about referendums, I would note that national referendums have been held only occasionally in Canada. There was the 1992 Charlottetown accord process, there was a referendum in 1942 regarding conscription and in 1898 on prohibition. It is a rarely used vehicle. While referendums can be used and be useful in engaging Canadians on questions of fundamental importance to the country, we have seen from previous experience that they can also be very divisive along regional and linguistic lines.

The motion also proposes to hold referendums at the next general election. As the motion acknowledges, the Referendum Act does not currently permit a referendum to be held at the same time as a general election, an issue that is divisive in itself. Referendums held during general elections can be done more cost effectively but, on the other hand, issues of a referendum can dominate the election period at the expense of the general electoral campaign.

I would also note that the opposition coalition has been threatening a general election within weeks. It would obviously be impossible to implement this motion before the next general election, which could happen within weeks. I hope the opposition does not call an election because it is not in the interests of Canadians and certainly not in the interests of the economy. The government wishes to work with other parties to ensure that the next general election does not happen for a long time.

In 1992, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing found that in jurisdictions where referendums had been held with general elections, voter turnout tends to be lower and those who vote represent a small cross-section of the general population. In fact, in its 1992 report the royal commission found that having referendums at the same time as general elections was not a good idea.

More recently, in November 2009, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs began its review on the Referendum Act. Among other things, the committee was considering this very question. It has not yet completed its study and perhaps it would be more prudent to wait for the recommendations before making a decision on this issue.

*Business of Supply*

On the issue of a referendum on the abolition of the Senate, I must say that I find the idea simplistic. Polls have continuously shown that Canadians support Senate reform. A recent poll on Senate reform found that two-thirds of Canadians would like to directly elect the Senate while only 30% support the abolition of the Senate. As the Prime Minister has said, abolition should be the last resort and all members of Parliament should be focused on making our government's reasonable Senate reform agenda a reality.

Participation in the political process by exercising one's right to vote is a cornerstone of our democracy. Of all forms of civic engagement, voting is perhaps the simplest and most important. That is why the idea of reforming Canada's voting system cannot be treated lightly.

●(1055)

At the outset, I would like say that I find the portion of the motion concerning electoral reform perplexing. The proposal is to create a special committee on democratic improvement that, among other things, would be responsible to engage Canadians, "on how best to achieve a House of Commons that more accurately reflects the votes of Canadians by combining direct election by electoral district and proportional representation". However, the committee would not be mandated to ask Canadians what voting system they would like to have.

The motion presumes that Canadians are dissatisfied with our current system and eliminates the possibility for voters to propose another system, such as a preferential system which the United Kingdom will hold a referendum on this spring. However, it strongly suggests that the first past the post system will be preferred there as well.

Moreover, while the intent of the motion may be to obtain the views of voters on electoral reform, it did not propose a referendum on electoral reform, even though it prescribes abolishing the Senate. So there is obviously a contradiction in the logic.

Like Senate reform, electoral reform has received much attention in recent years. However, while there seems to be general consensus that the majority of Canadians support some form of Senate reform, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to changing our electoral system.

Voting system reform has been put to voters in three different provinces, British Columbia twice, Ontario and Prince Edward Island, and it has been rejected every single time. After significant citizen engagement efforts in these provinces, particularly British Columbia which included citizen assemblies, voters in each province were given the opportunity to vote in referendums on changes to the electoral system. In each case, they favoured the existing system.

In 2007, the Conservative government completed a series of cross-country consultations as well as a national poll in order to consult Canadians on democratic reform issues, including our electoral system.

The participants, who were broadly representative of Canadians at large, expressed satisfaction with the first past the post system and were disinclined to fundamental change. In particular, they valued the electoral system that produces clear winners, such as single party, majority governments that are more common under first past the

post, than other forms of PR. This first past the post system also allows voters to hold governments accountable for their performance.

Although a system of proportional representation is not appropriate for the House of Commons, if the senatorial selection act is passed, provinces would be free to use proportional representation or any other democratic system for selecting Senate nominees that directly consults with the members and citizens of the province. This should be a reason why the NDP should support our Senate reform agenda. I would be interested to hear from them on why they would not.

Not every voting system is perfect, but we have a very good system here in Canada. I agree that there needs to be democratic reform and we are moving forward with democratic reform. We have taken big money out of politics by limiting campaign finances. We are trying to ensure that the House of Commons better reflects the population of the people of Canada and where they live.

This is what Bill C-12 does. It is representation by population, a principle that the vast majority of Canadians support. The Senate is designed to reflect the will of the regions. This is important in a federated model such as Canada where we have 10 provinces and three territories. It is important to have that balance.

We have proposed eight year term limits in the Senate in Bill C-10.

●(1100)

Bill C-10 would allow for the reduction of 45-year terms, which the NDP member correctly suggested there was an accountability and legitimacy issue. This bill would help to address that. Also, Bill S-8 would allow for the people of the provinces to select their senators.

This is a much more practical way to move forward on Senate reform. It is constitutional. It is a step-by-step approach that is easily understood. In fact, one could argue that what the NDP has suggested, which would require a huge constitutional change, is a statement of support for the status quo. All reasonable commentators, including in recent editorials in the *Toronto Star*, *National Post* and throughout the media, know there is no political appetite for these types of huge constitutional negotiations, like what occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. People want us to focus on the economy and other priorities of Canadians. They do not want use to get involved with deep constitutional quagmires.

I ask NDP members to take their energy, focus it on moving forward with the government's reform agenda, support Senate reform, support Senate term limits, support Senate elections, support representation by population, support our Bill C-12 and support our other initiatives to increase voter participation and campaign finance reform.

Again, I thank the hon. member for Hamilton Centre for raising this very important issue, and may God keep our land glorious and free.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for taking the time to be part of this and to respond to the motion. I also want to thank him for the tone of the remarks. I hope he feels mine matched the same respect that I have for him as he showed in his remarks to me.

First, in the member's province, and this was raised by another member, the Manitoba government report on the Senate said that it preferred abolition, but if abolition was not possible, then it would move forward with Senate reform. I just want to keep the record straight.

The minister spoke earlier in his remarks about how much democracy we already had here. In addition to everything else we know in terms of the undemocratic nature of the Senate, I do not know how many Canadians are aware that the hon. member for Churchill does not qualify to be a senator. She qualifies to run and get elected with a mandate of the people of her riding because they chose her. However, because we have an artificial age limit that one must be 30 years old, she cannot sit in the Senate. Where is the democracy in that?

When the minister referenced Egypt, and I want to be very clear on this, I was talking about what would happen if the Senate started using all the powers that it had. What I meant was a peaceful revolution. I do not want to suggest or minimize anything.

I also want to mention that we support increase in the seats that are being proposed in B.C., Alberta and Ontario, but that is not really reform; it is just an update.

You keep telling me to respond and wrap up, Mr. Speaker, but the minister covered an awful lot of territory. I have about eight more comments to make, but I will mention this one.

The minister made reference to Britain. Let us be very clear about what is going in Britain. That is not proportional representation. That is a method of polishing up and perfecting first past the post, but it is not proportional representation.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. I would like to remind all hon. members that I appreciate people have passionate feelings about this subject, but I would encourage members to pay attention to the Chair and to keep to the time limits so more members might be able to participate in the debate.

**Hon. Steven Fletcher:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments on the tone of the debate. When we talk about democracy, it is important to respect each other's points of view.

The main difference between my presentation and the member's is he probably cannot hear me without the microphone, but I can certainly hear him without one. His passion is very evident.

I did not quite catch what the question was, but everything that needs to be said I have already said. I would call upon the NDP and Liberals, people who love Canada, to help the government ensure that our democracy not only remains strong but becomes stronger. The government has proposed realistic changes to the Senate with regard to term limits and senatorial elections that are doable, realistic without causing a constitutional quagmire and, of course, representation by population in the House of Commons, something that all Canadians support.

•(1105)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise with pleasure to speak to the motion from the New Democratic Party on democratic renewal. I am disappointed, however, that New Democrats have chosen these leftovers from their 2008 campaign to be debated together, which really goes around the ability to debate either one of them in a substantial way.

New Democrats made their decision to focus on these issues now, in the face of the Minister of International Cooperation not telling the Parliament of Canada the truth, the recent electoral fraud that is before the House, the government's mishandling of the evacuation of Canadians from Libya and the overriding attitude of secrecy of the government, when it is very clear there is no appetite to open the Constitution at this time.

Liberals also believe it is also disingenuous that the motion does not really address the fact that constitutional talks would have to be reopened. In fact, a very expensive referendum would be in no way any more than a polling result in terms of its binding nature.

[*Translation*]

Yesterday, Chantal Hébert said that the NDP is taking the wrong road on Senate reform. Here is what she wrote:

This article was written before the debate on the motion, which was to have taken place yesterday in Ottawa. The debate was postponed to today.

Two hours might sound like precious little time to devote to a cause that has the sympathy of scores of Canadians including—at one point in the not so distant past—Prime Minister Stephen Harper—

[*English*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I want to remind all hon. members that they ought not use the names of members of Parliament. They cannot do indirectly what they cannot do directly.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Ms. Hébert goes on to say:

...but in the circumstances it's really 120 minutes too many.

For many parliamentary scholars, fixing the Senate is one of the top 10 measures needed to address the democratic deficit.

But if the NDP seriously believed the Senate to be a major priority, it would advocate a return to the constitutional table rather than promote a referendum on its abolition.

The upper house cannot be abolished or substantially reformed without a constitutional amendment requiring the support of most and probably, all the provinces.

She also said:

[The] NDP Leader ...argues that a referendum would at least set the stage for a national discussion on the Senate but recent experiences have shown that election campaigns are at best rickety stages for such debates.

*Business of Supply*

● (1110)

[English]

Yesterday, the Hill journalist, Dale Smith, also commented that it was disingenuous to go about proposing a referendum without acknowledging that this proposal would mean reopening the Constitution. He went on to say that he had even had some NDP MPs tell him that the Senate did good work, before they launched into a convoluted and unicorn-filled discussion about how they would supposedly replicate that good work in the Commons, reformed by proportional representation. He said that was a much longer story for another day.

However, because it is not an elected body, that somehow negates its usefulness. Never mind the fact that because senators are not electioneering is a big part of why they do their good work. The Supreme Court is not elected either, but vanishing few people dismiss it as an unelected body.

We believe there are many other proposals such as electing the Senate by proportional representation. There are many ways of going about this without having pure abolition. I think a lot of us do believe the Senate, and particularly its committees, has done good work.

In my years in Parliament, I think of the good work done by many of the senators themselves. It is almost like one-person commissioners going out and listening to Canadians on important things, like Senator Yves Morin on science and technology and health research, Senator Keon, Senator Dallaire, Senator Landon Pearson for children's rights, Lucie Pépin, reproductive rights and military families and Joyce Fairbairn on literacy and Paralympics. It was almost like they had a mandate. There are many reforms that could do that in a clear appointment system, which would allow us to fill the second chamber with people with expertise, non-existent in the House at the time.

The Liberal Party favours Senate reform that reflects sound public policy and respects the Constitution. By initiating what are likely to become broad constitutional negotiations with the provinces to deal with Senate reform now is simply not where the current priorities of Canadians are, either in terms of substantive democratic renewal, or the broader challenges on which the federal government should focus.

Right now the Conservatives are moving two bills through Parliament at a snail's pace, by their own design, which really amounts to a piecemeal approach to Senate reform. While we would not completely rule out some form of these proposals on Senate term limits and provincial and territorial Senate elections, the Conservatives have failed to properly consult with the provinces on these bills or with the Supreme Court of Canada on potential constitutional implications.

Abolishing the Senate would require a resolution of Parliament, together with the approval of at least seven provinces, representing at least 50% of the population of Canada. Some constitutional experts have even contended that unanimous consent of the provinces would be required.

As for electoral reform, the issue is in need of serious and comprehensive dialogue with Canadians about whether the current

system is, for all its faults, working, and if not, what needs to be fixed or what is to replace it. We believe there is lots of support for various approaches to electoral reform.

Last week in Alberta it was very clear. Many Liberals in Alberta are very keen that their votes count in the House of Commons. Green Party members across the country care about this. I think the federalists in Quebec have been often worried that more people there can vote for a federalist party and they can end up with a separatist majority. This kind of distortion in result is worrying to people and although we welcome that dialogue, I believe it would be premature to start prescribing alternate systems at this time.

The NDP motion restricts the options for reform to a mixed form of proportional representation and direct district elections and this kind of change requires a broad consensus that does not currently exist.

[Translation]

I have to look at today's debate from a practical point of view. To abolish the Senate, as the NDP is proposing, we would have to amend the Canadian Constitution. Constitutional law prohibits the federal government from unilaterally making changes of this magnitude. It would require the support of at least seven provinces, and perhaps all 10 provinces. Constitutional experts do not agree on how to go about abolishing the Senate. It would surely require the approval of at least two-thirds of the provinces with a population totalling at least 50% of the total population of the provinces, or the 7/50 formula.

Four provinces—British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Manitoba—have said that they are in favour of simply abolishing the Senate. However, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces have already indicated that they would be opposed because they see the Senate as a means of protecting minorities and regional interests in Parliament.

All this should be looked at in the context of a government report on democratic reform released in February 2007. Participants in focus groups were opposed to major constitutional changes requiring the consent of the provinces out of fear of opening a Pandora's box.

As for proportional representation, the first past the post system being used at the federal and provincial levels offers many advantages, but the results do not reflect the electorate's choices. That is why certain Canadian provinces have tried to change their electoral system.

The citizens' assembly that was launched in British Columbia in 2003 recommended using the single transferable vote, or STV, system. British Columbia's version of the STV system had seats grouped into regional ridings with multiple MLAs, and the number of MLAs from each party would reflect its share of the votes received. Many women find the STV system hard to accept because it in no way guarantees more female members.

*Business of Supply*

On October 23, 2003, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty announced the creation of the Democratic Renewal Secretariat, which mandated a citizens' assembly to examine the electoral system. In May 2007, the citizens' assembly recommended a mixed member proportional system. Under this system, a person votes for a local member and for a party, which is elected by means of the first past the post system. The local member represents an electoral riding, while the votes for the parties, in conjunction with the number of local members elected from each party, determine how many list members each party will receive in addition to its local members. In October 2007, this reform received only 36.9% of the vote, far less than the 60% required to make the referendum result binding.

Commentators said that the result reflected the electorate's skepticism about political parties. The lack of transparency and democracy in every political party deterred people from voting in favour of the referendum question.

● (1115)

[English]

It is upsetting today that we are spending the time of this chamber rehashing the NDP platform from 2008, and many commentators have commented that we cannot possibly do justice to either of these and they both require a serious conversation with Canadians, not a top down prescription.

It is also interesting at this time of the electoral fraud accusations from the public prosecutor that we actually look back to the Gomery Commission and ask the NDP and the government of the day, what are they doing about these recommendations that Lawrence Martin reminded us of in his September column? Where is the Appointments Commissioner? Where is the reduction of the size of the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office? Where is the re-establishment of the integrity of the access to information process, or the vetting system that sees Ottawa officialdom gagged unless given approval by PMO-PCO? Where is some semblance of power to the cabinet or the prime ministerial pledge not to make pivotal decisions, such as income trusts and Québécois nation status, without prior consultation with that body?

What about opening up the executive branch of government to media scrutiny that could include the daily briefings in Langevin Block? What about re-empowering the increasingly cheapened committee system, starting with having government members understand that they must represent the public good, not just their party's talking points? What about reforming question period and the antiquated convention that shrouds the decisions taken by the Governor General in total secrecy?

I have been across the country convening round tables on democratic renewal from Moncton to Vancouver, and not once did any of the participants ask to open up the Constitution. It is the third rail right now in our conversation on democratic renewal. There is no question that people are concerned about the all-time low voter turnout. There is no question that people are concerned about the all-time high cynicism in the population. There is serious concern about negative advertising and the way that the party in power seems to be employing the Republican voter suppression techniques, that all government is bad, all politicians are bad, and it does not matter if

we vote. The real voter suppression that attempts to drive down voter turnout actually ends up being good for the Conservative base.

It seems a bit astounding that the bill on increasing advance polls, brought forward by the government last April, has stagnated since April 26 last year. We have seen nothing about trying to increase voter turnout. We think that the youth of Canada need to know that the government would prefer they did not vote, that tenants did not vote, and that we need to be putting in place things that can rectify that.

Across this country, it was very clear that Canadians were reminding us of the Prime Minister's previous comments in the Reform Party foundational document that said that they believe in accountability of elected representatives to the people who elect them, and that the duty of elected members to their constituents should supersede their obligations to their political parties.

On all four topic areas of parliamentary reform, citizen engagement, electoral reform, and party reform, there is no question that Canadians understand there is a lot to be done. The very definition of "good governance", according to my hero Ursula Franklin, is that government must be fair and transparent, and that it take people seriously. That needs to apply not only here in government and in Parliament but in our riding associations. People will not believe that we will govern that way if we do not conduct ourselves in a better way. That includes abiding by the Elections Act.

The three guiding principles of best possible representation, best possible transparency, and best possible information with which to make decisions, really have been promoted, in each of the places I have been, by terrific round tables on representation, openness, transparency, and information. People came forward with all kinds of ideas about improving Parliament's ability to hold government to account: the idea of democracy between elections, gender balance, aboriginal-provincial-territorial relations, electoral reform, and Senate reform.

● (1120)

The lack of openness and transparency of this government is of huge concern to the people of Canada, as is its refusal to move forward on whistleblower protection and indeed the scandal of the person put in charge of so-called whistleblowers within the government. The role of the media is of huge concern also. The long form census, the ability of officers of Parliament to have their budgets and the legislation to support them, the independence of advisers, the firing of those who do not agree with the government, and the muzzling of civil society are issues I have heard raised at almost every round table.

We know that the government has blurred the roles between government and Parliament with government ads being confused with partisan ads, two prorogations, and the blurring of confidence votes. There is also the fact that the U.K. cabinet office, before the U.K. election, said not to do what Canada had done in terms of threatening an election every time what was asked was not received. It is a travesty.

*Business of Supply*

If we look at the index page of the Conservative Party platform for 2006, the government has done nothing in terms of making qualified government appointments and cleaning up government polling, advertising, and procurement contracts. It is a litany of not.

I believe that we need to work together with all of the parties to actually figure out what we can do together. As the leader of the official opposition has said, “We must be able to put limits on the power of the Prime Minister of this country”.

As Jim Travers has said, “It has taken 500 years to wrestle power from the king and 50 years to get it back into one man's office”.

It has to stop right now. The country is appalled at such things as electoral reform, inserting “nots”, the long form census, detainee documents, costs of prisons, and oaths to secrecy. We need to open this up. The democratic deficit is in allowing citizens, MPs and cabinet ministers in.

I am sorry that the debate today is on something not as important as the things that I have just discussed.

• (1125)

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of comments and then a quick question.

The member has tried to put us down somehow because we are bringing back things that we ran on in 2008. Does she not still believe in what her party believed in, in 2008? We do. We still think that there should be a pharmacare program in this country. We still think that CPP should be adequate for people to retire on. We believe the Senate should be abolished and PR brought to the House of Commons. I do not understand how the member thinks that is somehow a problem.

We have heard from a representative of the party who is the status quo apologist-in-chief who said that the Liberals will defend the system because, for the most part, they created it. The Conservatives have just perfected it a little more in terms of making the Senate a great place for partisan activities.

The member also said that they do great work over there because they are not partisan. Is it not interesting that both the existing or former Conservative and Liberal national campaign co-chairs are on the Senate dime? When did they have time to go off and do all these good things?

If we need a committee to do good work, we can appoint it and pay them properly to do it. However, senators have no right having a say in the laws that are made in this country.

My question to the member is this. Will the member acknowledge and admit that the proposal in the referendum in Britain is not proportional representation, but actually a perfection of the first past the post? Will she acknowledge that there is a world of difference between the kind of proportional representation that we and Fair Vote Canada support versus what is happening in Britain?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that what is being proposed in the U.K. is not mutually exclusive with moving on to full proportional representation. It is a first step. It is not mutually exclusive. I do believe it may be because the citizens have such difficulty letting go of a hard-held wand that we need to do a much

better job explaining to Canadians the distortion in the system that is not truly proportional.

I do believe that the member is also absolutely correct. My reflection on the activities of the Senate predated these extraordinarily über-partisan appointments of this Prime Minister in terms of the Roméo Dallaire appointment. This is pure partisan obfuscation of what should be a sober second thought. I do feel badly that the people there, and the people in this House more recently elected, do not understand that this is not the norm.

The normalization of the partisanship is an absolute destruction of this chamber that was designed for hon. members.

• (1130)

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the member referred to democratic reform as leftovers. She also made a comment about Chantal Hébert who thinks that democratic reform is not important. Chantal Hébert only thinks what Liberals think. If the Liberals think something is important, she thinks it is important. It is unfortunate that she would use Chantal Hébert who also said that this opposition day motion is not important. That is a real shame.

I would like to know how that member of the Liberal Party feels about Senator Raymond Lavigne, who is on trial for allegedly using public money to commit fraud? Could she tell me if that is a good thing for democracy in Canada?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Before I go to the member for St. Paul's I want to clarify one matter and this has been raised before and that is the issue of identifying specific members of the Senate. There is no hard and fast rule that in this chamber we cannot refer to members of the Senate, but when we move toward the point where we are criticizing individual members or accusing specific members of the Senate of something, there is a tradition in this place that we do not do that in the context that the member of the other place does not have an opportunity to defend themselves.

On this basis I will allow the question and I will go the answer, but I would urge all members to be mindful of this because I anticipate that this issue may arise more times today. Specific reference to the good work in the Senate or people in the Senate is not disallowed, but there is a line somewhere and I would ask all members to be mindful of that when they are asking their questions.

The hon. member for St. Paul's.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, Chantal Hébert is one of the most professional journalists on the Hill. She criticized our government when she felt that we were doing wrong. Today she is criticizing the NDP for bringing forward something that might require constitutional change without acknowledging that in the motion. She is saying there are many other things before us right now that are more important than this debate. This chamber can do nothing about this issue on its own.

*Business of Supply*

Obviously in any assembly one, two or three people will bring dishonour to an institution and that is really what is happening right now with the charges of electoral fraud. It is also very sad to see parliamentarians being brought into that kind of debate and dishonour.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for your caution about making disparaging comments about individuals in the other place despite some things that might have happened to certain individuals in the other place. We want to improve decorum here and we have to stay away from those types of snide comments.

I want to question the hon. member about the whole issue of proportional representation. She has been around the world and has seen other governments that have proportional representation. My experience with it is that it has not been well received.

I was recently in Ukraine where it has gone from direct representation to proportional representation. The people do not know who they are electing because they are people on a partisan list. They are extremely partisan and political when they are functioning in their house. There is no way for those individuals in their electoral districts to contact their representatives because they do not have any representatives. They do not know to whom they should turn to get the assistance they need in dealing with government programs and government issues like we do as members of Parliament here day in and day out.

The hybrid systems like we see in Mexico and New Zealand are creating a double-tiered system. There are directly represented members of parliament who do all their constituency work, do all their committee work, do all their work in the house, and then there are people appointed off a list. The NDP is criticizing the Senate because its people are bagmen and people who have worked in a party headquarters so that is why they get to the Senate. The people on a party list who end up in a country's main chamber are a bunch of political hacks. They are hyper-partisan. Those individuals who do not have work in their ridings cause all sorts of commotion in their house and chamber.

I would like the member to comment on that.

• (1135)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, I think the member knows that in the world there are only three countries with pure first past the post systems left, the U.K. which is moving to change it a bit, the United States and ourselves, and that there are systems around the world that work and ones that do not. I agree with the member that the ones where it is purely proportional and no one really knows who their member of Parliament is would not work in this huge country. People do need to know their members' address, where they come from and know the regional issues. We would, I assume, in any electoral reform keep individual riding members.

The debate that we would have with Canadians is about the lack of proportionality and the lack of Liberal members from Alberta when they can get up to 20% of the vote, and the fact that in 1993 the Conservative Party had 20-plus per cent of the vote and only two seats. People understand that there is a distortion and that we need to have a proper conversation with Canadians as to what might work to fix that.

The Green Party put forward an interesting idea which would be that there would be a best losers list, where they would have had to have been a candidate in the last election, knocking on doors and listening to people, that if we were going to get three members from Alberta, they would be three of our candidates as opposed to a predetermined party list, as was the proposal in Ontario. I have to admit that until we move on party reform, we are not going to get the kind of support for electoral reform—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Quebec.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today as the Bloc Québécois critic for democratic reform to speak to the motion moved by the member for Hamilton Centre. The NDP member's motion contains many elements, including the holding of a referendum on the question of amending the Referendum Act in order to abolish the existing Senate and to appoint a special committee for democratic improvement made up of 12 members. The motion also defines how the special committee would operate. Today I would like to focus on point (a), which is the most important and which reads as follows:

the House recognize the undemocratic nature of the current form of representation in the Parliament of Canada, specifically the unnecessary Senate and a House of Commons that does not accurately reflect the political preferences of Canadians;

I would like to examine this point from two angles: the undemocratic nature of the current form of representation in Parliament, specifically the House of Commons, and the unnecessary nature of the Senate. In that regard, we quite agree with the NDP.

Bills on democratic reform have been coming up over and over again for the past few sessions. This time around, we have Bill C-12, which aims to change the formula for calculating the number of members per province to increase the total number of members to 338. The distribution of new seats would be as follows: five more for Alberta, seven for British Columbia and 18 for Ontario. That would give us a total of 338 members, compared to the 308 we have now. This bill, if passed, would have a direct impact on Quebec's weight in the House of Commons, which would drop from 24.3% to 22.19%. Quebec would be even more marginalized compared to its current weight in the House.

It is of the utmost importance to maintain Quebec's weight in the House because Quebec is the only majority francophone state in North America and because Quebecers are a unique linguistic minority on this continent. Louis Massicotte, a political scientist at Laval University, published an article on federal electoral redistribution entitled "Quelle place pour le Québec? Étude sur la redistribution électorale fédérale". It is also more important than ever to protect our language and our culture when negotiating free trade agreements. We are talking about the cradle of the Quebec nation, which this House recognized in November of 2006, although, in practice, this means nothing to the Conservative government.

*Business of Supply*

Make no mistake. If the government is insisting on increasing the weight of these particular provinces, it is because they are its stronghold or because it hopes to make political gains there. By going forward with this democratic reform, the Conservative government is claiming that it wants to respect democracy. However, the Conservatives are not fooling anyone. They are masters of flouting democracy. For example, they prorogued Parliament to avoid votes. They failed to follow the House's orders to submit documents, in particular, documents on the transfer of Afghan prisoners. They refused to appear before parliamentary committees. They recommended that unelected senators vote against bills that were passed by a majority of votes in the House, thus going against the will of the people. In 2008, they also failed to abide by their own legislation on fixed election dates.

The government is blatantly misleading the House and the public, as in the case involving the Minister of International Cooperation. I could go on but there are other points I would like to make.

Any recommendation in the House made by a special committee should not only take into account the current demographic weight of Quebec in the House of Commons, but it should also ensure that this weight is maintained because under no circumstance should Quebec's weight be any less than it currently is in the House.

In its current form, the Senate is unnecessary. It is a vehicle for partisan politics. Ever since the minority Conservative government came to power, it has been using this vehicle to introduce bills that the House of Commons opposes, in order to go against the will of the House of Commons. I cited a few examples, but there are many more.

● (1140)

Going against the will of the elected members of the House of Commons is completely anti-democratic in that this opposition comes from people whose legitimacy comes from a partisan appointment, unlike the legitimacy of the members of Parliament, which comes from the people.

We do not have to look too far back to find an example. Just consider Bill C-311. Bill C-311, An Act to ensure Canada assumes its responsibilities in preventing dangerous climate change, was supported by the Bloc Québécois and the majority of the legitimately elected members of the House of Commons. The bill imposed binding greenhouse gas reduction targets to ensure that Canada respects the IPCC recommendation and the requirement to submit a significant action plan every five years. The Prime Minister allowed the Senate to deny the will of the Parliament of Quebecers and Canadians by allowing Conservative senators to defeat Bill C-311 without even studying it.

Yet, during the last election campaign, the Prime Minister declared that an unelected chamber should not block bills from an elected one. He then did an about-face and is now making use of the Conservative senators. He made sure that he appointed the majority of senators to the Senate to ensure that they would block bills or motions that Parliament had adopted and sent to the Senate and that they would introduce bills before members of Parliament even had a chance to speak to them.

When the seats of Liberal senators opened up, the Prime Minister made sure to appoint loyal Conservatives. By allowing their senators to vote against Bill C-311 without even studying it, the Conservatives created a precedent, a first since 1930, and showed a flagrant lack of respect for our democratic institutions.

The Conservative senators also managed to block certain bills passed by the House and sent to the Senate to be studied. Take, for example, Bill C-288, regarding the tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions, introduced by my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle, or Bill C-232, An Act to amend the Supreme Court Act (understanding the official languages), which would require Supreme Court judges to be bilingual. The Prime Minister could be confident that the senators would vote against these bills. In both cases, the Senate blocked the bills. On May 5, Bill C-288 received the support of a majority of MPs in the House of Commons. For the second time in less than three years, it was sent to the Senate. Since then, it has only been debated twice. Bill C-288 would help thousands of young people who want to study and remain in the regions, some of which are struggling economically.

With Bill C-232, the Conservatives were trying to buy some time. They kept delaying study of the bill until they had a majority in the Senate. The Conservative government is taking advantage of the fact that it controls the Senate in order to dictate its agenda. It is one thing for the Conservative government to oppose a measure, but to recommend that the Senate prevent debate on these two bills is unacceptable.

This shows the Conservative government's contempt for the will of the democratically elected parliamentarians. I should point out that the Liberals were no better and also used some schemes to delay passage of bills. Nonetheless, they never went as far as the Conservatives are going. In 2006, by the way, the Conservatives campaigned on reforming the Senate and making it more legitimate. That was one of the Prime Minister's promises.

That is why this Conservative government introduced a bill to reform Senate terms and limit them to eight years. That bill does nothing to reform this outdated, archaic institution where appointments are strictly partisan. That bill does nothing to remedy the nature of the Senate. The Prime Minister has transformed it into "a permanent office for his organizers, a waiting room for his Montreal candidates, and an absolute circus by the use of his surprising appointments, to describe them politely", according to Vincent Marissal from *La Presse*.

The democratic deficit in the Senate and its extraordinarily partisan nature derive from the choices made by the Fathers of Confederation in 1867. From an academic standpoint, the upper house or senate in a federal system must represent the federated entities alongside a lower chamber, in our case, the House of Commons.



*Business of Supply*

●(1145)

According to Réjean Pelletier, a political scientist and a professor in the political science department at Laval University, it is clear that this is not the case in the Canadian Parliament. In 1867, the Fathers of Confederation could have chosen the American model, where senators are elected by state legislatures and all states have equal weight, with the ability to elect two senators for a six-year term.

Instead, the Fathers of Confederation copied the British House of Lords and thus made the Senate a chamber that reviews legislation passed by the House of Commons. So the Senate is a chamber of sober second thought that moderates the overly democratic ways of the lower house, which is subject to pressure and emotional pleas from the public. But it no longer plays that role. What is more, senators were supposed to be appointed by the crown.

The idea of representing and defending the interests of federated entities did not come up in the discussions prior to the signing of the British North America Act. And from that stems our objection to the Senate, with its lack of legitimacy and representation.

Given that the Senate has become a partisan tool for the ruling Conservative Party and that it lacks both legitimacy and representation, it is not surprising that the public is angry about senators' spending.

According to an article by Stéphanie Marin in the January 27, 2011 edition of *La Tribune*, it would cost \$90 million a year to keep the Senate in place. I do not remember the exact number, but I believe that 60% or 70% of Quebecers supported abolishing the Senate.

We also learned in January that some senators are incurring excessive if not extravagant expenses. Conservative senators have not stopped sending mail-outs despite the fact that, in the spring of 2010, the House of Commons prohibited members from sending these types of mail-outs outside their ridings and specified that the Senate should follow suit.

It is important to note that the total printing budget for the Senate increased from \$280,500 to \$734,183 in 2008-09. Last month, the senators gave themselves the right to use taxpayers' dollars to continue to send mail-outs in which they can attack members.

To remedy the representation and legitimacy deficits and truly reform the Senate—to create a Senate where senators are actual representatives of Quebec and the provinces who are appointed or elected by legitimate authorities in Quebec, such as Quebec's National Assembly, and in the provinces and where there is equal representation for Quebec and the provinces resulting in a truly effective and non-partisan upper house as they have in other countries—we would have to proceed with a constitutional reform that would require agreement from seven provinces representing at least 50% of the population. We know that this would be practically impossible because we would have to reopen the Constitution.

The Bloc Québécois does not oppose this motion given that the Senate, in its current state, is unnecessary and that the current method of democratic representation has many shortcomings, such as the ones I have already mentioned. However, the Bloc's support for this motion is conditional upon the inclusion of two basic

elements. First, Quebec's political weight must not be reduced at all as a result of any democratic reform. Second, under Quebec's referendum legislation, a referendum must be held in Quebec on the abolition of the Senate.

I would like to make two amendments to the NDP's motion. I move, seconded by the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges:

That the motion be amended:

(a) by adding after the words "the next general election," the following:

"with the understanding that, in Quebec, such a referendum will be subject to Quebec law, in accordance with the current Referendum Act and as established as a precedent by the 1992 Referendum on the Charlottetown Accord,";

(b) by adding after the words "recommendations to the House" the following:

"that in no way reduce the current weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons"..

●(1150)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Hamilton Centre if he consents to the amendment being moved.

[*English*]

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I concur and accept the amendment.

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

●(1155)

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, by way of questions and comments, I have two quick points.

First, the policy with regard to accepting the current weight of the seats in Parliament being frozen moving forward as a policy that we have already accepted is predicated on the fact that it was not that long ago that this House unanimously agreed with this statement, "That this House recognize that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada".

We all accepted that. For us to turn around within a year or two and diminish the actual weight of the Quebec seats in this House, in our view, is contrary to the spirit of that motion that was passed. It was done for a reason. I am very comfortable accepting the amendment because it is consistent with our policy on this matter.

Second, with regard to the referendum being allowed to be held by Quebec legislation under the current Referendum Act, during the Charlottetown referendum in 1992, Quebec was allowed to do that. Therefore, since we still have the same law and that precedent exists, we are prepared to accept that, almost see it as an exception, as long as it is understood that it is done so without prejudice and that, during the course of reviewing the Referendum Act, we remain free to accept a policy that may or may not allow that to happen in the future.

I just wanted to explain why I support the amendment. It is my understanding that in return we do now have at least two of the four parties in this House that are prepared to accept this motion.

*Business of Supply*

[Translation]

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon:** Mr. Speaker, we did in fact have consultations with the NDP and we agreed on the proposed amendments. We will never give up. The government recognized the Quebec nation and now it needs to walk the talk. That is important to Quebec. Quebec is a nation, by virtue of the significance of its francophone population in North America and its distinct culture.

The bill the government wants to introduce would increase electoral representation from outside Quebec, for example, in Alberta and British Columbia. We must be very careful, since Quebec's weight would decrease. I am calling on all members of this House to be vigilant. If Quebec is recognized as a nation, we must also recognize that its weight in the House should not be reduced below its current level.

[English]

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc has brought forward an amendment dealing with the abolition of the Senate but it then complains about the diminishment of Quebec's representation in Parliament. If the Senate is abolished, Quebec will lose 24 parliamentary seats. In fact, supporting the NDP motion would mean that Quebec's representation in Parliament would be diminished because Quebec has 24 senatorial positions, which is four times as many as Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan or Manitoba, and is as many seats as Ontario has in spite of Ontario being, by population, a larger province.

I do not mind that Quebec has as many Senate seats. That is why the Senate is there—

• (1200)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The microphone seemed to go off for about the last 30 seconds of the minister's question.

**Hon. Steven Fletcher:** That is a shame because those comments were very profound.

By supporting the abolition of the Senate, the Bloc is supporting a reduction of Quebec's political weight in Parliament because Quebec would lose 24 seats in Parliament. It is very hypocritical for the Bloc to support the motion.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon:** Mr. Speaker, I would invite the Conservative Party spokesperson for democratic reform to read the motion carefully. We are not talking about abolishing the Senate, but rather about abolishing the Senate in its existing form. The Senate has been reduced to a propaganda tool, the Prime Minister's robotic arm. In the Senate, they do not even look at the bills that have been democratically passed here in the House and then sent there. It will decide to reject a bill without even examining it. Unelected senators introduce bills that run counter to the political will. The Prime Minister wanted to reform the Senate. The NDP member's proposal constitutes reform. He is calling for the House to appoint a special committee to improve our institutions. I wonder if the senators from Quebec care more about Quebec's interests or the interests of the government currently in power. We could work on finding ways to make the Senate more acceptable and more respectful of what happens here in the House of Commons.

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Québec on her comments and more generally on how she handles her duties as the Bloc Québécois critic for democratic reform. I would also like to thank my NDP colleague for accepting the Bloc amendment.

I would like to respond to the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, who said that the Bloc could expect a 25% reduction in the number of parliamentarians because there are 25 senators from Quebec. The minister did not seem to notice that the only difference is that, in Quebec, no matter what our party, we are democratically elected by the people we represent. Ours are not political patronage appointments. That is what my colleague was trying to show and to make the minister understand. He does not seem to understand that.

If an election is called—likely this fall—the 308 people elected to this place, no matter what parties they belong to, will deserve to be here and their legitimacy will be conferred by the people, unlike senators who are appointed as a political reward.

Although I am being told that my time is up, I would like to mention some cases: Brian Mulroney appointed his hair stylist and the manager of the Ritz-Carlton; the Liberals appointed Viola Léger, the actress from *La Sagouine*, and Jean Lapointe, who still makes movies. I could go on for the rest of the day.

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon:** Mr. Speaker, what more can I say? This motion would ensure that the Senate is more respectful of the decisions that are made here in the House of Commons. We no longer want unelected representatives voting on bills that were passed here in the House of Commons. We no longer want that attitude towards representatives who were elected by the public. That is undemocratic. The Conservative Party should be happy to see such a bill because that was what the Prime Minister wanted during the 2006 election campaign as well as the last one. He promised to reform the Senate and to never use senators to overturn the votes held here in the House. Yet he has done the complete opposite. It is clear that the Conservative member responsible for democratic reform is not taking that into account.

A promise was made. Therefore, we are debating it today and the NDP has decided to move forward.

• (1205)

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Before I resume debate, I want to check the microphone of the minister of state. Would that be turned on? Yes, I think it is working now.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Nickel Belt.

I want to acknowledge the very good work of the member for Hamilton Centre who has been tireless in bringing forward issues around democratic reform. What we see before the House today is a result of months of work in terms of developing a very reasonable approach to democratic reform.

*Business of Supply*

I know others have been speaking about the Senate but I want to focus on another aspect of this motion, which reads, in part:

...the House appoint a Special Committee for Democratic Improvement whose mandate is to (i) engage with Canadians, and make recommendations to the House, on how best to achieve a House of Commons that more accurately reflects the votes of Canadians by combining direct election by electoral district and proportional representation....

I will speak specifically to proportional representation and I will begin by quoting an elder statesperson, the hon. Ed Broadbent. I was lucky enough to sit in the House with him in 2004. During Mr. Broadbent's tenure, he was a tireless advocate for the need for ethics and democratic reform. What we have been seeing over the last couple of weeks around ethics in this place would surely have Mr. Broadbent rising in the House to vigorously protest some of the behaviour of cabinet ministers and Conservative senators.

In a speech given by Mr. Broadbent in October 2005 in Ottawa, he outlined a number of issues around ethics and democratic reform but I will talk specifically about proportional representation. In his speech, he said:

A major source of needed democratic reform is our outmoded, first-past-the-post electoral system. ... Ninety per cent of the world's democracies, including Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Ireland and Wales have abandoned or significantly modified the pre-democratic British system that still prevails in Ottawa. As the Canadian Law Commission recommended and five provinces seem to agree, fairness means we need a mixed electoral system that combines individual constituency-based MPs with proportional representation. ...only such a system would positively redress the existing imbalance in the House of Commons in gender, ethnic, ideological and regional voting preferences.

The Pepin-Robarts Commission pointed out a quarter of a century ago—

This conversation has been going on so long that I am sure people are tired of it, and yet we do not get the change we need.

Mr. Broadbent went on to say:

—our present system does a great disservice to Canadian unity because regional representation in the House of Commons—in the caucuses and in the cabinet—does not reflect Canadian voters' intentions.

Mr. Broadbent went on to say that for fairness and the good of Canada, “Let's get on with electoral reform”.

I hear consistently from the people in my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan and in other parts of British Columbia from other Canadians that it is time for us to have a system of proportional representation.

I know a recent experience with a referendum in British Columbia failed but many of us who were involved in that referendum know that it was not that British Columbians did not support some system of proportional representation. It was more about how that particular process was set up.

The Law Commission did some excellent work and released a report in 2004. I will read some of the report because it says far better than I ever could why we need to look at our electoral system. The executive summary of the report reads:

For the past decade or so, Canada has been in the grip of a democratic malaise evidenced by decreasing levels of political trust, declining voter turnout, increasing cynicism toward politicians and traditional forms of political participation, and growing disengagement of young people from politics. However, as the Commission heard throughout its consultation process, many citizens want to be involved, want to have a real voice in decision making, and would like to see more responsive, accountable, and effective political institutions.

I think that is a very important point. It is not that Canadians do not want to be engaged in their political process. It is that they want their engagement to be meaningful and to actually count for something.

Later on in the report, the Law Commission states:

Canada currently uses a plurality–majority system, which ensures that the winning candidate in a riding obtains at least a plurality of the votes cast. It is called a first-past-the-post system because, in some respects, it resembles horse races where the winner is the one who crosses the finish line first.

For many Canadians, this system is inherently unfair—more likely to frustrate or distort the wishes of the voters than to translate them fairly into representation and influence in the legislature.

● (1210)

It has been criticized as:

being overly generous to the party that wins a plurality of the vote, rewarding it with a legislative majority disproportionate to its share of the vote;

allowing the governing party, with its artificially swollen legislative majority, to dominate the political agenda;

promoting parties formed along regional lines, thus exacerbating Canada's regional divisions;

leaving large areas of the country without adequate representatives in the governing party caucus;

disregarding a large number of votes in that voters who do not vote for the winning candidate have no connection to the elected representative, nor to the eventual make-up of the House of Commons;

contributing to the under-representation of women, minority groups, and Aboriginal peoples;

preventing a diversity of ideas from entering the House of Commons; and

favouring an adversarial style of politics.

I want to touch briefly on the under-representation of women, minority and aboriginal peoples. Right now approximately 62 members of the House are women. Over the last couple of decades, roughly 20% of the House of Commons have been women and that number has not grown.

Women certainly understand that in order to have a balanced voice in the House of Commons, we need that kind of representation. In many systems of proportional representation, women's representation increases. That is a very good reason in itself to support a system of proportional representation.

In the Law Commission's conclusion in its executive summary, it stated:

Canada inherited its first-past-the-post electoral system from Great Britain over 200 years ago, at a time when significant sections of the Canadian population, including women, Aboriginal people, and nonproperty owners, were disenfranchised.

That is a very important point. We know that women only got the vote in the early 1900s and aboriginal peoples did not get the vote until the 1960s. We still have a system that reflects that disenfranchisement.

The Law Commission went on to state:

Canada's political, cultural, and economic reality has vastly changed; the current electoral system no longer responds to 21st century Canadian democratic values. Many Canadians desire an electoral system that better reflects the society in which they live—one that includes a broader diversity of ideas and is more representative of Canadian society. For these reasons, the Commission recommends adding an element of proportionality to our electoral system.

*Business of Supply*

Furthermore, because of its many potential benefits, electoral reform should be a priority item on the political agenda.

Again, I applaud the member for Hamilton Centre for ensuring that proportional representation was part of the conversation today. It certainly has been part of the New Democratic agenda ever since I have been involved with the NDP. It is a priority in terms of ensuring that the voices of Canadians are more adequately heard in the House of Commons.

Fair Vote Canada has put out an excellent report called “Dubious Democracy”. I will not have time to go through the entire report, but it did a very good job. One section is titled “Unrepresented Citizens: Millions of Votes Do Not Count”. Let us talk about what these numbers translate into. When talking about the winner-take-all system, it stated:

The other voters in that riding or district lose their right to representation. The latter group of voters cast “wasted” votes—they gained no more representation than those who didn’t even cast votes.

It did an analysis on elections from 1980 to 2000 and stated:

The average for wasted votes cast in federal elections during the same period was 49.1%, or more than 6.2 million votes. By comparison, in the 1999 election in New Zealand with a mixed proportional voting system, only 7% of the voters cast wasted votes.

When 6.2 million people feel they do not have a voice in their duly-elected representative body, there is a very serious problem. No wonder it has contributed to the ongoing discontent and lack of participation in voting.

In the last federal election in 2008, there was the lowest voter turnout in Canadian history. In these extremely complex times in which we live, we need to work very hard to encourage voter participation and engagement in the political process. We need the diversity of opinions and for women to be at the table.

I encourage all members of the House to support the NDP motion. Let us get on with establishing electoral reform in our country.

●(1215)

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Madam Speaker, this is a very important discussion on the amendment that the Bloc has brought forward.

The member is from British Columbia. I have heard from many British Columbians who feel they are under-represented in the House of Commons, that their vote, compared to votes in my province of Manitoba, is worth less because B.C. has more citizens per riding than Manitoba.

With Bill C-12, the government is trying to ensure, as much as practical, that votes are equal across the country, that every vote has the same impact from the election of an MP perspective. What the member is suggesting is far off that and moves away from the principle of representation by population.

By supporting the Bloc motion, the member is weakening the voice of British Columbia in the Parliament of Canada. How could the member expect to be re-elected because the people of B.C.—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Order, please. I have to allow the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan time to respond.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Madam Speaker, the Minister of State’s question reflects the fact that the Conservatives simply do not

understand democratic reform. If they were serious about democratic reform, they would support the motion put forward by the member for Hamilton Centre.

If the minister wants to talk about real representation, then let us talk about proportional representation. I would then have some confidence that there would be more women in the House to have their voices heard, that there would be enough visible minorities, that there would be enough aboriginal peoples. Proportional representation would give people in Nanaimo—Cowichan, in British Columbia and throughout Canada a real voice in the House of Commons and every vote would count.

If the Conservatives are serious about democratic reform, then let us support this motion and get on with the system of proportional representation.

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the question I want to ask the member is based on the premise that the Senate was established within a bicameral system going back to 1867. It was established to provide regional and provincial balance. I am not sure whether the position being taken is that first past the post representation would provide regional representation and a balance of regional interests compared to a reformed Senate.

Is it the member’s position that proportional representation would be a regional counterbalance and thus a reformed Senate to reflect the changing realities would be unnecessary?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Madam Speaker, our position is the Senate is so fundamentally broken that it is difficult to see how reform would accomplish the kinds of representation that elected proportional representation would do. We have an appointed Senate. We have seen some egregious appointments over the last few years.

My understanding is that to be appointed to the Senate currently an individual needs to own property. There are a whole whack of people in the country who have no hope of being appointed to the Senate because they do not own property. An individual has to be at least 30 years old. Although the New Democrats would like to see the Senate abolished, members of our caucus were elected by the people in their communities, but they cannot be appointed to the Senate.

If we want to talk about true representation, then we have to get rid of the Senate, go with proportional representation and then talk about how parties can work within that system to ensure there is gender balance, to ensure aboriginal peoples are represented and to ensure there is regional representation. There are ways to achieve that with proportional representation.

I again urge members of the House to support the motion.

●(1220)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to clarify what I said earlier, because in the heat of the moment I may have gotten carried away.

*Business of Supply*

I think that everyone in the House would agree that Chantal Hébert is one of the best writers in the country and that we all read her column attentively. My comments were obviously not a personal attack. Rather, I was commenting on a specific column with which I disagreed.

[English]

No personal slight was intended of course. Even when we disagree, we are all professionals doing our job the best we can.

I am pleased to rise and participate in today's opposition day motion, tabled by my colleague from Hamilton Centre. I commend him on his excellent motion. The timing of this motion and today's debate could not come at a more critical period.

This historic place, our Parliament and its elected members are held in low regard by Canadians, thanks largely to the track record of the Conservative government and the previous Liberal government. Whether it was the sponsorship scandal that alienated so many voters or the hyper participation of the government, many Canadians now view this chamber with distrust.

However, it does not have to be that way. Like many of my constituents I am angry. My constituents are angry and disappointed because the government would rather prorogue Parliament when it cannot get its way, protect ministers who mislead the House, the minister of "not", violate election laws because it thinks it is above the law, appoint dozens of senators at a cost of millions of taxpayer dollars, undermining democracy itself, spend billions on corporate tax cuts for its friends or even sole-source 65 fighter jets at a cost of billions more, than help Canadians with their home heating bills or access to long-term care facilities or help them protect their pensions.

I am angry because I know we can achieve these goals and deliver a helping hand to those who help build our country. However, we do not because the Conservative government is so consumed with winning a majority that every promise it breaks, decision it makes, or every bill it brings forward is based solely on a political calculation on whether it will add one or two percentage points to its popularity so it can inch ever closer to a perceived majority. The Conservative government has sunk to such new lows in its approach to governing that it often makes a mockery of this great institution.

Let me read a quote going back to election night 2006. It states:

During this campaign, we talked a lot about values. One of the oldest and enduring Canadian values is democracy...This is a freedom for which our ancestors perished and our veterans fought—for which those in our Armed Forces today still sacrifice, for which too many in our world still yearn. It is a freedom which we must always—always—cherish as Canadians.

Who said this? None other than the Prime Minister.

Since delivering this speech, he has broken his promise to bring about real democratic reform. He has broken his promise on Senate reform, appointing 36 Conservative cronies and bag men. He has given Canada a black eye on the world stage, costing us a seat on the UN Security Council, a first for Canada. He has wasted millions of dollars of taxpayer money on advertising designed to benefit the Conservative Party. Two of the Senate cronies are now charged with wilfully exceeding spending limits in the 2000 federal election, the

very election in which the Prime Minister promised to clean up corruption in our country's capital.

Is it any wonder that New Democrats stand here today urging parliamentarians to do what the Conservative government has lacked the courage and leadership to do? We know what real Canadian leadership looks like. We only have to witness the tireless dedication of our leader, the member of Parliament for Toronto—Danforth. His dedication to this chamber and our political process, his commitment to giving all Canadians a voice in Parliament, is a shining example for all of us. Our caucus knows that the best way to get Canadians excited again about the political process in our great country is to change our system to better reflect their vote.

● (1225)

This motion today could begin to reverse the drop in confidence in and respect for our political institutions that Canadians have. Our motion calls for the appointment of a special committee for democratic improvement whose mandate would be to engage with Canadians and make recommendations to the House on how best to achieve a House of Commons that would more accurately reflect the votes of Canadians by combining direct elections by electoral district and proportional representation.

There is no better way for Canadians to feel that their vote counts than by ensuring that the House of Commons actually reflects the will of the people. That is what part of this motion achieves. That is why we need to support the motion. We need to send a clear message to Canadians that their voice and concerns matter, and that we intend to take action to address their concerns.

There is no higher calling than serving the great people of this great country. There is no greater honour for me to be standing here today in this hallowed chamber to speak on behalf of the people of Nickel Belt. We owe this to Canadians. We actually owe them a lot more, but this motion is a good start.

The second part of the motion addresses the upper chamber, the home of political relics and bagmen and cronies, of undemocratic, unelected, unnecessary, unaccountable and unrepresentative members. I would go so far as to say that the Conservative government is taking a page from its corporate buddies. The Conservatives are engaging in a form of hostile takeover of the Senate as a democratic institution. They are even using the Senate to circumvent this democratic chamber of elected representatives.

*Business of Supply*

Together, senators collect millions in salaries and they travel on taxpayers' dollars to attend their parties' fundraisers. Some are even ungrateful for their perks and privileges. Let me provide just one example. Last December, the Prime Minister appointed a Conservative senator who referred to his senator's salary as a "catastrophic" pay cut. It seems this senator will have to get by on only \$132,300 a year, plus the pittance of \$187,000 on average for staff and travel and office expenses. However, this senator is willing to make the sacrifice. After all, the Senate only sits for 90 days a year for the paltry wage of \$1,470 per day. Seeing that the Senate only begins sitting at 1:30 p.m. each day of its three day work week, one can only wonder when this senator will ever find the time to campaign for his upcoming election. I almost forgot: there is no election for senators.

I wonder if the senator would ever risk asking Canadians, who earn an average of \$172 a day, how they would feel about the senator's great sacrifice of earning only \$1,470 a day.

The Prime Minister has appointed 37 of them, including 18 new senators, the largest number ever, in a single day. Not even Brian Mulroney appointed that many in one day when he was forcing the free trade deal on us. We will do our best to ensure that the Prime Minister does not get to make these appointments any more. What a legacy.

In conclusion, we know that many Canadians feel that something is broken. Our plan, outlined in today's motion, will make elections more democratic and Parliament more representative. That is the key to making Canadians feel their vote counts. We are asking all parties to work with us on a pragmatic, step-by-step plan to improve Canadian democracy. It is just a start. We need to redouble our efforts to regain the trust of Canadians. We have our work cut out for us.

In the 1867 election, voter turnout was 73.1%. Over 100 years later, in 1968, voter turnout was even better at 75.7%. Yet in 2008, voter turnout dropped to 58.8%. Let there be no doubt that we have a serious problem in Canada. We cannot afford to continue down this road.

I see that you are giving me the one minute sign, Madam Speaker—

•(1230)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Order, please.

I regret that the hon. member's time has elapsed. We will move to questions and comments and perhaps he can add some comments at that point.

The Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to ask about the main motion. I wonder if the member fully understands that by calling for the abolition of the Senate, what the NDP is actually advocating are wholesale constitutional negotiations that would bring us back to the memories of Meech Lake and the Charlottetown accord.

Quite frankly, the priorities of Canadians deal with the economy and priority social programs. Why does the NDP want to raise this issue, especially as the motion says this should be done by the next

election? The NDP may be causing an election in the next two weeks. Is that realistic?

**Mr. Claude Gravelle:** Madam Speaker, I would just like to remind the hon. minister that this is only a starting point. That is all it is, a starting point for democratic reform. We want to put the question to Canadians. Do they want it or not?

I want to cite an Ipsos Reid poll between the days of January 24 and 27, 2011, indicating that 33% of Canadians want to abolish the Senate and 49% want Senate reform.

That is a total of 82% of Canadians who want to reform the Senate.

This motion, today, brought forward by the hon. member for Hamilton Centre is just a starting point. We can start there and then we can go on.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member would like to comment on the fact that after prorogation in December 2008, when the Prime Minister did not want to face Parliament and the music, he then appointed 17 senators on January 2, 2009, one of whom was the individual who lost the election in Avalon in my province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That person, Senator Fabian Manning, voted very recently to kill Bill C-311, the very bill the person who defeated him, who is sitting in the Liberal caucus, voted to support in the democratically elected House.

What does the member think of that, and what should Canadians think of a system that allows a Prime Minister to appoint a defeated candidate to an unelected Senate, who then votes down something that the person who defeated him voted for in the House of Commons?

**Mr. Claude Gravelle:** Madam Speaker, that is a very good question.

The fact that the Senate defeated Bill C-311 is a fact. That is why we need to reform the Senate.

I want to add to what the hon. member from the province of Newfoundland and Labrador said about defeated candidates being appointed to the Senate. In that group of senators that was appointed, there are eight formerly defeated candidates, some of whom were defeated more than once.

Do we know why they were defeated? It is because the people in their ridings did not want these candidates to represent them, but the government, in its wisdom, appointed them to the Senate.

•(1235)

**Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it was interesting to listen to some of the facts that were just mentioned.

I have a very simple question for the hon. member. He cited an Ipsos Reid poll and said that poll showed that 33% of Canadians wanted to abolish the Senate. Then I believe he said that somewhere in the vicinity of 49% wanted to reform the Senate. Is that not exactly what the Conservative Party wants to do?

We want to reform the Senate to elect senators.

*Business of Supply*

I doubt it, but people might even elect an NDP senator, and then the NDP members would not have to bark so loud about it.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle:** Madam Speaker, he is right: if they want good representation, they will probably elect NDP members. That is a given.

The member quoted the proper numbers, that 82% of Canadians want democratic reform.

I just want to quote one senator, and I will not name him. He is the chief fundraiser for the Conservative Party. This is what he said:

I want to tell you that I do not admit to being a bagman; I proclaim it.

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Madam Speaker, I have already spoken to this motion today. Therefore, I will speak to the amendment that has been brought forward. Also, I would like to split my time with the President of the Treasury Board.

The amendment by the Bloc Québécois to the motion would reduce the representation Quebec has in Parliament. In fact, it would get rid of 24 senators, 24 parliamentarians. There would be zero senators from Quebec. That is the position of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. They want zero.

I can understand a little of what the Bloc wants because they do not want to be part of Canada. Not only do they want zero senators, but also zero MPs in this place. That is really what the Bloc's role is. Yet in the same breath, the Bloc Québécois is calling for 25% of the seats in this place. On the one hand they want zero, and on the other hand they want 25%. That is not reasonable.

The fact is the Bloc Québécois do not want to have a strong united Canada. They want their own nation. We all know that. The NDP, by cozying up to the Bloc on this very fundamental issue, is not being helpful to federalism.

I would also point out that the Bloc members have been here for over 20 years. One Conservative government MP does more for Quebec in one hour than 50 Bloc MPs have done in 20 years. Electing a government MP or even a federalist MP is better than electing a Bloc MP, because at least the federalists believe in Canada. The Bloc does everything it can to destroy what is probably the greatest country the world has ever known. That is the Bloc's agenda. Thus the hypocrisy of the Bloc to call for 25% of the seats in this place and the abolition of Quebec as part of Canada is very disturbing.

I would also point out that the Bloc's criticisms included that of the legitimacy of the senators. The government has brought forward a bill that would limit terms to eight years. We have also brought forward a bill that would allow for the election of senators. That eliminates the Bloc's argument right off the bat. All they have to do is to support this government's reform legislation, but they are not going to do that because they do not want a strong Canada. They do not want a strong united Canada but to break up our country. Therefore, the Bloc has no credibility when it comes to Canadian democratic institutions.

The member said that electing Bloc MPs is fine. On my part, I believe we live in a great country and I cannot think of a better country than Canada, and so I think that electing Bloc MPs is self-

alienating. Electing a Bloc MP will essentially result in an empty seat, because the Bloc does not want to be and will never be part of government. It is conceivable that federalist party members would be part of government. Therefore, it is a productive thing to elect a federalist MP. I am not just talking of Conservatives but also of the NDP or Liberals. This is a nation-building exercise. The Bloc, of course, is against any nation-building exercise.

● (1240)

The Bloc has demonstrated time and time again its pretense in advocating for Quebec. For example, because Alberta is growing fast, the Bloc does not want Alberta to have more seats in this place, or Ontario, or B.C., which is representation by population, the standard in the House of Commons. The Senate standard is to have regional representation. Limiting the Senate is just part of the Bloc's overall agenda. I cannot believe the NDP members are falling into this. By eliminating senators, that is one less federalist voice in this place, one less voice for Quebec in building this great nation.

The NDP members have fallen into this and it is disappointing. The Bloc of course has its own agenda. The fact is that when the Bloc members stand and call for additional seats for Quebec, we all know that they are being disingenuous because it is the Bloc's goal to have zero seats in the House of Commons for Quebec. It is the Bloc's goal to have zero seats in the Senate for Quebec. It is the Bloc's goal to have no members of Parliament in this place. The NDP is falling in bed with the separatists on this issue. That is a fact.

However, I believe that we need to work together. I am quite willing to work with the NDP on some issues that have been raised today, such as the minimum age of 30 for appointment to the Senate. If the NDP were willing to support our Senate term limits, perhaps we would be open to reducing the age requirement to 18 for appointing senators. However, we need the term limits first, otherwise we are leaving open the possibility that someone could be appointed to the Senate for 57 years. I do not believe anybody wants that. If the Senate term limits come into effect, I am quite happy to talk about what we need to do to bring the eligibility of senators down to the age of majority as it is here in the House of Commons. That is reasonable.

If there are proportional representation problems and under-representation for visible minorities, including people with physical disabilities, as there are in this place, that is something that each of our parties needs to address. We can do that through the nomination process by ensuring that winnable seats are populated by people who reflect those constituencies and our country. That can be dealt with largely through the party process.

The fact is that the Charlottetown Accord caused a lot of divisiveness in our nation. That is what the NDP is advocating.

As I mentioned earlier, I am splitting my time with the President of the Treasury Board. Due to the fact there is important government business that the president is undertaking, I will speak until he has the opportunity to enter the chamber.

*Business of Supply*

Canadians do not want constitutional wrangling. They want the government to focus on the economy. They want Canadians to work toward coming together. Canadians want the government to work toward bringing Quebecers, Manitobans, British Columbians, Newfoundlanders, everyone together.

• (1245)

This motion, especially with the Bloc amendments, would make our federal institutions weaker. The federal government's agenda is to make Canada stronger through ensuring that the Senate has legitimacy through elections and that senators do not end up being in the Senate for up to 45 years but stay for only 8 years. That allows for renewal and elections, possibly including, by the way, proportional representation for the election of senators.

It is up to the province how it wants to do it. Manitoba wants to do it by senatorial districts, and that is fine, but why does the NDP not want to work with us to make this a reality? It is doable, it is constitutional and it can be done in reasonably short order, but the NDP does not seem to be based in the reality of practical politics.

Practical politics would be to support term limits and the senatorial election regime and ensure that the Senate becomes more democratic and stronger. In fact, there could even end up being some New Democrats the Senate. The people would decide. The Bloc amendment is not in the interests of Canada or democracy. I am disappointed that the NDP has fallen in with the Bloc.

The President of the Treasury Board having returned from his important government responsibilities, I would like to yield the rest of my time to the great member from British Columbia, the President of the Treasury Board.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Before I proceed, I would ask if there is unanimous consent to proceed as the hon. Minister of State for Democratic Reform has asked. He was in the 13th minute of a 20-minute speech and to respect the procedures, he would have had to stop after 10 minutes.

I am going to ask the House whether there is unanimous consent to proceed to a five-minute period of questions and comments with the Minister of State for Democratic Reform and to allow the President of the Treasury Board the remaining eight minutes.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Questions and comments, the hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

• (1250)

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I must say that I am disappointed in the direction the minister has taken. Respect between the two of us has been mentioned and respect is nowhere in those remarks.

The minister accused the NDP of cozying up to the Bloc. It is not a matter of cozying up to another political party. It is a matter of showing respect to the people of Quebec and for the amendment passed unanimously that recognizes the Québécois forming a nation within a united Canada. This is about nation building.

Why did the minister not show the same kind of respect that we in the NDP are showing to the people of Quebec and my province of

Ontario when their government brought forward a bill before this one to increase the seats in the House that gave Ontario fewer seats than it was entitled to through representation by population? The reason was the government was worried about this very issue, that Quebec would be upset that the relative weight of its seats would go down and it wanted to diminish the seats in Ontario. New Democrats took a position that said Ontario is entitled to every one of its seats and we are going to respect the spirit of the unanimous motion passed in the House.

Why did the minister and the government not show that same kind of respect to my province and bring in a bill right from the get-go that represented the number of seats Ontario is entitled to based on its population?

**Hon. Steven Fletcher:** Madam Speaker, when I assumed the office of Minister of State for Democratic Reform I reviewed the critiques and comments from the people of Ontario, Alberta and B. C., and that is why we introduced Bill C-12, which would increase the number of seats for Ontario to 18, 5 for Alberta and 7 for B.C., respecting the principle of representation by population.

The fact is the NDP, by bringing forward this motion, does not respect the principle of representation by population because it supports 25% of the seats for Quebec, which is completely against what the member just said. I respect the member, but the logic of his argument does not carry through and the numbers do not lie.

We are bringing forward a straightforward piece of legislation for representation by population. We respect Quebec as a nation. That is why we do not want it to lose 24 seats in the Senate, and that is what the NDP is advocating. The NDP is advocating for the loss of 24 seats in the Senate, bringing down Quebec's representation in Parliament. We want to ensure that Quebec's seat total in the entire Parliament of Canada, the House of Commons and the Senate, is not reduced. The Bloc and the NDP are reducing those numbers.

We want to ensure fair representation throughout Canada and NDP members should be ashamed of themselves.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, my question has to do with the statement the minister made about leaving up to the political parties in their nomination process the issue of representation by minorities, et cetera. That is a wonderful dream, but it has not happened and it will not happen.

I would like the minister to have an opportunity to suggest another way that may be successful so that we have proper representation by those who may not be able to secure nominations because of their personal circumstances but who would make excellent members of Parliament to represent Canadians.



*Business of Supply*

•(1255)

**Hon. Steven Fletcher:** Madam Speaker, I obviously empathize with the challenge of bringing forward minorities into Parliament. However, everyone needs to demonstrate an ability to be elected. I went through two nomination challenges to have the opportunity to run for the Conservative Party of Canada and ran against some very impressive Liberal candidates in a safe Liberal seat. An individual needs to demonstrate the ability to be in this place and the party process helps do that but it can also be open to allowing everyone to run. It is up to the parties. The Conservative Party of Canada has demonstrated an ability to do this. Our caucus is the most diverse caucus in this place.

[Translation]

**Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. members for unanimously agreeing to my colleague's request to share his time today.

This is a very important topic, and I hope that the NDP will help us move forward on discussions concerning Senate reform. I do not believe that this is the most important issue to Canadians across the country, but it is still important.

[English]

Given the importance of it, there are a number of implications here. First, there is the whole aspect of a referendum itself. Being that I would like to think of myself as a true democrat, I cannot oppose the notion of a referendum. Certainly, I think there is a time and a place for a referendum. Whether it should be on this particular topic, at this time, is still worthy of question. If there is going to be a referendum on a topic, I believe people need to be properly informed of all the dimensions of the issue and the implications. It is apparently a non-binding referendum, so the cost would have to be taken into account. We should ask ourselves the question: What price democracy? Cost should not be a prohibiting factor when there is a bona fide reason for a referendum question.

On the question of the Senate itself, because a particular institution may not be functioning to the democratic expectations of "the people" in my view should not be a reason for its elimination. A lot of people think the House of Commons does not function properly and I do not hear anybody here advocating for its elimination. However, can it be improved? I profoundly believe, as does the government and our Prime Minister, that the Senate can be improved and we have taken some legislative steps in that regard.

Most Canadians quite rightly balk at the notion of receiving a job that gives legislative power, in fact the power to slow down or speed up legislation coming out of this duly elected body here, and to have that position virtually for life, up to 45 years for a senator appointed at the age of 30. We have proposed ways of dealing with that with an eight-year term. The fact that the federal government, that is the prime minister, would be the sole means by which people could be appointed to the Senate, most people balk at that as do we.

That is why we and the Prime Minister have been clear, through the senatorial election act and through the statements of the Prime Minister, that if the provinces would come up with a way of electing, in a democratic way, their choice for the Senate, then the government would be pleased to make that appointment.

In fact, the proof is in the pudding in Alberta, where at the time of the municipal election, the Senate choice of the people of that particular province was also on the ballot. There are Senate selections in the Senate today who have actually received more votes than anybody here, more votes than the Prime Minister. They are solely from Alberta, but they sit there truly as elected Senators, and they are going to be there for a term that has been defined.

The other question that needs to be highlighted here: What is the reason for a Senate? As constituted back in Canada's formation, and in our genesis, probably the main underlying reason was to protect property owners. They had to own property, and still do today, to be in the Senate.

There is another very significant reason to have a Senate. First, we recognize that no electoral system is perfect. However, as Churchill said, "It is better than the alternative".

How can we make a more perfect electoral system here in Canada? I am a firm supporter of first past the post and representation by population. I believe in that strongly. We should not be totally fixed to the one-thousandth per cent that every constituency would be right down to one or two people, the exact same amount, as is the U.S. experience.

Our present chief justice, Justice McLachlin, before she was head of the Supreme Court, wrote a very good overview on this question, that the Canadian experience shows it does not have to be as tight and minute as, let us say, in the United States. There is some reason to have some flexibility there. However, we are still committed to representation by population.

Here is the question that countries around the world have faced. What do we do when one of our provinces or states is highly populated and another province is not? Then we will always have more elected representatives from the highly populated province than we will from the less populated province.

•(1300)

That province or state will always be able to out-vote the other less populated one. We made some provisions for that, constitutionally, so that P.E.I., for instance, has some protection from, let us say, Ontario. It could be argued that it is minimal.

What could be put in place so there is not a situation where a province or, as in Canada, a city of MPs, a city full of MPs in this House right now, can vote or cancel out the votes of MPs from an entire less populated province?

The way to put that balance, even though it will never be perfect, in place is to have senators elected. Unlike the United States and some other places that have a bicameral system, we do not have the same number of senators for each province. Some people would say we should not have the system at all because it is not the same number in each province.

*Business of Supply*

What I am saying is that it is not perfect, but if we have senators who are democratically elected, it would give a bit of a buffer to the less populated provinces, by having a bicameral house, a two-bodied house as it were, to have a number of senators there, using the U.S. model or similar ones around the world.

It would have to first be passed by the people who are elected, representation by population, but then the bill would have to be passed in the Senate as well. So a small state like Rhode Island could stand up to a more populated state like California, or a small province like P.E.I. could stand up to a more populated one, like Ontario or British Columbia.

That notion of protecting the citizens of less populated areas has to be full understood. It has to be contemplated that if we wipe out the Senate, it will forever remove the protective capability of less populated provinces from more populated provinces.

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I was listening carefully, as members have been, to the debate and in particular to the comments that the minister has just given.

We firmly believe that the bicameral relationship could be improved. The Senate, in its origins, was designed to represent regional interests, protect provincial rights, and within the present demographic milieu, and Canada being a strongly federalist entity, we are always searching for that balance between regional interests and provincial interests, and the higher common interests of the national state.

The thrust of the motion and the comments that have been made thus far appear to be challenging the manner in which reform takes place, in particular how senators are chosen. There is a veiled characterization that crass politics are playing too strong of a role.

The minister has emphasized his belief in democracy and electing senators. As an intermediate step, would the minister have any other suggestions in terms of how the public's confidence, given the objectives that he has very well outlined, could be instilled and reinforced in the Senate, that the Senate would in fact be that sober second thought and would be representing—

• (1305)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

**Hon. Stockwell Day:** Madam Speaker, that is a fair question.

I alluded to it initially in my remarks and I will just touch on it again. Being really honest here across the floor, the public chafe at the thought of senators being appointed because they understand that the senators have legislative authority.

Let us be honest, whether it was the Liberals doing the appointing or whether it is the Conservatives doing the appointing, when we are in the opposition we say that we do not like that. Now that the Liberals are there, they are saying that they do not like the appointment process. The people of Canada do not like it.

That is why the Prime Minister has proposed, and we have proposed, this ability. We have encouraged provinces. We have not even been all that prescriptive. We have allowed some room and imagination. We have said, "Please, come up with a way then that

you, as provinces, would elect the people you want to see in the Senate".

Then we have to have a prime minister who will make the commitment to appoint them, as our Prime Minister has. In this way, it would avoid a constitutional battle. It simply makes a provision.

Just using Alberta as a case, there would be a municipal election, the names would get added on, there is some cost to it, of course, and then Albertans would be saying to the prime minister of day, whoever it is, "Here, this is our choice, not your choice, Mr. Prime Minister, here is our democratically-elected choice".

I think that would go a long way. It is one of a number of steps that would go a long way to bringing some public confidence back into that process.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the very intelligent minister on this issue, but when this issue of abolishing the Senate is raised, the complaint that I hear from over there is that it would involve constitutional change. How can we do what the member suggests without getting into that quagmire?

We have Alberta with six Senate seats compared to 10 in New Brunswick. The whole thing is a mess. To even try to get any sense of it would require the most agonizing amount of constitutional bargaining, disagreement, and unhappiness that one could imagine.

The simplest thing to do, what the minister's leader said to do, is to abolish the thing. I do not think it can be fixed.

**Hon. Stockwell Day:** Madam Speaker, our leader said that if Canadians clearly are showing that they do not want it, then that may be the only thing that is left. I would add, that would have to be demonstrated. Let citizens know what they are giving away. They would potentially be giving away protection from highly-populated areas always out-voting them. By going with a senatorial election act, there would be no constitutional change requirement.

I do agree with my friend, but eventually we will get to the question: Should there be an equal number from every province? We will then get into some good debate, but let us improve the thing before. That would be the perfect system in some people's eyes, but do not let perfection be the enemy of getting something better. Allow it at least to move where we are electing those people.

To look at the formation of this process in the United States, the Americans had the exact same arguments. We can look at other countries that have bicameral institutions, they had the same arguments, and they worked toward improving the system.

So it is not going to be perfect, but it will be an improvement, and we can do it with a senatorial election act without having to go through that constitutional morass that my friend is talking about.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the great member for British Columbia Southern Interior.

*Business of Supply*

I stand to speak today in favour of the New Democrat motion calling for a referendum to abolish the Senate and for proportional representation.

The Senate was created in 1867 to mirror the British House of Lords, to serve as a chamber of sober second thought, to provide regional representation and to act as a check on Parliament. It was made an appointed body so that it could not stop legislation from the House of Commons. It was there to revise and renew legislation. It was also created to recognize the social and economic elite. It was, in part, created to protect the property interests of the wealthy.

There was some concern from our founding fathers that an elected body, or the House of Commons, would not do so. Today we know that is not the case.

The Senate is broken and no longer works in the public interest. This House knows it and so do the Canadian people.

I became convinced of the need to abolish the Senate following the controversial Senate vote on November 16, 2010, that killed Bill C-311, the climate change accountability act.

Bill C-311 would require the federal government to set regulations to establish targets to bring greenhouse gas emissions 25% below 1990 levels by 2020 and to set long-term targets to bring emissions 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. The government must take action on climate change and Bill C-311 would have been the first step to set hard targets to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

However, it has become abundantly clear that the government does not want to deal with one of the most pressing issues of our time, so it got the Senate to do its dirty work.

Bill C-311 passed the House of Commons and passed the committee. The majority of members in this House, who were sent here to represent their constituents, passed the bill and yet it was killed by the Senate. I will repeat for clarity that the unelected and unaccountable Senate shut off debate and called a snap election to vote down and kill this important legislation that passed through the House of Commons.

That was an outrageous move and Canadians were outraged by the move. It was the first time since the second world war that the Senate had voted down a bill that had won support of the majority of members in the House of Commons. This move did not get the attention it deserved. It was a fundamental change in the way our democracy operates.

The government is not known for its transparency and adherence to democratic principles and now it has appointed enough senators to circumvent the democratic process.

Only a few short years ago, before the Conservatives were in power, they had very real concerns about the way the Senate operated. While the Prime Minister was in opposition, he claimed that he would never appoint a senator. At that time, he considered the Senate to be undemocratic.

This is something members will rarely hear from me but the Prime Minister was correct. The Senate is undemocratic. That is why the people of New Zealand abolished their upper house, the legislative council, in 1951.

It is amazing how things change when one gains power. Now that the Conservatives are in power, they have completely changed their tune and are using this unelected, undemocratic body to push through their legislative agenda.

The Prime Minister has appointed 36 Conservative insiders to the Senate since coming to power. In 2008, he broke a record by appointing 18 people to the upper chamber in just one day. The Senate is now stacked with failed Conservative candidates, party fundraisers and political organizers. We must not forget that this was the same modus operandi for the federal Liberal Party. It, too, stacked the Senate with its friends and insiders.

• (1310)

A senator earns approximately \$132,000 a year. The qualification to become a senator is to be loyal to the ruling party that appoints him or her.

The Senate costs approximately \$90 million a year to run. Taxpayers are paying a large sum for an unaccountable and unelected group of senators that block legislation passed by their elected representatives.

I believe it is time, through a referendum, for Canadians to have a say on the future of the Senate. A referendum would open up the dialogue on systems in which far too many Canadians have lost faith. It would allow us to engage the population in an issue that is important to our very democracy.

I will now talk about the second aspect of our motion, which reads:

(c) the House appoint a Special Committee for Democratic Improvement, whose mandate is to (i) engage with Canadians, and make recommendations to the House, on how best to achieve a House of Commons that more accurately reflects the votes of Canadians by combining direct election by electoral district and proportional representation....

These two ideas, to abolish the Senate and to investigate how to best create a House of Commons that accurately reflects the votes of Canadians, fit well together.

Voter turnout continues to decline each election. In 2008, only 59.1% of Canadians went to the polls, the lowest turnout in history. The youth turnout was even worse. As parliamentarians, we should be very concerned. We need to reflect on why this is occurring and how we can turn this disturbing trend around.

Too often I hear from people who feel their vote does not matter. They tell me that they often decide to vote strategically. They feel that it does not matter who they vote for because there is no way their favourite candidate will, under our current electoral system, ever be elected. Therefore, they end up voting for a candidate, not because they support that candidate, but because they want to stop someone else from gaining power.

Proportional representation is an electoral system that allows every vote to count, whereas the first past the post system creates a winner takes all situation. I worry that sometimes people stay home from the voting booth because they feel that with our first past the post system, the person they want to vote for does not stand a chance so they do not bother voting.

*Business of Supply*

This is not the way our democracy should operate. This could point to why Canadians, and particularly why the youth vote, seems to be so disengaged. It is time for an examination of democratic reform. It would show Canadians that we, as their elected House, care about their participation in the political system.

The United Kingdom, in conducting a referendum on electoral reform in May, is doing just that. The people of the United Kingdom want their voice heard, and so do Canadians.

An Environics poll conducted for the Council of Canadians last year indicated that 62% of Canadians supported moving toward a system of proportional representation in Canadian elections. This support was consistent across the country, notably 71% of youth wanted to move to a proportional representation system.

I mentioned in my speech my concern about youth voting and the voter turnout. If we can do anything to inspire our younger generation to get to the polls, we must. It is imperative to the future of our democracy.

In the motion supported by Fair Vote Canada, it states:

With people all over the world risking their lives to demand their democratic right to be heard, it's about time that Canadians had a fair voting system, so that all our votes can make a difference.

We must do all that we can to bolster our democracy and to ensure that all votes count. For that reason, I am in full support of the motion and urge all parliamentarians to vote in favour of it.

•(1315)

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, we have heard very little from members of the Liberal Party today, other than their spokesperson, the member for St. Paul's, who provided us with a bit of revisionist history this morning when she suggested that somehow the Conservatives had stacked the Senate with partisan appointments. On the other hand, however, the Liberals had members in the Senate but they were not partisan.

I want to remind the member for St. Paul's that it was in 1984, when the orgy of appointments were made by John Turner at the behest of former Prime Minister Trudeau, which led to a game-changing debate in that election, when Mulroney was able to attack Mr. Turner on the basis that he could have said no when he filled the Senate with Liberal hacks and fundraisers.

Basically, the Prime Minister is continuing that long established tradition by the Liberal Party over the last 100 years, and we want that to stop.

Does the member have any further observations about the lack of Liberal interest in changing the Senate?

•(1320)

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Madam Speaker, yes, it is true that the Conservatives broke a record by appointing 18 senators in one day. However, I am not sure that is a record they want to be proud of.

The Liberals also have a record of doing a similar manoeuvre when it appointed their party loyalists and supporters. That emphasizes the need for electoral reform. We need to get rid of this unelected, unaccountable body that is now being used for purposes other than what it was initially meant for.

I think Canadians want an updated body that reflects the will of the democracy in which they believe, and that means change. This motion, which calls for a referendum, would give Canadians the choice to keep this unelected body or to get rid of it once and for all.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I will quote the December 20, 2008 edition of the *Winnipeg Free Press* when the Minister of State for Democratic Reform stated, "If we don't get those reforms in a reasonable amount of time we will look to abolish it".

The Conservatives have been in power now for a little over five years. In the member's opinion, is that a reasonable amount of time and should we start looking at abolishing the Senate?

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Madam Speaker, the Conservatives spoke about that being an issue when they were in opposition. They said that the Senate, an unelected, undemocratic body, needed reform and attention.

Now that the Conservatives are in power, they could have done something about that. If this were really an issue, they could have acted on it. Five years is a legitimate timeframe to have addressed this issue and, I would argue, it should have been addressed years ago when they first came to power.

This needs to be addressed but what have the Conservatives done? Let us look at the record. Once they came to power, they turned it around and started to use the Senate to kill bills and change the outcome of the democratic process that has been voted on and approved by the majority of the members of the House of Commons who represent the Canadian people.

I mentioned Bill C-311 earlier in my speech, which was of great importance to Canadians, and seeing it killed in the Senate was tragic.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** Madam Speaker, before I begin my speech, I would like to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Hamilton Centre for his work and his vision for our country. He was the one who proposed this motion to our caucus. I would like to thank him and offer my congratulations.

The time has come to discuss our electoral system. It is clear that major changes are needed in the Senate. For example, it is inexcusable that a group of unelected senators rejected Bill C-311 on the environment without any, yes any, discussion.

•(1325)

[*English*]

I would like to spend the rest of my time by sharing my thoughts on proportional representation.

We do not have a high voter turnout in Canada and there are many reasons for this. I would like to submit that one of them is that the representation in Parliament does not accurately reflect the percentage of votes received. For example, if we had some sort of proportional representation system in place prior to the last election, the results would have been as follows: the Conservatives would have wound up with 119 seats, Liberals 83, NDP 56, the Bloc 31 and the Green Party would have had 17 seats. Even though 941,097 people voted for the Green Party, it did not get one seat in the House of Commons.

The executive director of Fair Vote Canada says that:

Proportional voting would obviously help the NDP. Almost 80% of votes cast for the NDP don't help to elect anybody. But this is about what's good for all voters.

He goes on to say:

If you are a Conservative in Toronto or a Liberal in Calgary, the current system is not working for you. The plain fact is that most of us are 'represented' in Parliament by people we voted against. Canadians demand more viable political choices.

There are some myths floating around and Fair Vote Canada attempts to counteract those myths.

There are trade-offs between good democracy and good government. In his landmark study, "Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Democracies (1999)", internationally renowned political scientist Arend Lijphart assessed and compared the performance of majoritarian democracies associated with winner take all voting systems and consensus democracies associated with proportional representation systems.

He concluded:

—the overall performance record of the consensus democracies is clearly superior to that of the majoritarian democracies" and "the good news is that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, there is no trade-off at all between governing effectiveness and high-quality democracy – and hence no difficult decisions to be made on giving priority to one or the other objective.

The other myth that he dispels and talks about is the fact that proportional representation means coalition governments and that is bad because it requires deal-making. Let us put this idea to rest today once and for all. Here are the facts. Governments formed under any voting system are coalitions of different groups that negotiate and make deals. That is the way democracy works. The two largest big tent parties are coalitions of factions, which are generally hidden from public view except during leadership races. These internal factions compete with one another and then negotiate and compromise on the party platform.

Do people think we do not have differences of opinion in our party? Of course we do. We come together, and that is how we should be coming together in Parliament.

The primary difference between this and the formation of multi-party coalition governments under fair voting systems is transparency. Coalition negotiations among parties are generally more visible to the public and the compromises are publicly known. Majority rule under fair voting systems, the resulting coalition or governing group represents a true majority of voters.

That is what Canadians want. That is probably one of the reasons why they are not voting or coming out in large numbers to vote.

### *Business of Supply*

Let us look at some facts to dispel the fact that once we get proportional representation, we will have chaos and bedlam. The examples often cited are Italy and Israel. Let us apply some perspective.

With more than 80 nations using proportional systems, critics can find only two examples, which I just stated, of a system that appears to be chaotic. Opponents of fair voting do not like to talk about long-term stability and the prosperity of Germany, Switzerland and Sweden, or about most of the other 81 countries using proportional systems. In the last half of the 20th century, many of the large European countries had about the same number of elections as we had in Canada.

Coalition governments created under fair voting systems tend to be stable and productive for two reasons.

First, the parties know that a fair voting system makes it highly unlikely any party will gain a majority of seats because seldom do a majority of voters support any one party. The parties understand that the only way they can ever govern is by creating constructive partnerships with other parties. What a revolutionary idea, creating constructive partnerships so we can govern for the people of Canada.

• (1330)

Second, because election results reflect the way people vote, the parties have no motivation to force frequent elections, or prorogation, because of small shifts in public opinion. With Canada's first past the post system, a small shift of votes can trigger a huge swing in seats, which is something that cannot happen with a fair voting system.

Far from creating chaos, Lijphart's study on effective government demonstrated the countries using fair voting systems readily matched and often exceeded the economic and social performance of nations run by single-party governments, which are usually, as he says, false majorities. As Dr. Lijphart concluded, there is no trade-off between good democracy and good government. In fact, it is good democracy that leads to good government.

I submit that the timing is right as we discuss the reforms of the Senate, which is not working, as we discuss the House of Commons, which often is dysfunctional as we are often accused of partisanship and going against each other. Is it not time to come together and have a sensible system of voting so we can co-operate and have the actual proportion of people who voted reflected in the House of Commons?

[*Translation*]

I would like to say that proportional representation is an important step towards a healthy and very strong government.

[*English*]

It is imperative that we have in the House of Commons a representation that truly reflects the votes that people have cast.

I am sure our motion will be supported by all members in the House of Commons. I am sure that each and every one of us wants to ensure what is reflected here truly reflects the votes that people have cast in the last election. This could be a major breakthrough for democracy in our country.

*Business of Supply*

[Translation]

I am ready to take questions.

[English]

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Madam Speaker, as a fellow British Columbian, the member knows very well that Premier Campbell, both in the first and second mandate, consulted the people of British Columbia with regard to having some kind of electoral reform. Citizens were brought together from across the province of British Columbia and examined all kinds of voting methods.

What the NDP are proposing was one of the items that was brought forward. It has been rejected twice by British Columbians. It has been rejected by his own constituents. Now the member comes to the House of Commons and says that we have to throw out our current electoral system and bring in a proposal that his own constituents rejected in a referendum that happened less than a couple of years ago in the province of British Columbia.

What mandate does he have to come into the House of Commons on behalf of his constituents to say that we need to change everything when his own constituents, less than two years ago, rejected the very proposal that he will vote on in the NDP motion?

Second, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, a dear friend of mine, talked about the importance of elections and people not voting anymore. With proportional representation, we strengthen political parties and weaken the voices of individual Canadians to step forward to represent their constituents. Political parties become stronger, local representation becomes weaker and the ability of people to represent their constituents and not just their parties is destroyed. It is a bad idea.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Madam Speaker, on the surface it appears logical, but I submit that it is not quite logical. It is more complicated.

The question put in British Columbia on the system that was chosen by the group was a complicated system. Many people did not understand that there were other systems. Many people who advocate this, many in my riding, would like to see a proportional representation system perhaps based more on the mixed model, where voters elect certain people and then there is a list from parties. That might work better than the complicated system we had.

The system that was proposed in B.C. would have taken power away from parties. That is probably why the two major parties did not support it. They thought it would take away from their power base and give more power to people in the ridings. However, it was more complicated.

This may be the finding of the committee, but in my riding it was much more complicated than a system, for example, where we elect a certain amount of MPs, as we do now, and a certain amount are taken from a list reflecting the proportion.

I think if we were to tighten it up, we would have a much stronger system that would truly reflect what Canadians have voted.

• (1335)

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the member's speech was impressive and insightful.

Notwithstanding what the minister from that province said, I am sure the member's constituents would be proud that he is standing here fighting for real democracy for Canada.

My question is directly on the issue of voter participation, particularly among the young. We know that more and more young people are saying, "a pox on all your houses". They are not getting involved in politics or not coming out and voting. While that may serve the short-term interests of some political parties here, it is not a sustainable long-term nation-building situation.

Knowing that a recent poll showed that upwards of 71% of all young people supported moving to some version of proportional representation, my question for the member is this. Does he believe this is a positive reinforcement for Canada in terms of young people actually becoming engaged and caring about their democracy and their nation in a way that brings them to our political process? Does he believe that moving to proportional representation is a positive investment in young people's involvement in our political system going forward?

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Madam Speaker, as I had mentioned, it is inconceivable that one of the other political parties had over 900,000 votes and it is not represented here. A lot of the young people are members of that party. A lot of young people are members of the major parties. They see that they vote and work hard and not one of their MPs in their cities gets elected. There is something not quite right. We owe it to the future of Canada and our young people to improve our system and to have some kind of proportional representation system.

**Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I wish to advise at the outset that I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier.

I rise today to speak to the motion on Senate abolition, put forward by my colleague from Hamilton Centre.

The issue of Senate reform has been on Canadians' minds for a long time and is very complex. Accordingly, the motion put forward today is complex in its many subsections, the details of which I will get into. I had occasion to speak previously to Senate reform in this Parliament and the Parliament before. We have had some elections and prorogations and the aspect of Senate reform has not been touched upon in any real way by the government and this Parliament, except by the Conservatives stuffing the chamber with political hacks in order to put forward their program and to squelch democracy.

However, I think we need to start on the basics and the history of the other chamber. I would like to quote from the Bible: "And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand". That is the gospel according to St. Mark, chapter 3, verse 25.

These two houses have been working together for some time, with arguments of course on their efficacy. However, it is important to remember the origin of the houses and it is important that we not forget the history of the founding of the Senate and the history of the founding of this country. This country was born of two major influences. I would argue three, but there are two major Canadian influences, which were those coming from the United Kingdom, the British Empire, and those from our francophone or French Quebec background.

*Business of Supply*

When we look at this place, this Parliament in general and this system of government, we are happy to see vestiges of our British heritage, the coats of arms, and the fact that we have a head of state who is a British sovereign. There is no doubt about that influence. What we cannot ignore is at the time there was a great negative influence from the south. Our largest neighbour was a young republic going through the throws of a civil war, one of the most bloody wars in the history of humankind, and the country that is the United States today was very much in the minds of the founding fathers, not just because of the Fenian Raids in the 1866 period, but also because the neighbour to the south had formed its government almost 100 years before that on a broken model, as was perceived by the founders of our model.

We did not want at that time to completely copy the British model. I do not make a practice of quoting Conservative politicians, but since time has passed and he was our first Prime Minister, I will quote Sir John A. Macdonald who said very clearly that the model of the House of Lords was not for Canada.

An hereditary Upper House is impracticable in this young country....An hereditary body is altogether unsuited to our state of our society, and would soon dwindle into nothing.

Let us be clear that the Senate we have is not the House of Lords. It never was intended to be. All the arguments of our good friends from the NDP fall flat on their face in that respect.

What was the upper house founded for? The upper house was founded on the idea that provinces did not want to enter a union without some protection of their rights. They agreed to become part of that union including Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia to protect their provincial rights because the model of the south, the American constitution which gave states sovereignty, was broken in 1867. It had broken in 1861 and led to the calamity which was the civil war. We did not want to follow that, so Canadian forefathers said they would set up a Senate which protects provincial rights.

Here is where I come to a major disagreement with the government in this respect, going back from the time of its election over five years ago. The provinces came together to form a union and the provinces have not been consulted. In 2007, the then minister of democratic reform, who was moved to a much more vaulted post now, said:

I know there are those who wish to see the Senate remain unchanged. There are many members in the Liberal Party who want to see it remain unchanged because it has served them very well over the years as an institution dominated by appointed Liberals.

My, how time has changed because the Senate now is dominated by and controlled by a Conservative majority. I wonder what that minister thinks of those words that he said in this chamber then.

● (1340)

I wonder what the minister thinks of the words he said in the chamber then. He must have second thoughts. He must be wondering, "What was I thinking? The Prime Minister did not give me the playbook and did not tell me, as the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, that I was going to pack the Senate with Tory hacks and control the Senate". He should have had those notes then and I feel bad for him.

I really feel bad that he was sent out on that errand, suggesting that the Senate is just for Liberals. We see now that it is just for Conservatives. The Conservatives will not go anywhere near this motion and we know that. It is because they have the House stacked the way they want.

Let us lower the temperature and talk about what the Senate has done. The Senate is a great example of some wonderful Canadians being appointed to do good work. Who can argue with that? Even the NDP is not going to argue with the quality of the persons appointed to the Senate, the work they did before they were appointed and the work they have done since.

No one is going to argue with the naming of General Roméo Dallaire or Conservative Senator Wilbert Keon, a heart surgeon. No one is going to argue that Charlie Watt, a Liberal senator representing aboriginal interests, was a bad appointment and does bad work.

Frankly, the NDP may argue with this one. There was an appointment of a member of the NDP to the Senate. She has turned out to be a wonderful senator and a great representative of the west. I speak, of course, of Senator Lillian Dyck, a person of great accomplishment at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. She completely filled out the card with respect to a CV.

She was an appointed member of the NDP. What did New Democrats do with a wonderful person like that? They said, "You can't join our caucus. We have nothing to learn from you. How dare you try to sit in our caucus". This woman has contributed to Canada. She brings background that is important to Canada. They stuck their heads in the sand and said that we cannot reform the Senate because we will never be in power, but we are never going to take any advice from a good senator.

Those are some of the good examples of great Canadians who have contributed to the Senate and to Canada's oversight.

The Minister of State for Democratic Reform really did not get to answer the questions in 2007 and 2008, but if he were to predict how little provincial-federal consultation there has been since the time he gave his speeches and the last time we last talked about democratic reform of the Senate in the chamber, he would be dismayed to learn there has been nothing in the way of federal-provincial negotiations on Senate reform.

As I asked in a speech back then, how bad could it be to have a real meeting with the provincial and territorial leaders, something more than just a main course of bison and a dessert of crème brûlée in a two-hour meeting where they are rushed out to the airport before any real discussion takes place? That was back in 2007. Premiers and territorial leaders do not even get the bison and the crème brûlée any more. There are no more conferences on this topic. This motion has nothing in it with respect to provincial consultation.

It is the underpinning of how the Senate was founded. It is in the Constitution. The only real reform that has ever taken place in the Senate was in 1965 before patriation, before there was an amending formula, and it was done unilaterally in the dark of night without any opposition because all it did was to say that at age 75 senators will have to retire.

*Business of Supply*

What have the Conservatives done with the Senate? They have packed it with people like Irving Gerstein and Doug Finley who have been charged with contravening the Canada Elections Act. They have failed to enforce section 140 of the code of the Senate. People charged with criminal allegations is nothing new to the Senate. Does it not make a mockery of our system when the Conservative appointed senators do not even follow the rules of the Senate with respect to reporting a criminal charge when section 140 of their own code says they should? I say—

• (1345)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** On a point of order, the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Madam Speaker, earlier today the Speaker ruled that there should not be any disparaging comments made about members in the other place. We are constantly trying to improve decorum in the chamber. When we are talking about senators from the other place, we should treat them with the respect that we treat each other here. I ask that those allegations be retracted from his comments and that he does a proper job of improving decorum in the chamber.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I thank the hon. member for his comments. I am sure the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe will take that into consideration. However, from what I heard, I think he was stating some facts. I did not hear any overly disparaging comment, but I would ask him to be mindful of that. In fact, his time has run out. I would ask for questions and comments and he can perhaps conclude his remarks.

The hon. member for St. John's East.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Madam Speaker, perhaps the member could elaborate on his views.

I heard his very enthusiastic and vigorous speech. One thing I did not hear, though, is whether or not he supports the idea of Canadians getting to decide whether they want to get rid of the Senate or not. This is what the motion is about with respect to the Senate. Are the people of Canada sick and tired of this notion of an undemocratic Senate, with the kind of concerns that he raised? Having the powers it has under our Constitution, should people not be given an opportunity to express their view? And if they want to get rid of the Senate, then it is up to us as political leaders to find a way of doing that.

Could he tell us whether the Liberals support the idea of Canadians having a say, or at least find out what their opinion is as to whether or not we should rid ourselves of this relic?

• (1350)

**Mr. Brian Murphy:** Madam Speaker, first, I want to apologize for saying anything other than that Senator Gerstein and Senator Finley have been charged under section 140 of the Canada Elections Act. I am sorry if I said anything else.

The other aspect of the member's question is a good one, whether the provinces and the territories had been consulted.

Would the member, who I know to be a very strong, vigilant, diligent and vigorous member, have, in the day, said to former Premier Danny Williams that we are going to do this and not consult him at all on something that is integral to the founding of our nation.

It may be a difference of opinion, but the idea of a referendum across this country has been tried before. Obviously people are not against the idea. But to not even have consultations, as the government has avoided for six years, with provincial and territorial stakeholders is a shame, is unacceptable and is a prerequisite for Senate reform.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to speak to this matter. First, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Hamilton Centre for sponsoring this motion. I followed his speech with much enthusiasm and I want to tell him from the outset, in order not to create false expectations, that I will not be supporting the resolution. Out of respect for him and for others who have spoken to this issue today, I will explain why I cannot support his resolution. The main reason has to do with the part about the Senate.

[*English*]

I believe ours is a system of checks and balances between the executive and the legislative branches, between the government and opposition, and between the two Houses. Having a bicameral parliament is part and parcel of the system of checks and balances.

As opposed to abolishing the other chamber, I believe we might want to improve it. Therefore, I cannot and will not support the motion because of the portion of it that deals with the Senate. I do not think it is appropriate to propose an abolition.

Some of us may remember that in the previous parliament, the 39th parliament, Bill C-10 was a bit of omnibus legislation that contained an element that we all missed in this House. Perhaps the government should have been more forthcoming in explaining the elements of the bill. Nonetheless, the Senate caught something that we should have caught in this House, which would basically have given the Minister of Heritage some powers equivalent to censorship in the making of films. After strenuous debate, that portion of the bill was abandoned. Thus I think the Senate saved the day there.

Furthermore, in some instances, the Senate initiates very thorough studies. I remember the one that was tabled by the Senator Kirby on mental health, which has had a significant impact to the benefit of all of us in this country. There are other studies of that nature on poverty and security. I think there is certainly a great deal of work that is done by the Senate that is quite good and that is why I support the Senate.

Perhaps amending the Senate might be something we should consider. For that, I think we need to look at another mechanism rather than just striking a House committee. Perhaps the way to go could be a royal commission or a mechanism involving provincial authorities when looking at possible reform of the Senate. If such reform is impossible, then at some point down the road perhaps there will be outright abolition. However, at this point I think that would be premature.

I did listen quite closely to comments by my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan.

I am sorry about the inclusion of the elements of the Senate in this motion, because I really rather agree with where the rest of the motion is going.



*Statements by Members*

I was at one point the minister for democratic renewal, and I remember the discussions I had with Ed Broadbent, who was the member for Ottawa Centre at the time. I said that I personally agreed that there may be a use in our system for an element of proportionality. I tried to define that element.

I recall an op-ed in the *Globe and Mail* a few years ago calling for a “12-per-cent solution”, which apportioned a reduced number of seats on a proportional basis, but regionally. The reasoning then was that if we had greater regional representation within caucuses, for instance if the Liberals had more voices from Alberta and the Conservatives more voices from Quebec and the NDP more voices from other provinces, in other words, if we had more provincial voices speaking in the respective parties’ national caucuses, the national perspective might win the day more often.

I think that would be healthy for our country. Therefore, I do support, notionally, an element of proportional representation.

I understand there are concerns and that proportional representation is a complex system. We had B.C., Ontario and P.E.I., where the people spoke on this. We had mixed messages. In B.C., a majority but not quite a sufficient number of people supported at one time having a single transferable vote, which is indeed a complex method. I think the problem there was that there was too great of a fixation on that particular method of altering the way of voting. We also had Quebec and New Brunswick, if I recall, that took a very serious look at elements of proportional representation and yet have failed to enact anything.

It is a complex situation, and I think the nature of our country, the federation, will help us evolve because, at some point, one of the provinces, if not the Government of Canada, will find a way to perhaps try some elements of proportionality. We will then see how that evolves.

●(1355)

The other concern of course is that some people say that if we go that way, we will always have a minority Parliament. That may be so. Some of my colleagues do not like the prospect of forever having minority parliaments, because it is quite difficult for members of Parliament if they are on constant electoral alert. However, I believe that is what Canadians may want; Canadians may want to have a little shorter leash on their representatives.

It behooves us all to learn to work together, not just to say we want to work together and pretend that we want to work together, but actually to find mechanisms to work together and make Parliament work. That is well within our grasp and capacity, and if the Canadian public decide that is what they want of us, then somewhere down the road, somehow, we will have to find a way to do that.

If we ever do go down the road of having an element of proportional representation within our electoral system, then we had better find a way to work together, whether by reconstructing committees or the way the House works or way we deal with legislation. In any event, that is well within our grasp.

All of that is to say that despite all of the concerns with the concept of proportional representation, an element of that, not a majority or perhaps not even as high as 50% or even 25%, but an element of that, might help our democracy. I say this because the

other concerns about where we are going are equally valid. Here I refer to the concerns about lack of participation and declining participation, especially among young people. We have to be concerned about that. It is a concern that we cannot ignore, one that we ignore at the peril of our democracy and the well-being of our very nation.

When we weigh all of this together, perhaps the way to go would be to create a committee of the House of Commons and to give it a mandate, perhaps a little clearer than what we see before us today and with a little more authority, to go out and sound this out in a rational, responsible, realistic manner and come back to Parliament with its conclusions. Then Parliament should take them up in debate and see where they would lead us.

If we were to do that, and we will not do so today, I gather, from the indications of where the votes are, and to debate a motion that did not deal with the Senate, I would certainly be willing to support it and would encourage my colleagues to support it and to see where it takes us. I am sorry the Senate was included in the motion today, because I think we could otherwise have seen a little progress today.

[*Translation*]

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

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

●(1400)

[*English*]

### WIND STORAGE PROJECT

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Madam Speaker, as part of the government’s economic action plan, \$795 million under the clean energy fund was allocated over five years to research, development and demonstration projects to advance Canadian leadership in clean energy technologies.

On February 26, I had the opportunity to announce an investment of \$2.79 million from the clean energy fund in the Cowessess First Nation’s wind storage demonstration project. A wind turbine and a battery storage system will be installed on Cowessess First Nation land to demonstrate how intermittent wind power can be harnessed and stored to provide constant and continuous energy. This single turbine system is capable of heating and lighting approximately 30 homes and can be replicated a good number of times.

I would like to congratulate Chief Grady Lerat, the Cowessess First Nation, and members of their council and economic development team for pursuing this project and seeing it through to fruition. I wish them good success into the future. It may be a small beginning, but it is a big step in the right direction.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]***NORDIC WORLD SKI CHAMPIONSHIPS**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, this is akin to the United States winning soccer's World Cup in Brazil or Switzerland winning the gold medal in hockey at the Vancouver Winter Games. Yesterday, in Oslo, Norway, the birthplace of cross-country skiing, Canadian skiers Alex Harvey and Devon Kershaw won the gold medal in the classic sprint relay at the Nordic World Ski Championships. They beat the Norwegians on their home turf. The torch has definitely been passed from the hands of Pierre Harvey to his son. Alex Harvey's legend will go down in history, just like that of his father, who made us so proud for so many years.

*[English]*

All of Sudbury must also be brimming with pride having seen its native son, Devon Kershaw, with gold hanging from his neck in Oslo. We join our voices with theirs in congratulating the two skiers for their epic victory.

*[Translation]*

Congratulations Alex Harvey and Devon Kershaw.

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**RELAY FOR LIFE**

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):** Madam Speaker, the first winter Relay for Life took place on February 26 in Hérouxville, which is in my riding. The cold weather did not prevent 300 walkers from participating in this relay organized to support cancer research. This is a first in Quebec and in Canada.

Emotions were running high during the traditional survivors' victory lap, which started off the relay. I was very impressed by the organized way the community, the municipality and the hundred or so volunteers were mobilized to look after the walkers all night long.

The organizing committee managed to collect \$56,638, or more than double its initial goal of \$26,000. I am very proud that this very first winter Relay for Life took place in my riding. It was an honour to attend and encourage these dedicated and hope-filled people.

Spurred by this great success, the organizing committee is already making plans for next year. I will be there and I invite all my colleagues to come along.

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*[English]***FRUIT GROWING INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** Madam Speaker, our fruit growing industry is in deep in trouble. B.C. apple growers are making a return of 12¢ a pound while their cost of production is 22¢ per pound. Current farm support programs are too complicated even for accountants to understand and are not paying out. Many farmers have yet to receive program payments they applied for in 2008.

Our trade policies are taking a toll on our fruit growers. Cheap subsidized apples coming in from Washington State are undercutting prices for our farmers. The president of the B.C. Fruit Growers'

Association is appalled that the CFIA has approved an import permit from yet another Chinese province. We simply cannot sustain any more apple imports from countries with low production costs, especially those whose standards do not exactly conform with ours.

I call upon the federal government to put Canadian farmers first and to ensure that any current or future trade agreements do not interfere with their ability to earn a decent living and to supply us with good quality food.

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**VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS**

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Madam Speaker, author Kurt Vonnegut once said:

I can think of no more stirring symbol of man's humanity to man than a fire engine.

Today, I wish to thank the brave emergency service volunteers, especially the firefighters from Prince Edward County, Deseronto, Belleville, Thurlow, Madoc, Marmorora, Tweed, Stirling, Bancroft, Maynooth and all points in between, all of whom play a vital role in our communities.

Their tireless dedication is an inspiration to all mankind.

Over two-thirds of rural Canadian fire departments are staffed by volunteer firefighters who put their lives in danger while saving lives and property every day in our communities.

In return, it is essential that we support their training programs and offer adequate tax relief that encourages recruitment and retention of volunteers.

It is for these reasons that I believe, and have believed, that we must continue to be a strong advocate for our first responders.

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● (1405)

**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, 25 years ago, Rick Hansen embarked on a world tour to make the world more accessible and inclusive and to find a cure for spinal cord injury.

Inspired by a deep-seated belief that anything is possible, Rick's dream took shape in the form of the Man in Motion World Tour. I was there in Vancouver when he launched his tour. For 26 months, he and his team wheeled more than 40,000 kilometres through 34 countries raising awareness of the potential of people with disabilities.

The government must introduce a national disability act to promote reasonable access to medical care, medical equipment, education, employment, transportation and housing for Canadians with disabilities.

Rick's tour was a testament to his tenacity and his deep-seated belief that anything is possible when one is determined to live a dream. Rick has inspired and continues to inspire Canadians and people all over the world to live their dreams.

*Statements by Members***FOREST SECTOR CHAMPION AWARD**

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Upper Ottawa Valley continues to have a proud history in forestry, with local foresters like Grant Gulick, Leo Hall, Chris Heideman, Ray Pastway, Raymond Bell, Dana Shaw, Earl Bochert, Bob McRae, Dean Felhaber and the Dombroskie brothers carrying on a tradition started by pioneers like Peter White, Thomas McKay, J.R. Booth, John Egan, and the Buchanan and the McLaughlin brothers, to name a few.

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the county of Renfrew for its selection as 2011 forest sector champion by the Ontario Forest Industries Association, the OFIA. The award was made to the county at a special ceremony during the 68th annual meeting of the OFIA.

As good stewards of the earth, it is important for us to acknowledge that our forests are growing.

Canada's record of forest management and regeneration is unsurpassed with a rate of deforestation that is virtually zero, a record we should all be proud of in this United Nations International Year of Forests.

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[*Translation*]

**TAX HAVENS**

**Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, during the latest World Social Forum in Dakar, Eva Joly, a European MP, stated that tax havens are weapons of mass destruction against the development of poor countries. According to Joly, the detrimental role of tax havens has been known for 10 or 15 years. If we are unable to combat them, it is because they are the crux of strong, converging interests.

Governments are quietly subsidizing multinationals by allowing them to avoid paying taxes. Leaders of poor countries are amassing a fortune through corruption. Political parties are obtaining their funding illegally.

Eight non-governmental organizations on various continents have launched the international campaign "End Tax Haven Secrecy". The purpose of this campaign is to demand that the G20 leaders introduce concrete measures to put an end to this lack of financial transparency.

The Bloc Québécois welcomes this initiative.

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[*English*]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has successfully led Canada through the most serious global recession in recent memory.

We have cut taxes for families and small businesses. We have begun to rebuild our armed forces. We have toughened up our criminal justice system. We are strengthening our borders against terrorists and human smugglers.

Our government is now embarking on phase two of Canada's economic action plan. It is a plan for jobs and growth that keeps spending and taxes down. It is a world leading plan that will position Canada for the future as a strong, prosperous and united country, the best place in the world to live, work and raise a family.

My constituents look forward to the upcoming budget. Now is not the time for an opportunistic election. It is a time to remain focused on what matters most, which is keeping Canada's economy growing and creating good jobs for Canadians. That is exactly what we intend to do.

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**MAIN ESTIMATES**

**Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board recently tabled the main estimates, which confirm two things: that the Conservatives lack financial management and that, at all costs, the Prime Minister will do as he said, "You won't recognize Canada when I get through with it".

The estimates show that spending is still \$11 billion more than it was in 2009. So much for fiscal restraint. Every year, spending by the Conservatives has well outpaced inflation. A media report this week said, "The...government has a poor track record when it comes to controlling spending".

However, there are cuts to the CBC, to EI and to regional economic development. The estimates show that the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency is being cut by \$64 million. These are all areas that the Prime Minister said he does not support.

The one area where there is a massive amount of increased spending, over half a billion dollars, is on Conservative crime policies, the same policies that failed in the United States and in the United Kingdom, and are being brought in when crime rates are actually falling in Canada.

It is about choice. Choices made by the Conservatives certainly are changing Canada, but not for the better.

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● (1410)

**FREEZING ASSETS OF CORRUPT REGIMES ACT**

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today, our government tabled the freezing assets of corrupt regimes act in order to freeze the Canadian assets of former dictators.

Canada took swift action to freeze the assets of Moammar Gadhafi's regime in Libya. This act would ensure that we have the tools to act just as swiftly in all future cases.

The unrest in the Middle East and in North Africa has made it all too clear that Canadian laws do not allow us to react as quickly as our allies around the world.

The people of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and elsewhere are courageously voicing their legitimate democratic aspirations. Thousands have paid the ultimate sacrifice, losing their lives in the fight for freedom.

*Statements by Members*

In Canada, it is our responsibility to ensure that we do not become a safe haven for murderous dictators to stash their cash.

I call upon all parties in both chambers to put partisan politics aside and urgently pass this important legislation.

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**JIM TRAVERS**

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, members of the NDP caucus were shocked and profoundly saddened to learn today of the most untimely death of our friend and colleague on the Hill, Jim Travers.

Jim was a seasoned, veteran journalist and a consummate professional who was an inspiration and a mentor to many. “The kind of journalist I aspire to be”, one press gallery member said today. He was an old-school guy who would never burn a source, never pull a punch and never hesitate to speak truth to power in the finest tradition of his honourable craft, and he did so with a sense of humour and a turn of phrase that was always pithy, unique, clever and memorable. The man could really write.

In all of his many roles in an illustrious career, Jim represented the very best of journalistic integrity. His colleagues at *The Toronto Star* have lost a dear friend and an inspirational leader.

Our deepest heartfelt condolences go to Jim's family. His many friends on Parliament Hill will miss him profoundly, and I am proud to have been one of them.

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**SOCCER**

**Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as a soccer mom, a soccer coach, a referee and an avid soccer player, I am thrilled to report that in Zurich this morning, FIFA awarded the hosting rights for the 2015 Women's World Cup to Canada.

In addition, Canada will host the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup 2014.

It is a tremendous honour to host the single largest women's sporting event in the world. We know that cities from coast to coast will provide outstanding venues for these exciting games.

Soccer continues to grow in popularity in Canada and the Women's World Cup will build on that enthusiasm.

Our senior women's team, the reigning regional champions, is off to Germany this summer for the 2011 World Cup.

Our government is proud to be a key supporter of these tournaments. They are certain to be highly successful and we look forward to watching Canada's teams play the beautiful game with the world's best right here at home.

I say “go Canada go”.

[*Translation*]

**QUEBEC ATHLETES**

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in the history of sports, never before have we seen a nation with so many champions in sliding sports in the same year.

Érik Guay, winner of the super G crystal globe in 2010, was triumphant in December at the 2011 alpine world ski championships. Alexandre Bilodeau, who brought home the gold in the single moguls event at the Vancouver Olympic Games, was crowned the 2011 world champion in dual moguls. Jennifer Heil brought home the gold in single and dual moguls at the 2011 world championships. Alex Harvey won the 30-kilometre pursuit at the under-23 world cross-country championships and just yesterday became the world champion in the relay event. I should also point out that Jasey-Jay Anderson won gold in Vancouver in the snowboarding parallel giant slalom event.

In the last year, Quebeckers have dominated the world stage in sliding sports, making our nation very proud.

\* \* \*

● (1415)

[*English*]

**JIM TRAVERS**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise with sadness today to speak on the passing of a good friend, a fine Canadian and a great journalist, Jim Travers.

Jim was a true gentleman whose rumpled presence concealed a sharp mind, a lovely sense of fun and a great pen. He had a distinguished 40-year career in journalism, both at home and around the world. He was editor-in-chief of Canada's largest newspaper, *The Toronto Star*, as well as a mainstay of the Ottawa bureau.

Jim was rightly honoured by his colleagues, winning the Charles Lynch Award in 2005 and the National Newspaper Award in 2010.

We will all miss his keen mind and shrewd analysis, but even more, we will miss the warmth and kindness he showed to so many of us.

He had a deep love of our country and a profound respect for the importance of our democratic institutions and traditions, and he would have been annoyed with me for not being able to get through this without crying.

Jim's passing leaves so much behind, great friends on all sides of politics and journalism, but also a hole in our hearts. We send our deepest condolences to his wife Joan and children, Ben and Paddy, and his wider family.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***POLITICAL FINANCING**

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Conservative election fraud has been investigated for four years. Police raided Conservative headquarters. The fraud was pursued by two chief electoral officers, the chief investigator at Elections Canada, and the independent director of public prosecutions. Four of the Prime Minister's top advisers are charged with serious illegal conduct for which there is voluminous evidence and the likelihood of conviction, triggering fines and jail terms. That is some administrative matter.

How is all of that not a character issue for the Prime Minister?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is referring to the typical back and forth that we could expect from a five-year-long administrative dispute of this kind.

Conservative candidates spent Conservative funds on Conservative advertising. The national party did, indeed, transfer funds to local campaigns, which is legal, ethical and commonplace among all political parties.

The reason that Elections Canada is aware that we made such transactions is that we told it, and we will continue to make our case in a court of law.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is about the public's trust. Nothing happens in the government that this all-controlling Prime Minister does not dictate. He is, after all, the boss. He makes the rules. The in and out scheme, the forged invoices, and the voluminous evidence of illegal conduct go right to the top.

At the National Citizens Coalition, in the Reform Party, and as Conservative leader, the Prime Minister has made a habit of trying to circumvent campaign spending laws to let big money rule, so how can he deny it now? Campaign spending violations have been his stock in trade.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, it appears the member is referring to a five-year-long administrative dispute and the ongoing back and forth that has flowed out of that dispute. Of course, Conservative candidates did spend Conservative funds on Conservative advertising, and the national party transferred funds to the local campaigns.

The reason Elections Canada knows that is because we told it. We had no reason not to tell it because it is legal, ethical, and common practice among all political parties. We will continue to make that case in a court of law.

• (1420)

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, common practice it is not.

The Prime Minister is responsible for the people he gathers around him. He sets the standards. When local riding associations questioned the illegality of the Conservative in and out scheme, all the Prime Minister's men attacked them. They were called

“undisciplined”, “turds”, and “idiots”. Those are Conservative words, not mine, but that is the mentality the Prime Minister fosters: the culture of deceit.

If he will not ask his senators now charged with offences to step out of the Conservative caucus, would he at least remove the taint of the plumbers being in the Auditor General's Office?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the kinds of personal slurs that the member is engaging in will not create a single job for Canadians. It will not allow Canadians to save for their future.

What will do those things is Canada's economic action plan. We have created 460,000 net new jobs, we have the smallest deficit in the G7, five million Canadians invested in tax-free savings accounts, and unemployment is two points lower than in the United States for the first time.

It is time that the opposition stopped trying to tear people down and join with us in building Canada.

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we will see whether the judge finds the two Conservative senators or the Prime Minister's cronies as funny as the parliamentary secretary. Apparently, the Chief Electoral Officer does not share the same sense of humour. The Director of Public Prosecutions does not share the same sense of humour either. And the three judges of the Federal Court of Appeal do not seem to have understood the parliamentary secretary's humour.

All of this is a joke. Is this the Conservatives' idea of accountability?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the kinds of personal slurs that the Liberal Party has been engaging in for some time now will not create a single job and will not help families save for their future. What will do those things is Canada's economic action plan. It has already created more than 500,000 jobs, helped five million Canadians open a tax-free savings account and helped create steady economic growth for a year and a half. We are building Canada, not tearing people down.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, he is talking about personal slurs. He apparently has not been watching television over the past couple of weeks.

I have no doubt that the administrative interpretations of Vincent Lacroix and Earl Jones were as interesting as those of the Conservatives. The problem is that the judges of the Federal Court of Appeal, the Chief Electoral Officer and the Director of Public Prosecutions are clearly stating that the Conservatives' actions were not legal. The Conservatives committed electoral fraud to the tune of \$1 million.

What about that is “tough on crime”?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's overheated rhetoric notwithstanding, what we are really talking about here is that Conservative candidates spent Conservative funds on Conservative advertising.

It is true that Conservative headquarters did transfer funds to local campaigns. The reason that Elections Canada knows that is precisely because we told it in open disclosures.

This dispute is ongoing. We will continue to press our case in court.

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*[Translation]***CINAR**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, following media disclosures in October 2009, we asked the Prime Minister whether political interference had prevented the RCMP from laying criminal charges in the Cinar case. Of course, this question went unanswered. Today, we have learned that the Sûreté du Québec has finally pressed charges in the Cinar case.

Why has the government still not taken action in the Cinar case, which it has known about since it was elected?

• (1425)

*[English]*

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am not sure exactly what the hon. member's problem is.

This matter is before the court. I do not know why the hon. member is worried about this matter. It is before the court. The hon. member should let it be there. That is the way the process works in this country and I hope that he is not hearing this for the first time.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it was the Bloc that raised this issue in 2000 and, in the six years that the Conservatives were in the opposition, they did not ask a single question about it. They should wake up instead of just spouting rhetoric.

Under the voluntary disclosures program, the Liberal government at the time settled the dispute with Cinar behind closed doors without co-operating with the RCMP.

Now that the Sûreté du Québec has confirmed Cinar's fraud, does the government realize that the agreement reached with Cinar under the voluntary disclosures program is unacceptable and that immediate action must be taken?

*[English]*

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government realizes that this matter is before the court as we speak.

The hon. member would be the first one, if we started pronouncing on these matters, to say we are interfering with the

judicial process in this country. There is a decision within this matter and the matter should take its course.

\* \* \*

*[Translation]***TAX HAVENS**

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister is mistaken. This matter is not before the courts. The matter that should be before the courts is not, because the Liberals, like the Conservatives, never wanted to take care of the Cinar affair.

The federal government's complacency when it comes to tax havens allowed these white collar criminals to illegally transfer \$120 million to the Bahamas. By signing a tax convention with the Bahamas, a known tax haven, in 2010, the Conservatives did nothing to prevent fraud from being committed against small investors in the future.

While the rest of the world is taking action against tax havens, why are the Conservatives protecting them?

*[English]*

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of National Revenue, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the government have taken decisive action to give CRA the tools and resources it needs to aggressively pursue those Canadians who avoid paying their taxes.

This includes important measures contained in budget 2010 to close tax loopholes, and the inclusion of proceeds of crime legislation in the Criminal Code. We expect CRA to focus on aggressive audit efforts to find money that is hiding in offshore accounts.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, even though an international warrant has been issued for his arrest, former dictator Ben Ali's brother-in-law continues doing business in Montreal, as though nothing happened. Every hour that passes allows him to transfer millions of dollars to tax havens. Although we support Bill C-61, it is not necessary in order for the government to take immediate action under the UN convention against corruption and under Canada's Criminal Code. It can immediately freeze the assets of the entire Ben Ali family.

Why are the Conservatives continuing to protect them and refusing to take immediate action?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on the contrary. I would like to thank the opposition, and particularly the Bloc Québécois, for its support for the legislation we introduced in the House this morning. The sooner this legislation receives royal assent, the sooner we can act.

### POLITICAL FINANCING

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, no one is above the law. No one can defend their actions by claiming ignorance of the law. The in and out scheme is illegal, and that is clear to everyone. The Conservative party cheated. The Prime Minister is keeping the people who organized that cheating on his team. The Prime Minister is ultimately accountable for that cheating.

When will the government admit that it cheated?

[*English*]

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the reason we will continue to press our case in court is that Conservative candidates spent Conservative funds on Conservative advertising. The national party, indeed, did transfer funds to local campaigns, which, of course, is a legal practice. Elections Canada became aware precisely because we told it.

We will continue in this spirit of transparency. We will vigorously defend our actions, which have been in accordance with the rules, the laws, and the highest standards of ethics from the very beginning.

• (1430)

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, they transferred Conservative funds to break the rules on election spending limits. That is what happened.

The irony, of course, is that the Conservatives let this scandal happen in an election in which they were running against a Liberal scandal, the infamous sponsorship scandal. Imagine that, moving money in and out to go after the Liberal government that was playing fast and loose with money. No wonder Canadians think something is broken up here.

Yet this Prime Minister is still standing behind his actions. He says they have done nothing wrong. Why are these senators still in their caucus?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the reason that we continue to pursue our case in a court of law is that the Conservative Party followed all the rules. It is true that Conservative candidates spent Conservative funds on Conservative advertising. It is also true that the national party transferred funds to local campaigns.

The reason Elections Canada knows all of that, the reason it is aware of all of these transactions, is precisely because we made it aware by volunteering the information in a transparent manner many years ago. We will continue to press our case.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government is already on the ropes. We have asked the government to keep its cheating senators out of its caucus and then today we find out that the minister of immigration is using government resources to solicit money for Conservative ads on parliamentary letterhead.

When are the Conservatives going to learn their lesson? When are they going to clean up their act? Why is the immigration minister using parliamentary resources to raise money for the Conservative Party?

### Oral Questions

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the immigration minister in this government has done a superb job of reaching out to and building a strengthened system for Canada's newcomers. We cut the immigration landing fee. We have allowed a record number of new Canadians to come into this country. We have stood strongly in favour of protecting those who were in need of refugee assistance. We have delivered record aid to those people who are coming to this country from abroad.

We are very proud of our immigration minister and we stand beside him 100%.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have to wonder about the integrity and sense of ministerial responsibility of some of the members in the first row opposite. I believe that the Minister of Foreign Affairs was the chief organizer for the Conservatives in Quebec when they dreamed up their electoral fraud.

Could he explain what the \$10,126.18 was used for in his riding of Pontiac and could he tell us how much of that was reimbursed by Canadian taxpayers?

[*English*]

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I notice that the Liberal Party, in fact all of the coalition parties, has asked absolutely nothing about the number one issue in the country, which is jobs for Canadians. That is because, under our economic action plan, we have created 460,000 brand new jobs. We have the smallest deficit in the G7. Five million Canadians have invested in the tax free savings account, helping them to prepare for their future. Unemployment is two points lower than in the United States for the first time in a generation. We have had six consecutive quarters of growth. That is something to celebrate.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister that the scheme is not an administrative dispute. It was a well-administered fraud. It is not an accounting disagreement. It was a deliberate attempt to break the law. There is no misinterpretation. The Conservatives knew the rules and then broke them.

In the GTA alone, hundreds of thousands of dollars went in and out of ridings in a matter of seconds. Davenport, Vaughan, Scarborough Centre, almost \$100,000 worth of fraud in just those three ridings.

Did his boss really think they would get away with this?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the issue at stake is that the Conservative candidates spent Conservative funds on Conservative advertising.

*Oral Questions*

The national party did indeed transfer funds to local campaigns. The reason Elections Canada knows it is because we told it about it. Why would we not? It is legal, it is ethical and it is common practice among all parties. That is precisely why we will continue to press our case.

• (1435)

**Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence, the government's political minister for Newfoundland.

In the Conservatives in and out Ponzi scheme, \$32,000 was funnelled in and out of the bank accounts of four Tory candidates running in rural Newfoundland. Newfoundland is a small enough place that if \$32,000 worth of advertising were to be run, we would notice it, but the Conservative Party campaign did not run a single ad in any of those ridings.

Knowing that the money was actually laundered off to the mainland, with no local benefit to any candidate, what kind of a Ponzi scheme is this?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's overheated rhetoric and mistaken facts notwithstanding, I would simply remind him that we are talking about a five-year-old administrative dispute. We continue to take our case forward, because Conservative candidates spent Conservative funds on Conservative advertising. They did so in total accordance with the rules.

We stood for the right things. We followed all the proper procedures, and we will continue to defend our case in court.

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if it is an administrative dispute, I guess all four of them will go to an administrative prison. That is how it looks.

With respect to what we have seen over the last few days, it is really quite remarkable. There are cabinet ministers in the front two rows, not a single one of them prepared to answer a question on this, all affected by the crisis, all affected by the mistake, all affected by the fraud.

Where is the transparency? Where is the accountability? Why will not a single cabinet minister answer a question on this issue?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, still not a single question from the Liberals on jobs for Canadians. Here we are in the middle of a fragile economic recovery, with troubles around the world.

Our government focused on the economic action plan: 460,000 jobs; unemployment two points lower than in the United States; six consecutive quarters of economic growth; tax free savings accounts helping five millions Canadians prepare for the future.

Why will the Liberals not join with us in building up the country rather than trying to tear—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, one former Conservative candidate refused to

participate in the Conservatives' 2006 election fraud. He is a lawyer who quickly realized that it was an illegal manoeuvre. The director of public prosecutions, who has charged four organizers, maintains that the Conservatives made false and misleading declarations.

How can the Prime Minister claim to be lily-white when the Chief Electoral Officer, the Commissioner of Canada Elections, the director of public prosecutions and former Conservative candidates maintain that the party deliberately violated the Canada Elections Act?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I believe I mentioned that Conservative candidates spent Conservative money on Conservative advertising. It is true that the party transferred funds to local candidates. Elections Canada knows this because we told them. Why not? It is legal, it is ethical and it is a practice used by all parties. Therefore, we will continue to defend our case in the courts.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is telling half-truths. The Chief Electoral Officer had to conduct a search and seizure to get the documents. They were not handed over voluntarily.

The current president of the National Citizens Coalition believes that the Conservative Party is the victim of a vendetta. When the current Prime Minister was the president of this group that fiercely battled Bill 101, he tried to eliminate limits on election expenses.

By refusing to admit that his party contravened the Elections Act in 2006, is the Prime Minister not confirming that he is continuing his ideological battle to weaken the election rules necessary in a democracy?

• (1440)

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, in a non-partisan spirit, I would like to start by giving credit to the Bloc Québécois, which invented the in and out scheme. I believe that the Bloc is too modest, and probably should be. The leader of the Bloc, who invented this practice years ago, is truly the father of the in and out scheme.

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**QUEBEC CITY ARENA**

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, although they donned Nordiques jerseys at a highly publicized event, the Conservatives never had any intention of contributing funds to help build a multi-purpose arena in Quebec City. As usual, they created expectations and made promises in veiled terms, but when the time came to keep them, they ducked out.

How could the minister responsible for the Quebec City region put on a Nordiques jersey and suggest for months that her government would contribute to the arena project, when it never had any intention of becoming financially involved?



*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by telling the hon. member for Québec that I do not need her permission to put on a Nordiques jersey. We all would love to see the Nordiques return to Quebec City.

That being said, our position has always been very clear: we asked that a substantial contribution from the private sector be included in the financing package, which is not the case at this time. We do not have any programs that would cover this kind of request, and we have no intention of creating one.

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for the Quebec City region repeatedly asked for a business plan for the multi-purpose arena. Yet less than one hour after the presentation of a business plan, including a substantial contribution from the private sector, the minister closed the door on the project.

Will the minister finally admit that that condition, like all others, was merely a pretext and that, from the beginning, the Conservatives had no intention of contributing to the funding of the Quebec City arena?

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, from the beginning, we have been asking for complete information, including substantial private sector investments, basically since my discussion with the mayor, shortly before he made the announcement.

As far as we were concerned, it was clear that the project would be funded mainly with public money. Thus, it no longer fit within the framework of any of our programs. That said, we do not have any programs for professional sports and we have no intention of creating such a program.

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**INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are being told that the Minister of International Cooperation's refusal to support KAIROS despite the recommendation of officials from her department was a courageous decision. We, too, would like to truly understand her courage.

Can the minister explain to us why the recommendation was erroneous and why she disregarded it? Will she explain exactly how her department erred, or will she continue to demonstrate her contempt for this Parliament?

[*English*]

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government wants Canada's aid and development efforts to have an impact and make a difference.

With Canada's support and our government's policies, more children will get at least one meal a day; more children will be in school, with trained, qualified teachers; more mothers will be healthier and able to survive giving birth to healthy babies; and more young people will have the needed skills to get a job and earn an income.

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's code of conduct requires ministers to appear in the House and answer questions honestly and accurately.

Who in the Prime Minister's Office told the minister to cut KAIROS funding? Who inserted the "not" in the recommendation line? Why did she blame honourable civil servants? Why does she show such contempt for Parliament by not answering questions properly put to her honestly and accurately?

• (1445)

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that Canadians know how their aid dollars are being spent. That is what we want to answer for Canadians. We want to ensure that our aid is getting into the hands of those who need it most, reducing hunger and preventing disease and death, and for quality education for children and youth. We are delivering results and providing value from Canadian assistance abroad.

Canadians deserve to know what difference their aid dollars are making for these people. Those are the questions we will answer.

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**FORMER PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER**

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Christiane Ouimet, the supposed independent officer of Parliament who was there to protect public servants, left her position suddenly only three years into a seven-year term. The appointment of Mrs. Ouimet was approved by a resolution of the Senate and the House of Commons. She could only be removed by a similar resolution or for cause. No resolution was passed in either the House of Commons or the Senate.

Was Mrs. Ouimet fired or forced to resign and what incentive did the government provide to force her departure?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the appointment of that individual was something that was approved of and taken part in by all parties, including the leaders. We have had some reasonable comment from members opposite that they are in charge of that particular file, as they rightly should be.

Also, I would note that the Auditor General thoroughly reviewed all of the cases that should have been reviewed. We have an interim commissioner in place who is doing a very aggressive review of those files right now.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, then why did the House not approve her departure? It was our prerogative. The former integrity commissioner, Christiane Ouimet, left her job after completing only the first three years of her seven-year contract. There was no order from the House of Commons or the Senate to authorize her dismissal. This situation leaves us with many unanswered questions.

*Oral Questions*

Did Ms. Ouimet leave her position voluntarily? Was she forced to leave? What were the conditions surrounding her departure? Parliamentarians and especially Canadians have the right to know!

**Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Ms. Ouimet herself decided to leave. According to the information I have, she will now attend a committee meeting to answer questions. That will be the appropriate time for asking questions.

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**VETERANS**

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, unlike the Bloc and the coalition, our Conservative government is using the economic action plan to help the regions of Quebec. We are cutting taxes, supporting workers, helping seniors and supporting our small and medium-sized businesses in order to create jobs in every region of Quebec. Our Conservative government is listening to the regions and delivering the goods while the opposition is listening to the leftist urban elite from the Plateau.

Can the Minister of Veterans Affairs tell this House what our government is doing to help our brave soldiers and veterans in every region of Quebec?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member from Lévis—Bellechasse for his excellent work and his concern for veterans.

Our government is listening to the regions of Quebec and to veterans. We introduced Bill C-55 in the House, and it will serve as the enhanced new veterans charter and will help our modern-day veterans, who may come back wounded from Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, the Bloc is still not co-operating as we would like, but we still hope to pass this bill before the upcoming budget.

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[English]

**PENSIONS**

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, time and again the Conservatives have put the interests of banks ahead of those of ordinary Canadians.

For 11 million Canadians, the CPP is the only pension plan they have. The government clearly knows that the CPP benefits will be seriously inadequate for retirees in the future, but it refuses to do anything about it. New Democrats are proposing a phased-in doubling of the CPP. Our pragmatic proposal is even endorsed by a former actuary of the Canada pension plan.

Will the Conservatives include this practical plan in their upcoming budget?

• (1450)

**Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for that question, but it raises a larger question. Why do the New Democrats not talk to the partners who actually deal with the Canada pension plan, the provinces?

We have. We have spoken to the provinces. They do not support an increase in the Canada pension plan deductions for employers at this time. That is a critical difference.

We are putting forward an option that all of the provinces have endorsed. It is a pooled registered pension plan and it is for millions of Canadians who now have no option of a pension.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is well-known that over 300,000 Canadian seniors are living in poverty.

The guaranteed income supplement was supposed to prevent this and ensure a dignified retirement for all Canadians. It is simply no longer doing the job. New Democrats are proposing that the GIS be increased by \$700 million. That would lift all seniors out of poverty.

Will the Conservative government include this practical, doable idea in its upcoming budget, yes or no?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have taken a number of initiatives to ensure seniors have the help they need when they need it. We will continue to look at ways to improve the situation for seniors.

We have raised the GIS on two separate occasions. We have provided for income-splitting. We have increased the age credit a number of times.

We would ask the NDP members to support us when we put initiatives forward that are of benefit to the senior citizens of this country.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives refuse to admit that the victims of the forestry crisis are still piling up. After the closures of the sawmills in Saint-Fulgence and Petit-Saguenay, Scierie Gauthier is now under the protection of the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. Without a real assistance plan, other paper mills and sawmills will have to shut down.

Why does the government still refuse to create an assistance plan for the forestry industry, which would help save many jobs?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will quote the CEO of Scierie Gauthier, "In the current context of residential construction, forestry work is scarce because of the market." Even in his own region, people are saying that. If there is someone who does not get it, it is this member. Just yesterday, with the ministers of the Government of Quebec, I announced an additional \$8 million for silviculture. That is now \$240 million for silviculture.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the automotive industry in Ontario received \$10 billion and Quebec forestry workers received a few crumbs. We need a real stimulus plan for the forestry industry. It would include better access to cash, industrial research support, investments in alternative fuels and better support for communities and workers.

Why do the ministers from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean refuse to fight along with us to ensure that these measures are included in the upcoming budget?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, fortunately we are fighting on the government side. While we are in power, they whine and get no results.

He is comparing apples to oranges. In case he is not aware, we are partners in the automotive industry, and in the forestry industry we are competing with the United States. It is as simple as that. We are examining the issues with the automotive industry. We know very well that we signed an excellent agreement—which the Liberals neglected for six years—to sell our lumber to the Americans and we will continue to do so. We do support the forestry industry.

\* \* \*

[English]

**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, all Canadians are aware of the devastating impact of the collapse of the Atlantic cod fishery, but since the end of the moratorium more than 1,000 fishermen from southern Newfoundland have worked to rebuild the cod stock in area 3PS. However, the stock remains in a critical state.

Last week, DFO announced it would be postponing the annual March 1 conservation closure needed to protect the spawning cod because a few private companies did not catch their quotas. This flies in the face of science and places an entire stock at risk.

Will the minister please reconsider these reckless actions?

● (1455)

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the conservation and the recovery of our once proud cod stocks remains a priority for our government. Most areas remain closed to fishing or are opened responsibly to ensure that we do protect the spawning areas. We are also taking action to address the industry's concerns over grey seal predation. We will continue to work with the industry in rebuilding this stock.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is a conservation closure. The science is very simple. When the fish spawn, they congregate. When they congregate, they are more easily caught. This could devastate an entire stock of cod, an entire generation.

We have seen the disregard that this government has for science, whether it is the environment or fisheries management. Last year there was a 63% cut in gulf crab because science from 2008 was ignored by the government.

Will this minister come to her senses and go forward with this closure?

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member does not have to tell us on this side of the House how important the fishery is to this country. I just want to point out to this member, being the fisheries critic, that for six months, 183 days, and 74 question periods, this is the first fisheries question he has asked.

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**HOUSING**

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, soon the dream of buying a house will be out of reach for middle-class Canadians. In B.C. the median price of a home is over \$400,000 while the average family income is only \$68,000. Yet the Conservatives' only plan is to cut a billion dollars next year. These cuts also eliminate funds for social housing, aboriginal housing, and seniors in need.

Why is the government cutting funds for housing when it is so desperately needed?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we did not cut funding to housing. In fact, under the economic action plan, we had \$2 billion for housing to ensure that houses are built both for seniors and those who are disabled. The New Democratic Party did not support those initiatives. In fact, it should be supporting initiatives like that.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, maybe the parliamentary secretary should read his own government estimates because the bottom line is that the Conservatives are not helping middle-class Canadians.

In Vancouver the average price of a two-storey home is a million bucks. That is 10% higher than last year. Prices have also jumped close to 10% in Regina, Halifax and St. John's.

The housing crisis is real and it is hitting more and more people. When will the government stop dragging its feet and adopt the New Democratic plan for a national housing strategy?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are over 12,000 housing projects across the country that the NDP did not support this particular government in undertaking. Now it is asking, what are we doing for housing?

In fact, we had a number of tax initiatives and tax reductions. We put over \$3,000 in the pockets of every Canadian family of four, which that particular party did not support and did not even care to read the budget to see what was in it.

*Oral Questions***STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for Status of Women. In October of last year, our government announced concrete action to address the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

Could the minister provide this House with an update on these efforts and tell us what else this government is doing to address the issue of violence against aboriginal women and girls?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Miramichi for all the good work she does on behalf of women.

As she said, in the fall of last year our government announced it would invest \$10 million over two years to improve community safety, and ensure that the justice system and law enforcement agencies can better respond to cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

On Friday the Native Women's Association of Canada received an additional \$1.9 million in funding from our government for its new project. This is what the president of the Native Women's Association of Canada had to say:

This commitment shows that the Government of Canada and NWAC have a shared dedication to ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

\* \* \*

• (1500)

[Translation]

**GOVERNMENT SPENDING**

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we still do not know how much the megaprison that the Conservatives want to build are going to cost. We just know that it is a lot.

Meanwhile, there has been a reduction of 14% in the budget for environmental programs, an important file for the regions, where sustainable development depends on the effective management of natural resources. One-third of the budget for regional development in Quebec has been cut.

Is this what the Conservatives mean by giving power to the regions?

[English]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I find the Liberal position on funding prison construction quite confusing.

Last week I was in Newfoundland and people told me that they wanted us to, in fact, build a prison in Newfoundland. At the same time, the leader of the opposition party was telling Canadians that there should not be any prisons built.

Perhaps the two groups could get together and figure out exactly where they are on crime and they could start standing up for the victims of crime as opposed to being so worried about the prisoners.

[Translation]

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development told us that he consulted key stakeholders before implementing the Nutrition North program. However, according to committee witnesses, the consultations were merely a routine review and no indication was given that the food mail program was going to be replaced. How were they supposed to prepare for this change?

Is the government going to suspend the Nutrition North program until this House can seriously consider whether the costs justify the economic impact?

[English]

**Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the program went through a long consultation phase. We had more than 80 meetings in the north talking to northerners about what they would like to see in the program. They want a transparent and accountable system. They are going to get it with a retail subsidy instead of a transportation subsidy.

We are implementing changes to improve the effectiveness of the program, but we are also listening. We are prepared to make changes as this program goes along to make sure that it is delivering nutritious and affordable foods to northerners.

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**TAXATION**

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when Canadians are late with their taxes, they do not get a break; they get a fine. But GVA does not, a company that flooded Canadian markets with candy-flavoured cigarillos aimed at our youth. GVA owes Revenue Canada \$20 million in export taxes since 2006. It used that money to lower the cost of their deadly product. Incredibly, CRA neglected to collect these taxes and is now considering forgiving a large chunk of this debt.

Will the government indicate if this kind of deal is available for all Canadians or only its deep-pocketed friends?

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of National Revenue, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I suggest the member opposite get her facts straight and quit relying on the press for her information. The fact is that we are talking about uncollected duties, not taxes, and the government will collect what is owed.

I would remind the member that the Minister of Health introduced the Cracking Down on Tobacco Marketing Aimed at Youth Act, which is now law. The new law cracks down on tobacco marketing aimed at youth, bans flavours that would appeal to children, sets minimum package sizes and bans all tobacco advertising.

**The Speaker:** I wish to advise hon. members, in case some have forgotten, that the Canadian Medical Association is on the Hill today in Room 601 until 4 p.m. It is offering services to members to assist them in maintaining their health. Although I am only responsible for rights and privileges, I can, of course, urge hon. members to take care of their health.

[Translation]

Members can receive a free assessment of their risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. No appointment is necessary. Members can simply go to Room 601 any time before 4 p.m. today.

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[English]

## POINTS OF ORDER

### ORAL QUESTIONS

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order arising out of question period. The member for Toronto—Danforth mentioned, in his question for the government, a letter from the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism soliciting, on parliamentary letterhead, funds for Conservative electoral district associations.

I would seek unanimous consent to have this document tabled in the House.

● (1505)

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member for Vancouver East have the unanimous consent of the House to have this document tabled in the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

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## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, before I ask the question, I would like to first pick up on the unanimous request put by my colleague from the NDP.

A very troubling matter was raised during question period today and I would like to give the government House leader an opportunity to address it. Perhaps he could come back to the House and explain how it is possible that a minister of the Crown would facilitate and permit the sending out of fundraising letters seeking \$200,000 of financial commitments for Conservative branding.

**The Speaker:** That is fine but the question is supposed to deal with the business of the House and I think we had better stick with the intent of the question.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** I will leave it with you, Mr. Speaker, and with my colleague across the floor.

I would ask the House leader what the business of the House is for the remainder of this week. There were some changes this week in terms of opposition days granted to the NDP. These were negotiations that were ongoing I understand between the government and the NDP.

I would also like to ask what the business is for next week?

## Business of the House

We have been asking repeatedly, and Canadians want to know, where two other government bills are, Bill S-10 and Bill C-49.

**Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, before I respond to the member's question, I would like to, on behalf of the government, add my voice to the voices of the member for Toronto Centre and the member for Winnipeg Centre who spoke about the passing of a distinguished member of the parliamentary press gallery, Jim Travers of *The Toronto Star*. He was a long-time member of the parliamentary press gallery and a former editor of the *Ottawa Citizen*. Jim would have been just 63 years old next month. His passing in the hospital was completely shocking and unexpected.

Jim was a top national journalist and a columnist who never was afraid to make his views known on the printed page and on the airwaves as a frequent guest on panel shows and talk radio. He was a passionate Canadian. He loved this country and he was incredibly committed to his craft. Canada has certainly lost a legend.

On behalf of all of us in this place, I offer our sincere condolences to Jim's wife Joan, his sons Patrick and Ben, and to the rest of his family and friends, and his colleagues especially from *The Toronto Star* who, I know, are deeply saddened by this loss, and, indeed, all of his colleagues in the parliamentary press gallery at this very difficult time. The thoughts and prayers of all Canadians are with Jim's family and many friends.

In terms of parliamentary business for the coming week, today we will continue debate on the NDP opposition motion. I thank my NDP counterpart, the member for Vancouver East, after our difference of opinion. We have worked to make Parliament work and we have come to an agreement that has been satisfactory to both sides. I also thank my opposition colleagues from Ottawa South and Joliette for their assistance and agreement in this matter.

Tomorrow, we will resume and hope to complete debate on Bill C-55, the enhanced new veterans charter that our colleague, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, has introduced. Following Bill C-55, we will move to call Bill C-60, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (citizen's arrest and the defences of property and persons).

Next week, we will continue with the business on Friday and, in addition, we will call Bill C-20, the action plan for the National Capital Commission; Bill C-54, the child sexual offences; Bill C-8, the Canada–Jordan free trade agreement; Bill C-12, the democratic representation; Bill C-46, the Canada–Panama free trade agreement; Bill C-57, improving trade within Canada, brought forward by the Minister for Small Business; and Bill C-50, improving access to investigative tools for serious crimes, which is an important bill sponsored by our colleague, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

My friend from Ottawa South and the member for Vancouver East mentioned a solicitation for financial funds on parliamentary letterhead.

Mr. Speaker, as the chair of the Board of Internal Economy, I think it would be wise for you to place this issue before the Board of Internal Economy. There have been several complaints about opposition members soliciting campaign funds on government websites and perhaps the board could discuss that at the same time.

*Points of Order*

With respect to Bill S-10 and Bill C-49, we continue to make our case to Canadians and are working hard to convince the Liberal Party of the wrong decision it has made on these important piece of legislation. We will call for further debate in due course.

• (1510)

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. House leader for his suggestion. As a member of the board, he can bring these matters forward to his heart's content at the meetings and, as chair, I would be more than happy to accommodate him there.

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**POINTS OF ORDER**

BILL C-61—FREEZING ASSETS OF CORRUPT REGIMES ACT

**Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe if you seek it you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, Bill C-61, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of the property of officials and former officials of foreign states and of their family members, be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like the government House leader to tell us why they did not go further—why they did not ask that Bill C-61 be passed at all stages?

I said this during question period: the government does not need this bill in order to freeze Ben Ali's assets, but I think it would send an extremely important message to all of the dictators who are currently using Canada, Quebec and even Montreal—we saw that in the news yesterday—to squander money that belongs to various nations.

We would have liked to see a motion asking that Bill C-61 be passed at all stages and sent to the Senate.

[*English*]

**Hon. John Baird:** Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that the Bloc has certainly been co-operative in wanting to see this bill passed expeditiously but, regrettably, we could not find the unanimous consent of the House. However, I do thank all members of the House for allowing it to go to committee expeditiously so that it can be looked into.

Obviously, with respect to freezing private property, it is a very serious issue. We look forward to its consideration in committee in short order.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we on this side of the House want to establish is that there will be the five-year parliamentary review and, with that in mind, I wonder if we can get a response on that. We would be supportive but we want to know the government's response on that.

**Hon. John Baird:** Mr. Speaker, there were consultations with the parties on this important legislation and I believe both the Liberals and the New Democrats requested that the bill be amended with respect to having a built-in legislative review. On behalf of the government, I would indicate my support for that initiative.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to stand in the way of the progress of legislation but it would be useful if we had time to read the legislation and perhaps hear one speaker from each party. I gather that there may be unanimous consent, and I will not hold it back, but it should be noted that it would be useful to at least have one hour of debate before we approve a bill in principle.

**Hon. John Baird:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the interventions and discussions with my colleagues. At this time I would like to withdraw the question. There will be further discussions with the parties.

ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order arising out of question period.

In response to a question, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans indicated that it was the first time a question had been posed by the official opposition critic. I would think that she would be one of the least likely ministers from the government bench to purposely mislead the House.

I would ask that she check *Hansard* and maybe speak with her parliamentary secretary. She may want to correct the record because it certainly was not the first time a fisheries issue has been raised by me. Maybe she would like to clarify the record on that.

• (1515)

**The Speaker:** A dispute of the facts is not something the Speaker normally gets involved in, as the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso is well aware. This does appear to be a dispute about facts, whether or not there was a question asked before.

I am afraid my memory is not great for these things. I hear so many questions, I cannot remember what they are all about. I am sure the hon. member can check the record and inform the minister as necessary by sending excerpts from *Hansard*.

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**PRIVILEGE**

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION  
REGARDING KAIROS

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am continuing a question of privilege and I appreciate the indulgence you gave us prior to the break with respect to responding to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

I was away in the earlier part of this week and my good colleague from Guelph responded on my behalf. I do not want to be repetitive with respect to many of the things that he has already said.

I would just like to finish off by saying that with respect to my question in question period today the key point was that a minister is to answer, honestly and accurately, questions put to them in the House. That is the Prime Minister's code of conduct with respect to ministers responding in the House and, indeed, in order paper questions.

One of the key points that seems to have been lost in this whole exercise is the response, particularly in French.

[Translation]

“...KAIROS was recently refused funding as it was determined that KAIROS' 2009 program proposal did not meet the government's priorities.”

[English]

In other words, it was the agency that determined that it was not going to be receiving its funds.

Mr. Speaker, as you have been privilege to, and I put the word “privilege” in quotation marks, the many questions that have been put forward in the House, now exceeding some 90 questions, you will know that the response to the enquiry of the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine is not an accurate response and speaks to the issue of not answering honestly and accurately in the House, both in written and verbal forms.

The other point I wish to draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, before saying that I am prepared to move the motion in the event you make a prima facie finding is that after the hon. parliamentary secretary intervened and made his argument, there were talking points issued from the Conservative caucus, which basically said that the minister was not present either for the signing or the insertion of the famous “not”. It is, once again, one more version of the facts.

I have not been able to keep track of all of the versions that the government has put forward, but it certainly falls far short of the standard set by the Prime Minister for his ministers, namely, that questions be answered fully, forthrightly, honestly and accurately.

I appreciate the efforts on behalf of my colleagues particularly on this side of the House to speak to this serious issue and I look forward to the Speaker's response.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, I will point out to my hon. colleague and, of course, yourself, who needs no refresher on this point of privilege, that the normal course of action in Parliament is that when a point of privilege is raised by a member of the opposition, interventions are then made by all parties who wish to contribute to the discussion and a considered response is made by the government. That usually is the end of it, until such time, of course, as the Speaker makes a ruling.

In this particular case, we have had initial interventions from the member for Scarborough—Guildwood and others on the opposition ranks. I, on behalf of our government, made a response. Then there was a further intervention by the member for Guelph on behalf of the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, which precipitated my making a further response to his response and now there is yet another intervention.

### *Speaker's Ruling*

We have all said quite honestly and sincerely that we would like an early ruling from you, Mr. Speaker, but if members opposite continue to make interventions and force us to respond, your ruling will be delayed exponentially. I wish that we could get some clarification as to the normal course of proceedings when these points of privilege are raised so that we do not have continuous, subsequent and consequential interventions from the opposition.

I would suggest that if members are not prepared to make an accurate and fulsome intervention initially, they should not be asked to take up government House time by making subsequent interventions. It only stands to reason that their initial question of privilege should contain all of the information required.

● (1520)

**Hon. John McKay:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to point out that I do not wish to respond to the response.

**The Speaker:** I thank hon. members for their submissions. I will continue to review the matter and hope that I will be able to come up with a ruling fairly promptly on this.

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### POINTS OF ORDER

#### PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE—SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** I am now ready to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. member for Vancouver East on February 18 concerning the need to clarify the process by which members give notice of questions of privilege arising out of committee reports. I thank the hon. member for bringing this matter to the attention of the House.

The House will recall that on February 17, 2001, two members gave notice of questions of privilege related to the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. One member did so before the report was tabled, while the other waited until the report had actually been tabled and, as a result, the member who chose to wait to give notice until the report had been tabled was not the first to be recognized.

[Translation]

In reference to the procedures members are to follow in raising questions of privilege, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, at page 142 states:

A member wishing to raise a question of privilege which does not arise out of the proceedings during the course of a sitting must give notice before bringing the question to the attention of the House. The member must provide a written statement to the Speaker at least one hour before raising the question of privilege in the House.

[English]

For questions of privilege arising out of committee proceedings, O'Brien and Bosc states on page 151:

If the committee decides that the matter should be reported to the House, it will adopt the report which will be presented to the House at the appropriate time under the rubric “Presenting Reports from Committees” during Routine Proceedings.

Once the report has been presented, the House is formally seized of the matter. After having given the appropriate notice, any Member may then raise the matter as a question of privilege.

*Business of Supply*

This passage implies that a report must have been presented to the House before a member can give notice of a question of privilege related to its contents. This is akin to our procedures with regard to notices of motions to concur in committee reports, which cannot be submitted until the report in question has been presented.

[*Translation*]

The Chair is cognizant that to do otherwise with regard to notices of questions of privilege might well give rise to situations in which a member could give notice as soon as a committee begins to consider a matter, or perhaps even earlier, when there is but an inkling that something may arise. This is neither desirable nor practicable.

[*English*]

Accordingly, in the interest of bringing clarity to this procedure, from now on, the Chair will not accept notices of questions of privilege based on committee reports until after the reports are tabled.

I thank hon. members for their attention.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

**The Speaker:** Before question period, the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier had the floor. We were at questions and comments following his speech.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc.

[*English*]

**Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his very thoughtful speech. I understand it is his practice in this place and I sincerely appreciate him for doing this.

I agree with his points about wholesale reform in the Senate being necessary.

There are obviously two options. One is to do wholesale reform of the Senate through a constitutional amendment process, which would be very long, complex and may have very little chance of success. The alternative is to do exactly what our government is proposing to do, which is to introduce bills such as those for the election of senators and for term limits.

Would the hon. member consider supporting these two important pieces of legislation as a way of getting the ball rolling on Senate reform so that we can make it an elected chamber where people cannot serve up to 40 years in that place. This would be a way of starting the reform ball going so that we can reform it to an institution where it is effective, elected and equal in the long term.

● (1525)

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have always had the view that perhaps it was best to reform the Senate as a whole. However, I have to recognize that we have not proceeded a whole lot down that road.

The difficulty I have with the current approach that the government has undertaken is the lack of consultation, or the seeming lack of consultation, with provincial authorities. In the case of Senate reform, that is a necessity. The provinces must be included, consulted and hopefully brought into a consensus. Otherwise, we are likely to end up in a confrontation, which seems to be where we are headed. I gather the government has had public notice of some provinces intending to pursue the matter that is in front of the Senate now, in front of the courts.

I am not sure that either method will give us the results that perhaps Canadians want. That is why I suggest we ought to consider down the road another method which would perhaps involve a royal commission of sorts, but a method that would involve in its process provincial authorities.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier for his remarks. I particularly appreciate his tone and personal remarks. I have known the member quite well over the last few years working on the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association. I have the greatest respect for him and for his love and commitment to this country, but we disagree on some areas of how we should approach that.

I have always had a great deal of difficulty especially with the Liberals in defending the unnecessary Senate by virtue of the good work, the good reports and the good deeds it does. My thinking on that has always been, that is great, and there are some wonderful people there, but if we need them to do good deed work, we can create a committee, commission, or task force so they can do that work. The issue is that they ought not be allowed to have a say in what the laws of the country are because they do not have the legitimacy to do it, so I do not buy that argument.

I do want to ask about the notion of the check and balances, a favourite phrase of the Americans in their system. In ours, I do not see any check and balance. The hon. member mentioned one example where the Senate corrected a mistake or found a mistake here in the House. I served on two local councils and in the Ontario legislature and mistakes, unfortunately, are made all the time. However, they did not have a Senate or an overseeing body. They just made the corrections. In Ontario we did six amendments to fix one bill. It took a lot of time, but we were able to do it. We have the tools. There is nothing they do in the Senate that we cannot do here. I would like the member's thoughts on this.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Speaker, I have to say that the example I gave was pertaining to Bill C-10 in the 39th Parliament where there was an omnibus legislation and there was one parcel in the bill that basically would have given the Crown, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the authority to exercise censorship in moviemaking in this country and essentially could have destroyed the entire apparatus we have built up over the years for that industry.



*Business of Supply*

The government should have pointed these things out when it presented its legislation. It did not. Nobody on the opposition side saw that. It was picked up in the Senate and stopped by the Senate. If it had not been stopped I would argue that I do not think that the government would have introduced legislation to change that. Therefore, we would have been stuck with a system that the majority in this House did not want and that the Senate at the time did not want. I said that at that time the Senate saved the day.

There are a number of examples along those lines where it has corrected legislation, where it has picked up things that the House missed. Perhaps down the road there may be another method used than the Senate, but in a bicameral system the notion of checks and balances is imperative. I recognize that some days it may not work. I understand that if we were to end up with a majority Conservative government in the House and a Conservative majority in the Senate, the checks and balances would go out the door. However, most times it does seem to work.

If we are to get rid of the Senate, which is something that the motion put forward by the member calls for, I would rather see something in its stead before we get rid of it. That is why—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

• (1530)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. I would encourage all members to direct their comments to the Chair.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and start off by paying tribute to the member for Hamilton Centre who has brought this motion forward in the House of Commons today. As the NDP critic for democratic reform, he has brought the views of Canadians right to the front and centre of the House of Commons. He deserves the thanks of all members of Parliament and Canadians across the country. We praise him for his work.

I am flabbergasted. I cannot, for the life of me, understand why Conservatives and Liberals are going to stand in the House and say they do not support a motion that starts off by saying it is going to consult Canadians. We will have a parliamentary committee consulting Canadians on proportional representation, on modernizing that essential electoral system, and I will come back to that in a moment. I think it is self-evident, but the importance of modernizing our political systems does bear speaking about for a few moments.

Mr. Speaker, I should note that I will be dividing my time with the member for Ottawa Centre.

I cannot for the life of me understand why Conservative and Liberal MPs are, on the one hand, saying that they do want a consultation on proportional representation, yet on the other hand, saying that they absolutely refuse to have a national referendum on the Senate.

It is quite clear, or it should be, to everyone that with the falling rates of voter participation, it is absolutely essential that we modernize our political institutions to deal with the existing democratic crisis. Barely over 50% of Canadians voted in the last

national election. It was particularly appalling among the youngest Canadians. About 25% of 18 to 24-year-olds actually voted. Therefore, there is an institutional problem when Canadians do not feel their vote will count and do not show up at the polls.

We will see what Canadians say about getting rid of the Senate, or at least allowing Canadians to have a voice on that and make their choice. Canadians in my riding are saying they do not believe the Senate is democratic, that it is political nominees who come from the Conservative Party, and I will come back to that in a moment. They simply would love to have the opportunity to vote on that and vote to abolish it, as every province in the country has chosen to do. Every province that had a senate abolished it. When we go to what were formerly the legislative councils, they have all been abolished. No one regrets that. There is no call in British Columbia or Quebec to re-establish the senate, to reappoint political hacks and bagmen and bagwomen. There is simply not that outcry.

Why Conservatives and Liberals are so resistant to modernizing those political institutions is a question that hopefully individuals will ask. If there is an election campaign in a few weeks' time, I think individuals will ask the candidates from those parties why they refuse any sort of modernization of our political institutions.

I have a lot of respect for people who vote, whether they vote NDP, or Liberal, or Conservative or Bloc. The fact that they vote is important. Conservative voters voted often for the Conservative Party because they were told it would bring change to Ottawa. It has been exactly the contrary. In fact, the situation, the misuse of government resources, the sense of entitlement of the Conservative government and Conservative politicians is as bad or even worse than it was under the former corrupt Liberal regime.

• (1535)

Canadians voted for change. Many people in Canada voted in good faith for the Conservative Party. Now they are seeing that the commitments made by Conservative politicians have been completely betrayed.

Members may remember the Prime Minister saying that he would change the Senate, that he would stop using the Senate as some kind of warehouse for defeated party candidates the way the Liberals used to do. Let us look at the appointments that the Prime Minister has made, using taxpayer money, using the hard-earned money of softwood workers in British Columbia. They work hard and they pay their taxes. Their tax money is going to fund a group of bagmen and political hacks in the Senate.

Who has been appointed?

The former director of the Progressive Conservative Fund was appointed to the Senate and is now being paid, when we include office expenses and other expenses, half a million dollars. That money is being taken from the hard-working taxpayers of B.C., Alberta, Ontario, Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The tax money of Canadians who are working hard and dealing with record debt loads is going now to fund political hacks, and there is no other way of putting it, in the Senate.

The Tories national campaign director for 2006 and 2008 was appointed to the Senate. Half a million dollars of hard-working Canadian taxpayer money is being shovelled right at him every year.

*Business of Supply*

I will mention some more Conservative appointees to the Senate: the former chair of the Conservative Party Fund; a former Conservative MP who was defeated in the 2008 election; an unsuccessful Conservative candidate in B.C. in 2008; an unsuccessful Conservative candidate in the 2006 election; an unsuccessful former Conservative candidate who ran for the Canadian Alliance Party in 2000; a former Conservative MP from 1984; the former president of the Conservative Party; the former co-chair for the Prime Minister's leadership campaign; a former press secretary to the Prime Minister; former provincial Conservatives; another unsuccessful Conservative candidate in 2008; another unsuccessful Conservative candidate in 2008. The list goes on and on.

These people were rejected by the Canadian public. The Conservatives offered them up and Canadians said that they did not want them. What did the Conservatives do? Showing the utmost hypocrisy even for their own voters, giving the back of the hand to their voters, many of whom voted in good faith for the Conservative government, they stuff the Senate with their party hacks and take taxpayer money in the most abusive way and use that as their own resource just for themselves.

Rather than addressing the crucial issues that the NDP has been bringing forward, such as the shortage of physicians and nurses, the record levels of student debt, the tremendous poverty in which Canadian seniors are living, the fact that our veterans are treated despicably by the government, and I could go on, the Conservative administration, with that sense of entitlement that goes beyond even what the former corrupt Liberals felt, has been stuffing the Senate at half a million dollars a pop with failed Conservative candidates and other party bagmen and bagwomen.

We have been talking about scandals in the House of Commons such as the Conservatives misuse of taxpayer resources to further their own political ends, the misuse of ideology in government grants. In perhaps no other way does this show how profoundly mistrustful Canadians will be of those Conservative politicians who come forward in the next campaign and say that they have cleaned up Ottawa.

They are rolling in muck and mire, just like the Liberals did. They are showing the same contempt for the public as the Liberals did. Five years ago Canadians voted for change and voted to have some cleaning up. What we are seeing is the same level of trough, the same rolling in the muck and mire that we used to see.

The Senate is packed with insiders. NDP members are saying we must have a referendum. We must consult Canadians. We must put in place an electoral system that, yes, would be to the disadvantage of the Conservatives because they did not get the percentage vote in the House. The House of Commons will be a much more representative population and the Senate will be abolished, because that is what Canadians will decide.

• (1540)

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I caught some of the member's comments. I have certainly listened to the debate this afternoon and this morning. I always come back to the fact that the government has a realistic Senate reform strategy to have term limits and senatorial elections. These are doable within the Constitution. They do not require the

huge Meech Lake or Charlottetown kind of constitutional wrangling that tied up our country for virtually two decades.

Canadians want us to focus on the economy. Why does the NDP not come on side and support the government on these three bills: the Senate term legislation; senatorial selection, which although is in the other place it can still support it; and seat redistribution, where faster growing provinces that are currently under-represented will be represented appropriately, including B.C., Ontario and Alberta, in all of which the NDP has members? I cannot understand why the NDP is against democratic reform as presented already.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, the minister already knows the answer to that question.

First, members will recall that the Conservative government broke its word on the fixed election dates. It brought that legislation in and we supported it. What did it do? It broke that commitment.

What the minister is not saying is that ultimately it is the Prime Minister who decides. He is appointed. Therefore, this idea of some kind of sham Egyptian-style election is simply inappropriate. I think people around the world are actually fighting for real democratic reform.

The other point I want to raise is this. The government has shown such incredible contempt for British Columbia. It has forced the HST on British Columbians. It has done absolutely nothing to address key B.C. issues. If the government wants to permanently enshrine B.C. with only six members in the Senate, which is far below its population ratio in the country, that shows just one other reason why British Columbians should vote NDP in the upcoming election.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when I heard the minister of democratic reform speak, I was reminded of the word "reform". I remember the old Reform Party that claimed, at one time, it believed in things such as initiatives, recall and referenda. The whole purpose behind referenda is to restore to the people of a country the right to express their democratic opinions on a particular issue, particularly one as important as one of the two chambers that govern our country.

I noticed that the motion calls upon us to hold a referendum to put a simple question which would allow Canadians to vote on whether they wanted us to abolish the Senate and whether they wanted a new system of proportional representation.

Could my hon. colleague comment on the concept of allowing Canadians to express their opinions, votes and wishes to us, instead of having the Conservative government and the minister of democratic reform tell Canadians what they want? Perhaps we should hear from Canadians and let them tell us what they would like in their government.

Could my colleague comment on that?

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, I believe Canadians who have listened to the debate today already understand that the Conservatives and Liberals do not want Canadians to be consulted. They are telling Canadians to let them run their little shell game here, let them take taxpayer resources so they can fund their Conservative Party and let them use public moneys for their private gain.

What is very clear from this debate is Canadians should be writing their Conservative and Liberal MPs, asking them why they are stopping them from having the right to voice their vote on the future of the country. They should ask them what is wrong with them having a vote on the Senate and why they have been denied their right to vote. Canadians should be asking them those questions.

• (1545)

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of our motion on Senate and democratic reform. There are a number of things we need to put down in terms of the importance of this issue. One that is extremely important is to take a look around the world right now.

On January 25 something very profound happened. We saw a tired, corrupt regime being held to account by the people of Egypt. Nobody saw it coming. Many people had speculated that there might be some changes when Mr. Mubarak left office and perhaps Egypt would not have the continuation of what essentially was a form of corrupt monarchy by having his son take over.

Instead, something exciting happened, led by mostly young Egyptians. A lot of people did not appreciate that. There was a kind of paternalistic analysis of those young people with their Facebook and Twitter. Actually, it was much more profound than that. The young people said that it was time they decided who represents them, and it was others who followed them.

In the reports I have been getting from Tunis, Cairo and Yemen, it is extremely interesting that the old line parties in those countries are looking to the leadership within the under-demographic, people who say they will not take it anymore. They will not take the stale old promises and they do not believe in these institutions that are used to manipulate them. They will take their message to the streets, to their citizens, that they do not believe in these institutions any more, and the way they are being abused and maligned.

It is exciting to see and the change is significant. We do not know where it will end. We are all hopeful that it will be a regeneration of democracy and that people will have solid institutions built around what they want and need.

I travel a bit because I am the foreign affairs critic. I have gone to Jordan. I have been to Morocco and I have been to other countries to participate in election observations, and they ask me about our system. They often ask me about our Senate, our bicameral system. To a person, they are shocked when I tell them that we appoint our senators. They had no idea, and I had no explanation, other than to say it was good for the old line parties.

In 2011, down the hall, we have an unelected so-called representative body. I cannot explain it to anyone when I travel, other than to say that we have not caught up yet. It really undermines the legitimacy on democracy reform, especially when we talk to young Canadians. They say it is very difficult to vote when they do

not have their voice represented in Parliament or when they see one government elected with maybe 36%, 37%, and they have all the power.

The Conservatives are cheering over there on the other side. They won the lottery so they could stuff all their friends in the Senate. That is what we are talking about. Then they have, as my friend said, a make-believe reform. Having unelected senators in that place for eight years is not reform.

The original Reformers rejected the idea of an elected Senate. They were concerned about the competing powers between the two bodies. They were also hoping that it would eventually wither away.

• (1550)

The original reforms, of course, are not the ones we see here that are now hiding behind the Conservative banner. We are talking about George Brown. George Brown contemplated the idea of an elected Senate and rejected it because of the way in which it would interfere with the House of Commons that was more representative, but I am sure he had no idea that more than 100 years later this thing would still be around.

Alas, we had the other Reformers who came after Mr. Brown. I do not know if you remember them, Mr. Speaker. I am not sure if you were associated with them or not. What hope there was in 1993 when they all rode into town saying they were going to clean up Ottawa and establish democratic reform. We see the corpse in front of us. It is decomposing. Il n'existe pas. Reform is gone and it did not take long.

There was an opportunity in 2004. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs passed a motion to take this to Canadians. It was my predecessor, Mr. Broadbent, who worked hard to get that motion through. It was undermined by the Liberal Party. Does everyone remember that? The Conservatives joined us on that one and we thought we would actually have a partner. The Bloc supported it as well. We cannot consult Canadians any more. Does anyone know why? It is because the Conservatives are afraid of what might happen.

It was in front of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, when I was the democratic reform critic before the last election, and there was an opportunity to have a parallel process, which would allow parliamentarians to consult Canadians on democratic reform and there would be another engagement with Canadians.

What did the government do? It did not like it, so it gave it to its friends in the Frontier group, who were paid massive amounts of money to write a report, who did not consult anyone, and who we knew were biased. On the record, the Conservatives did not support democratic reform and that is what we got. That is why we in the NDP are here today moving our motion.

It is time that Canadians are given a real choice, not some make believe reform saying we will have a popularity contest in a province and then pass it along to the Prime Minister, who may or may not, though he says he will, put those people in power for eight years. That is not reform. Institutional reform means that the people in the Senate are legitimate or they are not.

*Business of Supply*

Personally, I think it is an option to have what is working in New Zealand, which is a mixed member system. Every once in a while we get to debate ideas in this place, but what if the Senate was folded into the House and was proportionally elected, so there could be people who had the time to do good committee work?

What if my friend from Alberta had constituents who wanted to vote NDP or Liberal and have him or her as an MP? What if someone in my riding who does not believe there is a chance of electing someone from the Conservative Party was able to have his or her voice heard?

That is what we are talking about and that is why Senator Segal supports democratic reform. However, we will never have it as long as we have two parties who think it is in their best interests to rag the puck, to come up with half-baked measures and, frankly, basically want to keep the old system going. I am not going to read through the list my colleague has.

What do Conservative members say when they go to people's doors and someone asks what happened and why bagmen are being appointed to the Senate? They could have at least appointed people who were not tied to the Conservative Party, perhaps school trustees or people on the PTA. They had the audacity to insult Canadians, their own party, and the roots of the Reform Party. What did they do? Sadly, they appointed their friends, just like the previous government. That is why we in the NDP believe this is important to pass in order to engage Canadians.

• (1555)

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have about three questions for the member.

The member began by talking about Egypt and the challenges that it faced in even creating its democracy, laying the seeds of democracy, and drawing an allusion to Canada.

I would like to inform the member that Canada is the greatest country in the world and one of the greatest democracies the world has ever seen. For the member to somehow equate Canadian democracy to the challenges that people are facing in North Africa is a disrespect to the sacrifices Canadians have made for our democracy, and it is disrespectful to the sacrifices the Egyptians and other North Africans are undergoing now.

It is just absurd to make that kind of comparison. I would like the member to apologize and to recognize that Canada is the best country in the world.

Second, the motion calls for a referendum at the next general election. Can the member please confirm or deny that the Liberal Party is going to vote for an election, that the Bloc is going to vote for an election, and that the NDP is going to vote for an election in two or three weeks when the budget comes down?

Finally, can the member please support representation by population, so that faster growing provinces can be represented properly in this place?

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Mr. Speaker, on the first point I am not entirely sure if the minister was listening to my speech.

I said that there are exciting things happening in Egypt and that is great. Young people are getting involved in politics. I am saying that

here in Canada, when it comes to democracy, we have to be vigilant. We have to make sure that we do not take anything for granted. When we have institutions that are not representative of the people, then we need to take a look at that. That is actually a nice segue.

I have no idea. The minister wants me to tell him how the Liberals and the Bloc are going to vote. I am not sure if he wants to rephrase the question or not. I am a member of the New Democratic Party. We are clear on what we have asked for. Let the other parties speak for themselves.

The third point, though, is quite interesting. He knows that as a democratic reform minister, this minister and the government broke the Speech from the Throne promise to have an institute for democratic promotion. I ask him as a minister, what happened? He obviously got shot down at cabinet. I am sad to see that. We supported it; all parties supported it.

We have a government that broke its promise again. Senate reform gone. Democratic promotion gone. We cannot even help in places like Egypt. We have totally undermined rights and democracies. The minister could not even get his cabinet to support the whole idea of democratic promotion.

I have a question for the minister, what happened?

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was not going to partake in this debate until the member who just spoke pointed me out.

I would just like to assure the member that the NDP voters and the Liberal voters in the constituency of Wetaskiwin, which may make for a combined total of 13% of those who vote, do not particularly share his point of view. However, that does not make up for the fact that the 77% or some who vote Conservative still do.

I want to assure my colleague that many of those voters at one time voted Reform and they would still very much like to see a triple-E Senate which is not an abolished Senate.

I have a question for the member. One always has to question one's motive for putting a motion forward. This motion is to abolish. The only two things I can remember the NDP doing are a parasitic attachment to previous Prime Minister Paul Martin on a napkin budget for \$4 billion and an attempted coalition overthrow.

I am just wondering if the member could explain to Canadians what removing the Senate could do should they ever form that kind of coalition again.

• (1600)

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Mr. Speaker, I will avoid ever making comments like "parasitic" about any of our former prime ministers. I will never do that. I think that is unfortunate. I have never ever used that kind of language with respect to a former prime minister.

I am a New Democrat. I believe that we should respect all our former prime ministers. I had asked for former Prime Minister Joe Clark to come before the foreign affairs committee. I did not call him "parasitic".

Sadly, this member has decided to use that kind of language in association with a former prime minister and it is unfortunate.

*Business of Supply*

The whole point of democratic reform is that every vote counts. That is not what we have here, when we have governments, both Liberal and Conservative, that can win majorities with 36%, 38%, and 39% of the vote. Does the member call that democratic? I do not.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to stand here today and join in this very important debate coming from my colleague and friend from Hamilton Centre, talking about two elements of democratic reform.

The first obviously is the one we have been discussing for many months and, actually, for many years, and that is democratic reform of the Senate. The NDP's position is to abolish the Senate.

I will be concentrating all of my remarks on the first part of the opposition day motion that deals with Senate reform, as opposed to the latter part of the opposition day motion on proportional representation. Due to the limited time that I have before me, I will try to concentrate my remarks only on the Senate.

I should also say at the outset that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Calgary East.

Let me first assure my colleagues, particularly on the NDP side, that I share with them a lot of the frustrations that they seem to be expressing today about Canada's Senate. In fact, I can assure my colleagues that several years ago, before I was elected to Parliament, I completely shared their view that the Senate should be abolished. At that point in time in my view, the Senate was irrelevant, useless and served no useful purpose for Canadians.

However, since I have been elected and have been in this House since 2004, I have changed my mind 100%. I have seen the good work that the Senate can perform. I would also point out that throughout the western world and the democratic nations of the world, bicameralism, which is to say federal institutions having two legislative bodies, is quite common. The U.S., Germany, Australia, and many others have a similar situation to ours. It is there for a reason. It is there to observe and give sober second thought to the legislative process. In other words, it is a legislative review body. It is also a review body that gives careful consideration to policy.

Even though I had great and grave doubts about the Senate in years past, since I have been in Parliament I have seen on many occasions the work that the Senate has done, both in terms of legislative review and on proactive policy considerations, presenting papers for not only this House and our consideration but also for Canadians as a whole. Without getting into an ideological debate about whether the Senate should be a part of our constitution and our legislative process, I would suggest that we will always agree to disagree on that very point.

However, there are two elements to democratic reform within the Senate that I believe should be discussed. I welcome the debate we have before us today. The first is term limits. One of the most unsavoury aspects of the Senate is the fact that senators can be appointed and then serve for up to 45 years. These would be unelected and, some would suggest, unaccountable senators remaining in their positions for 45 years. I do not think by anyone's definition that is palpable. Canadians would not agree with the

notion that someone can be appointed to a body and remain in that position for up to 45 years with literally no oversight.

Yes, there are times when senators can be removed with cause, whether they are charged and convicted of a criminal offence, whether their attendance is such that they have not proven their worth in the Senate, but generally speaking, senators can stay in their unelected positions for up to 45 years.

That is why we brought forward Bill C-10 on Senate term limits. Our position is that there should be a finite number of years that senators serve in the upper chamber. Forty-five years is clearly too long a period of time. We believe that eight years is the proper period of time.

• (1605)

Why eight years? Obviously it would take new senators a bit of time to become acclimatized to their new position, their new job, to learn the ropes so to speak. However, after a year or two, senators can properly function in the upper chamber. The most important part of a Senate term limit of eight years is that after eight years, senators have probably served their purpose to the maximum of their abilities. If not, at the very least we can look at renewal within the Senate.

What angers and offends Canadians more than anything else is to see senators who have served in the same position for 10, 20, 30, 40 years and beyond, paying little recognition to Canadians' true feelings. I believe that if senators were confined to a term limit of eight years, they would know that they had a job to do and that they had to get it done in a relatively short period of time.

I do not think there would be any argument that there should be a term limit put on senators. Whether it is eight years, twelve years or more, is open for debate. That debate would be extremely worthwhile.

I note that the former Liberal leader at one time said that he was in favour of term limits for senators. He was not sure whether eight years was the proper term. He suggested at one time 15 years and then 12 years. Nonetheless, he was a strong supporter of term limits. I am pleased to see that at least some in the Liberal Party agree with us that there should be term limits.

I would ask my friends in the NDP and the Bloc Québécois to also engage in this debate and hopefully come to the realization that if the Senate is here to stay, and I suggest it will be, then we should take a look at meaningful reform from within.

The NDP's suggestion that the Senate be abolished will probably be something that we will never see. It would never happen because to do that we would have to open up constitutional talks and there is no appetite in Canada, from the Canadians I have spoken with from coast to coast, to reopen the Constitution. We have seen the problems of the Meech Lake accord and the problems of other constitutional talks. There is simply no appetite for constitutional reform at that level.

I suggest that Bill C-10 would allow change and reform to the Senate without having to open up the constitutional talks again. The way we have drafted the legislation would allow reforms to be enacted with the approval of this House.

*Business of Supply*

If the NDP members are truly sincere in their belief that there needs to be reform in Parliament, knowing that the constitutional talks would probably never occur, at least not in my lifetime, on Senate reform they should welcome the opportunity to try and enact positive change. In other words, rather than strictly abolishing the Senate, let us grasp the opportunity to make change for an institution that will be with us for the foreseeable future. I would suggest the same thing happen with senatorial appointments.

Right now we have a system where all Senate appointments are strictly that; appointments rather than elections. If we want to have a truly elected Senate, that would require opening up the Constitution. That will not happen. We do not want that to happen at this point in time. Canadians do not want that to happen.

What we have done, through the Senate, is introduce Bill S-8, Senatorial Selection Act. That, in a nutshell, would allow provinces to have elections for Senate nominees. Those nominees would then be presented to the prime minister of the day and that prime minister would be required to give consideration to those Senate nominees. I would also suggest that no prime minister, regardless of political affiliation, would take those suggestions from the provinces lightly. If a sitting prime minister decided not to appoint a senator who had been recommended and elected from a province, he would do so at his political peril.

• (1610)

These are two real changes that can be made to the Senate, as we speak. They can be made internally in Parliament, without having to reopen constitutional discussions and talks. They would enact real reform within the Senate. It is a set of concerns that all members should take very seriously.

I would encourage all of my colleagues to join with us as we move forward with our democratic reform package in the Senate and ask them to support both Bill C-10 and Bill S-8.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I heard my colleague in his great speech say how we look at the Senate for the future and that our country does not want to open the Constitution to deal with that. We are saying we should have a referendum and let Canadians make that decision.

If Canadians tell us they want to have the Constitution opened to deal with the Senate, let Canadians get involved in it. That is what the motion talks about. Is there anything wrong or undemocratic to ask the people what they want? Or do we have to wait to have people on the streets, telling us what they want, as they are doing in other countries?

To us it is a shame what is happening right now in the Senate. The Conservative Party nominates senators who are going around the country getting money for the Conservative Party for its next election. That does not make sense. I would like to have my colleague comment on that. Is that what they are supposed to do?

I have always heard senators say, when they want to defend their place, that they are there to review decisions of the Parliament and that they have more time and are able to study the issues.

However, that is not what they are doing. They are listening to the Prime Minister of this country, and that is undemocratic.

Will the member accept that?

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I must say at the outset I am absolutely shocked and dismayed that my friend from Acadie—Bathurst asked that question because, normally, he listens intently to every word I speak in this House. In fact, I would suggest that from time to time, he actually leans forward to listen more closely to what I have to say, and I appreciate that. I appreciate that he takes my words of advice so seriously that he would be confused, and so totally confused as he is today.

He asks why do we not allow Canadians to participate in this. That is exactly what these bills are about. Bill C-10 would put in term limits. We have heard from Canadians. They do not want to see anyone have a 45 year term. And Bill S-8 would allow for elections for Senate nominees at the provincial level. What more of a form of democracy can we have than allowing full participation from members in individual provinces?

I think the member for Acadie—Bathurst is far off the mark. Once again, I would ask that he sit back and listen to me intently. He might learn something.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on that, because I am listening intently to the hon. colleague, as well.

The motion, among other things, calls for a referendum to put a simple question to Canadians, asking them if they want to vote to abolish the Senate.

I have two questions for my hon. colleague. First, what is wrong with that? Second, if my hon. colleague is confident that the majority of Canadians do want his party's proposals, which are term limits and electing senators as opposed to abolishing the Senate, then what does he have to worry about?

He can make that argument and bring that to the Canadian people and I suppose he will have confidence that the Canadian people will agree with him. What is wrong with the Canadian people having a referendum where they can directly give us their input on these very issues?

• (1615)

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that one of the biggest problems with the NDP motion of abolishing the Senate is that it would require reopening of the Constitution. That is simply not going to happen. Canadians do not want that. History is a great teacher. We have seen the problems in the last two attempts to open up the Constitution and there is no appetite for that right now.

With respect to the question of what is wrong with asking Canadians, nothing is. We have done that continuously. That is why we are in government and they are continually in opposition. If they would listen to Canadians more, they might be more than a fringe, irrelevant party in this place. If they would listen to the opinions of Canadians, they might actually have a chance to elect more members that they do.

I would point out that they did not listen to Canadians, many of them at least, when it came time to talking about abolishment of the long gun registry.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to a subject that has consumed political debate in this country for a long time.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have had the opportunity to travel around the world. In 1999, I went on a state visit with former Governor General Roméo LeBlanc to a few African countries, including the country in which I was born, Tanzania. I asked the governor general what the purpose of the trip was and what the purpose was of taking members of Parliament, including senators with us. He told me that we were going there to promote democracy, one of the cornerstone policies of our foreign affairs. I then asked him if I had his permission to tell all the other parliaments that we had senators sitting next to us who were not elected but appointed. He was at first reluctant to give me his permission so I told him that there would be no point in me going, and he finally agreed.

The people in the other place are excellent individuals who are doing a good job but the fact still remains that they are not elected and they do not represent the people of Canada. This was quite shocking to people because they all thought that our Senate was like the senate in the U.S.

There is a flaw in our Canadian democracy. The Minister of State for Democratic Reform has said that we have a great democracy in the House of Commons. All of us are very privileged to represent our people. We are also the voice of the people of Canada. They elect us to speak on their behalf. They do not want us to run the country based on referendums. We are also the people—

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** We are elected.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Yes, the member was elected but he is in favour of this motion. I do not understand why those members want to use a referendum when they have been elected to make a choice and provide their views.

I will tell the House why that party wants to abolish the Senate. It wants to abolish the Senate because it is a fringe party. It never listens to Canadians. It will never form a government and, because of that, it will never have an opportunity to put anybody in the Senate. Henceforth, it comes up with this far-fetched idea to abolish the Senate. If those members would talk to their constituents they would tell them.

Our government recognized that there was a democratic deficit in this country so the minister introduced the democratic representative bill. The House of Commons bill is based on representation by the people. We find that certain provinces are under-represented in the House and that is not fair. As a result, the minister brought in a new bill to balance the number of representatives in the House of Commons who speak for the people of Canada based on population. That is the right thing to do.

This government introduced that bill. We did not hear anything from those members, nor did we hear anything from the Liberals. Both parties want this unbalanced representation to continue. The Bloc, which is just a fringe party from Quebec, has put forward an amendment indicating that it wants its 25%, or whatever percentage it has. It does not recognize the fact that this is representation based

on population, not based on a quota like that party wants. It is natural for this House to reflect on all of Canada, not what the Bloc wants. The Bloc, unfortunately, is in the same position as the NDP. It will never form government and, therefore, will never put anybody in the Senate.

● (1620)

I want to be realistic about this. We have done two things that are critically important to reforming the Senate. We must go step by step to reform the Senate. We all know that opening up the Constitution will never work. A referendum to abolish the Senate will never work for the simple reason that it is a constitutional issue and the provinces will not agree.

The members seem to have forgotten one thing. A change in the Constitution requires the approval of the provinces. The members sitting there have no power over these things. The provinces will not agree to whatever they are talking about for abolishing the Senate. Therefore, what is the whole purpose of going through an exercise that we know will be a total failure? It will fail because the provinces will not agree to what has been discussed.

We all know what happens once we open the Constitution, so we first need to look for practical solutions. The first practical solution requires elections to be held in the provinces compelling the premiers to listen to the voices of their citizens on who should represent them in the Senate, not who is to be appointed by the Prime Minister. It was our Prime Minister who came up with the idea of an election.

I will give an example. I was in Alberta when the first senators who were elected were from Alberta. I was part and parcel of the election campaign that took place. Senator Waters was the first one elected. The Conservative prime minister at the time, Brian Mulroney, accepted the will of the people of Alberta and put him into the Senate. The triple-E Senate was promoted by Senator Brown.

When Premier Ralph Klein held the Senate elections, there were three or four candidates for two seats. It was one of the best campaigns we have seen with people right across the province giving their views on what the Senate should be. The people of Alberta made a choice as to who would represent them in the Senate and they gave two names. Who was the prime minister at the time? It was Prime Minister Chrétien, who, of course, totally ignored the wishes of the people. This is why this bill is very important so that we have elections for senators that are based in the provinces, not according to the Constitution.

We can ask any Albertan who went through that Senate election and we will hear how exciting it was for them to have people who want to be senators actually stand and tell them what they will do. We are very proud that Senator Brown was chosen by the people of Alberta. When our Prime Minister became the Prime Minister he listened to Albertans and put Senator Bert Brown into the Senate. We are very proud to have his contribution in the Senate.

I want to talk about a term limit of eight years. We have all heard stories of people who are not elected and, if they are not elected it is quite natural that they have a term limit.

*Business of Supply*

Our bill on term limits would give the people of Canada a chance after eight years to choose who will represent them in the Senate. Do the members not think that is the right approach and the right way to do it?

• (1625)

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that it was done the right way in Alberta and that one senator was elected. From my information, he was put there by acclamation because there was only one party running. At the same time, if we want to follow the theory that it was very democratic because he was elected, following the Conservatives' bill that the member was talking about, a senator should only stay there for eight years. He does not need the Constitution to resign from his position.

Will the senator who was supposedly elected democratically resign from his position because I believe he has been there now for eight years?

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I will set the record straight for my hon. friend. If he had looked at the Senate elections, he would know that there was not one candidate. There were four candidates running and two were chosen according to the Senatorial Selection Act. None of the candidates represented any party. Senators do not represent a party. They were representing—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Those members can keep laughing. At least the NDP would have somebody credible in Alberta who could run and get into the Senate. That is the way to go. You can see the way to do it. You guys would at least get an NDP senator by choosing the Alberta way.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I would like to remind all hon. members to direct their comments to the Chair rather than to their colleagues. I appreciate that this is a passionate debate.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Ève-Mary Thériault (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Prime Minister promised that no unelected senators would be appointed to the upper chamber until that institution had been reformed. Yet since coming to power, the Conservatives and the Prime Minister have not hesitated to make appointments, so many that the Conservatives now have a majority in the upper chamber. In his defence, the Prime Minister said that the senators he has appointed all agreed with the Senate reforms he wants to make.

What about the senators who were appointed previously and still sit as Conservatives? How does the member interpret the comments of Senator Andrée Champagne? In an open letter published on December 23, 2010, in *Le Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe*, she stated:

Clearly, there will be times when it will be difficult for me to vote in favour of certain bills that our Prime Minister believes in, including, for instance, any bills to reform the Senate. In my opinion, an elected Senate would not be the panacea for all the ills that some people claim are eroding the credibility of those who sit in the Senate.

Since we now know that some previously appointed Conservative senators, including Senator Champagne, do not agree with the

Conservatives' proposed reforms, is it not time to support a motion like this NDP motion and abolish the Senate?

[*English*]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Mr. Speaker, as I have stated, both of those parties do not have a hope in hell of putting senators out there so they are looking to abolishing the Senate.

However, the Prime Minister said that all the senators he has appointed have signed that they will be there for eight years. It is a first step. That is the way it will go.

We need to have the Senate changed under these two bills, which would make it elected with a term limit so that Canadians can make a choice on who will be sitting in the Senate. Does the hon. member not think that is the right way to go, instead of doing something that is practically impossible and has no value? Each of those parties will never be part of it anyway.

• (1630)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Laval—Les Îles, Government Priorities; the hon. member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Citizenship and Immigration; the hon. member for Don Valley East, Small Business.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Canadians are telling us that the time has come to change the way we select our government representatives, including those currently appointed and elected. They believe that the current system is patently undemocratic and unfair.

A number of proposals have been made in the past to resolve concerns with the appointed Senate and the electoral process for the House of Commons. As the representative for Vancouver Kingsway pointed out today, the Reform Party once called for referenda on electoral reform and other policy matters of concern to Canadians.

In 2004, the Prime Minister was quoted as saying:

Despite the fine work of many individual senators, the upper house remains a dumping ground for the favoured cronies of the Prime Minister.

A truer point has never been made.

That same year, the NDP sought all-party support for a process to consult Canadians on a reformed electoral process. Sadly the initiative was rejected by the other parties. In 2005, the NDP accountability package crafted by Ed Broadbent included reforming the electoral process to include proportional representation.

Remarkably, the Prime Minister again said in this place on September 7, 2006:

As everyone in this room knows, it has become a right of passage for aspiring leaders and prime ministers to promise Senate reform—on their way to the top....

But once they are elected, Senate reform quickly falls to the bottom of the Government's agenda. Nothing ever gets done.

Again, truer words were never said.



*Business of Supply*

Well, today the New Democrats have tabled in this House a path forward. In tabling this motion, the representative for Hamilton Centre has presented to the members of this House a real opportunity to take concrete action to engage all parties and the public in reforming our democratic process to genuinely reflect the will of Canadians.

Let us consider the current Canadian federal election process. In the 2008 election, the NDP garnered 1.1 million votes more than the Bloc, but elected 37 MPs compared with 49 for the Bloc.

In the prairie provinces, Conservatives took seven times as many seats as the NDP and Liberals combined, while garnering only roughly twice the votes of the other two.

While 940,000 voters supported the Green Party, that party earned no seat, and fewer Conservative votes in Alberta delivered 27 Conservative MPs.

The majority of democratic nations use a proportional system to elect their governments. Party-list PR is the most widely used voting system. It is used in Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Finland, Austria, Norway and Denmark. All of them are stable and effective democracies. That is hardly radical.

The mixed member proportional system is one that is frequently suggested for Canada. It combines the list system with first past the post. It is used in Germany, New Zealand and in regional parliaments in Scotland and Wales. Again, it is hardly radical.

It should also be kept in mind that proportional voting systems are not a new concept for Canada. From 1926 to 1959, the then-ruling party of Alberta, the United Farmers of Alberta, implemented a system of proportional representation, the single transferable vote system, to elect MLAs in the cities of Edmonton, Calgary and Medicine Hat. The remainder were elected by a system of a majority voting called alternative vote.

In 1959, the Social Credit Government abolished the mixed system of proportional and majority voting and returned the province to single-member districts with plurality voting, commonly known as first past the post. The government was widely criticized by the Alberta public for taking this step without public consultation, and the step was considered to have been taken for reasons of self-interest.

The single transferable vote, the system that was used in Alberta, is currently used in Ireland, Malta and for the Australian senate, and was used in many western Canadian municipalities in the early 20th century.

It is frankly wrong to suggest that Canadian voters are less interested than the citizens of other nations in pursuing improved ways of ensuring democratic representation, or that they are less able to adapt to different voting systems than the citizens of, for example, New Zealand, Spain, Germany or Belgium.

Our first past the post system has already lost its alleged advantage of electing majority governments. Is it not time that we stopped dithering and instituted improved systems to ensure that everyone's vote counted?

Surely we all agree that we need to remedy the declining voter turnout, as my colleague from Ottawa stated. We have a serious problem in this country where youth are simply not showing up to vote. They are not participating in the democratic process.

How many more times must we hear the complaint from Canadians that their vote does not count? How can we sit back and let the cynicism grow and voter turnout continue to decline?

● (1635)

Increasing interest in electoral reform is being expressed by Canadians. It is an issue that is constantly raised by my constituents and across Alberta. Many have become active in Fair Vote Canada. The longtime member of Fair Vote Canada's Edmonton group, Professor Jennie Dailey-O'Cain, advises that proportional representation would put a stop to the exaggeration of regional and rural-urban differences, bring more diversity and stability to Parliament, force different parties to learn to work together long term and make every vote count. Is that not what we all want?

New chapters of Fair Vote Canada continue to be started. Canadians are looking for opportunities to discuss change. Just this week a new chapter of Fair Vote Canada held its inaugural meeting in Lethbridge, Alberta.

There are many myths about proportional representation. They mostly revolve around the lack of stability of governments and their ability to effectively manage the economy.

In fact, what are often called consensus democracies are not less but possibly more stable and more effective economic managers. They are also better managers of the environment and more energy efficient than the majoritarian, winner-takes-all democracies.

If we were to take the plunge and adopt a voting system that more accurately reflected the voting choices of Canadians, we might actually find that a more representative democracy delivers good government. Was that not, after all, the goal of our Confederation fathers? I am proud to be a descendant of one. I believe strongly that my ancestor would support and encourage our continued efforts to pursue better means of delivering responsible government, a government of and elected by and truly representative of the will of the Canadian people. I believe that our proposed legislative reforms and dialogue with Canadians can deliver this long-awaited opportunity for electoral reform.

In 2004, the Law Commission of Canada issued a report entitled, "Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada". It said:

The first-past-the-post system is overly generous to the party that wins a plurality of the vote in a general election, rewarding it with a legislative majority that is disproportionate to its share of the vote....

It allows the governing party, with its artificially swollen legislative majority, to dominate the political agenda almost completely for a period of four or five years, thereby contributing to the weakening of Parliament....

It promotes parties formed along regional lines, thus exacerbating Canada's regional divisions, and conversely penalizes parties with diffuse national support....

### *Business of Supply*

This system disregards a large number of votes: unless a voter supports the winning candidate in a given riding, there is no connection between the voter's choice and the eventual makeup of the House of Commons...

It contributes to the under-representation of women, minority groups, and Aboriginal peoples....

It prevents diversity within the House of Commons. As a result of regional concentration, disproportionate votes to seats, and an under-representation of women and minority candidates, legislatures within this system lack a diversity of voices in political decision-making processes.

The Law Commission of Canada recommended adding an element of proportionality to Canada's electoral system, more specifically that Canada should adopt a mixed member proportional electoral system.

Canadians have been calling for reform. They desire a more democratic system.

Last year the government used the unelected Senate to kill Bill C-311. An NDP bill, the climate change accountability act, was passed by the majority of the duly elected representatives of the Canadian electorate. What is the government afraid of?

I call on government members and all members of this place to support this motion to allow the voice of Canadians to be heard.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague brought up some very sage points about proportional representation. I would like to give a quick little monologue on my own behalf.

I am not so sure, for the reason she stated, that proportional representation actually works in all situations. Here is why: it is a double-edged sword. She mentioned that the fault of our current system is that we divide ourselves along regional lines. To a great extent, I appreciate that, but on the flip side of that, I have spoken several times in the House on behalf of people who, I feel, need services in Terra Nova National Park. It is one park of many and yet, the concerns of the people involved were raised in the House because of me, as I represent that one area.

In essence, what I worry about is that if we had strict proportional representation, the people who slip through the cracks of national government policy will not be heard. I fear it dramatically. However, the mixed member proportional representation that the member talks about has some merit.

Would she like to illustrate that and could she alleviate the concern that people who have local issues will not be ignored?

• (1640)

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. I often enjoy hearing his questions.

I am not going to get into debate here, nor will I pretend to present what the actual proportional representation system will be. However, the member's questions and issues are very valid. They are precisely why our party is calling for the parties to get together and set in place a dialogue among Canadians so that we can bring in information about the pros and cons of the various systems and can learn from other nations on what has and has not worked in their countries.

From my standpoint, I want to make sure that we have a system that represents both the broader national interests and the interests of my own local community.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her presentation.

Even though I do not agree with the motion today, I am glad that we are having this debate, because fixing democracy and making sure that we are modernizing democracy are important. This gives us an opportunity to have that discussion.

The discussion on proportional representation is something that I have a lot of apprehension about. As our friend from Newfoundland just asked, how do we deal with the issue of people elected off a party list who have no ties at all to the local community?

We are elected as members from electoral districts and ridings across this country. We have a constituency that we are responsible for, including helping our constituents deal with the different issues and problems they may have with the Government of Canada, whether farm programs, fisheries, employment insurance, the Canada pension plan, or income taxes. They come to us and we can help them solve some of their problems. That is what direct representation is about, as well as bringing their ideas forward to Parliament.

If we want to move to proportional representation, we should look at some of the proportional representation systems around the world. When I talk to my colleagues in the Ukraine, they do not know whom they represent, and the people in the countryside do not know whom they should be talking to, because they do not have anyone to talk to, as most of the people come off the list from the major urban centres and not from the rural side at all.

I would like the member to comment on how to address that issue.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member. I have been pleased to work with him on committee.

Those are very good questions, exactly that kind that I hope would come forward if we can get agreement in the House to actually sponsor this dialogue. We are the ones who have the power. The Government of Canada has the power of the purse to decide to finance this dialogue. I have been frustrated trying to get this government to hold an open dialogue on a clean energy strategy for Canada. I finally just gave up and hosted my own in Alberta.

I think the member is raising valid issues. I do not have the answers to them, but I certainly would like the opportunity to hear the information and have my constituents hear it too.

The very issues the member is raising are why we are concerned about the Senate. Whom do senators represent?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the opposition motion moved in the House of Commons by the NDP and to discuss the proposal to hold a referendum on abolishing the Senate. The question would be clear and precise: do Canadians want a Senate?

*Business of Supply*

Earlier, my Conservative colleague said it was not feasible because we would have to reopen the Constitution. The Constitution was established some time ago. In a democracy, people evolve and change over the years. The Constitution was written in 1982, but people have changed since then, which is only natural. Parliament exists because democracy evolves. Every day, we debate certain bills and change Canadian laws because we are evolving and we need new laws adapted to the new changes in our country. The same is true for the Constitution.

Tomorrow morning, there could be a referendum in Canada and the majority of Canadians might vote in favour of abolishing the Senate. Earlier my Conservative colleague was saying that the provinces should agree. In my opinion, that would put a great deal of pressure on the provinces and the provincial governments.

Will we continue to hang on to an unelected Senate even if the citizens no longer want it? Canadians no longer want senators to be appointed by political parties and by the Prime Minister to please his political party. For example, when the current Prime Minister of Canada was in opposition, and even when he had formed the government but felt that the opposition had a majority in the Senate, he said that the Senate should never meddle in bills introduced by the government or the House of Commons.

This same Prime Minister has a majority in the upper chamber, in the Senate, and senators follow his instructions to the letter when elected members pass bills in the House of Commons.

In a minority government, although a majority of members of Parliament have voted for the bills, the Conservative senators in the other place turn around and listen to what the Prime Minister tells them.

Earlier, one of our Conservative colleagues said that Alberta senators are independent because the nominees are elected. Another hon. member asked earlier why they have a whip and a house leader if they are independent. What is the whip's job? I am certain that everyone knows the answer: to make them toe the party line.

There are two parties in the Senate—the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party—and two whips. There are party lines. When the Liberals had a majority in the Senate, the Prime Minister was distraught because he said he had formed the government and Parliament had passed bills, but that they were blocked in the Senate. Today, he is doing the same thing. Even worse, the Conservatives are abusing their power by appointing friends. The Prime Minister was against this way of appointing senators. He was against it.

This Prime Minister appointed Doug Finley, the Conservative national campaign manager; Irving Gerstein, the top Conservative fundraiser and chair of Conservative Fund Canada; Judith Seidman, the Quebec co-chair of the Prime Minister's leadership campaign; and Don Plett, president of the Conservative Party of Canada.

These are political appointments of the most extreme sort. Is that democracy? We send our young people to fight abroad so that other countries will have access to democracy and enjoy the right to vote, and so that laws will be passed by elected officials who are accountable to the people.

● (1645)

We are doing worse than that here in Canada. We do not have that kind of democracy. We pass bills in the House of Commons. Our rights are being violated. I was elected by the people of Acadie—Bathurst. I represent the majority of people in that riding and my rights are being violated. In fact, as soon as a bill leaves the House of Commons for the Senate, the Prime Minister issues an order that prevents the bill from being passed. Is that democracy?

Are we waiting for people to take to the streets to reclaim their democracy the way they are doing in Egypt and Libya? Canadians have elected MPs and those are the people that should be making the laws in Canada. But that is not what is happening. A group of friends was appointed to the Senate. Provincial premiers who lost their elections are appointed to the Senate as compensation. With all due respect, we saw this happen in New Brunswick. When Premier Hatfield lost the election in New Brunswick, he was appointed to the Senate. Political rewards are given to people who lose elections. People are thrown out of office by a democratic vote and the government turns around and sends them to the Senate until they are 75 years old. It is shameful.

Not very long ago, here in the House of Commons, we passed Bill C-311 on the environment. The Senate did not even review it. The Conservatives did not even debate the bill. They voted it down. Oh, but it is all right: it was an NDP bill. It was a fine thing to do. It did not make any sense.

That was the beginning of the end of democracy. The bill was not even debated.

Senators come to us and tell us we have to keep them there even though they have not been elected. They say that they are completely independent since the Prime Minister cannot remove them from their jobs until they are 75. They call themselves protectors of the regions and minorities and say they will ensure that politics do not interfere with what is good for the country. They will protect minorities and all that. But now they are going after minorities.

Like it or not, my Bill C-232 concerning judges in the Supreme Court was debated by the members in the House of Commons, and it was passed by a majority. That is democracy. However, the unelected senators have been sitting on their butts since April 2010 and refuse to even address the bill. The Senate has always fought to say that it would protect minorities and the regions, that it could study bills and if there were any errors, it could send the bills back with new ideas that it had added. It is improper for the Senate to reject bills from the House, especially if there is a minority government in power.

We did not see this problem in the past because we have had majority governments and the Senate typically had the same majority as the House, under the same government. So there were never issues between Senate decisions and those of the House. But now that there is a minority government, now that the majority of members are against the government, we are seeing all the little things that can go wrong. Now we see the dirty politics. That is what I call it.

*Business of Supply*

If the Conservatives really believed in democracy, if they really believed in what they were saying, they would consult Canadians and ask them.

A survey was done in my riding. There were three questions: do you want to abolish the Senate; do you want the Senate to remain as-is; or do you want to modify it? Few people responded. Out of 89 people, 75 said that they wanted to abolish and get rid of the Senate, and 7 said that they wanted to modify it. No one wanted to leave it the way it is. I would be very happy to see a referendum and let Canadians say what they want to do about the Senate. I have no doubt that it would give us a starting point to work towards changing the Constitution, doing good things for democracy in our country and honouring our country so that we can be proud of what it represents in the world.

• (1650)

[*English*]

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP want to have proportional representation. We want to have Senate reform and an elected Senate. Probably the best place to actually try out proportional representation is electing candidates to the Senate. Maybe, in consultation with the provinces, we could get to a point where we could try electing senators. We could do it on a province-wide basis and, based upon the proportional representation of the senators who are on a qualified list, we would be able to bring those names forward for the Senate.

That is a reasonable approach to satisfy the needs the NDP is talking about, as well as addressing the needs of many other members of the House, in both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, who have talked about Senate reform. We could combine the two and actually provide a real, true result that would satisfy what Canadians are looking for in the Senate. That might be the way to do it.

I still fear that if we go strictly off a party list, the problems we have experienced or complained about that exist today in the Senate, such as patronage, would exist then in the House of Commons because everyone would be coming off a list that is qualified by the party and not necessarily by the electors at the grassroots level. I would ask the hon. member to address that.

• (1655)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, I have visited many countries that have proportional representation. They have mixed proportional representation. On the other hand, how could the hon. member accept that the NDP gets 2.1 million votes and only 36 members of Parliament? The Bloc gets 1.6 million votes and they get over 50 members of Parliament. Something is wrong somewhere.

When people vote they ask if their vote counts or not. Many people do not want to vote today because they feel that their vote is lost. If we go to a riding and say in advance that a certain member will probably get in anyway, their vote does not go anywhere.

We have to try proportional representation, and getting rid of the Senate will not cost Canadians any more because we will have more elected members in the House of Commons and they will have to answer to the people. I feel that is the way to go.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have some mixed views on the Senate, but on the proportional representation, I want to share with the member my concern. There are many types of proportional representation, but if we are talking about the system where there is a list provided by the parties so that if they are entitled to additional seats, they would take it off the list, the problem with that is that those members of Parliament who are added do not have a constituency. That means their jobs would be basically Ottawa work but no constituency work. It is a totally different job. Because they have been put on the list, chances are they are people who could not probably get elected on their own merit in the first place.

These are some of the concerns and I wonder if the member would care to comment on some of the problems.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, with proportional representation, we do not have the formula down pat to say that it is the way it should go, but no one is stopped from staying on the list. People have to come from a certain region or a certain province. There are some in one province and some in another province, and we could have a list from all provinces across the country and they will report back.

We would make sure that they get an office, not like the senators who do not have an office in any region of the country. When the House of Commons closes and the Senate closes, the senators are gone. We do not see them any more. Where have the senators gone? They will try to get some money for their party so they get elected again. That is where they have gone. There is no office and no representation.

Someone who is elected by proportional representation would do his or her job for the constituency, for the province, or for the region, which should be the real thing to do, to represent the people not the party.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate, which serves to expand our reflections on the democratic institutions we need now and will need in the future. Everyone must recognize that there is currently a crisis in terms of traditional democratic representation, not only in Canada and Quebec, but also around the globe. This crisis in representative democracy is even more evident in Canada because of the continued existence of a completely archaic institution: the Senate.

The Bloc Québécois is not afraid of a debate on proportional representation. Everyone knows we do not have a definitive position on this, but we are very open to listening to all kinds of proposals. In a sovereign Quebec, we definitely would not have an archaic institution like the Senate. Perhaps we would have a proportional system or a house to represent the regions. It remains unknown. This allows me to take part in this debate with an open mind regarding the need to improve democratic institutions in all democratic countries.

*Business of Supply*

The motion we are debating, moved by the member for Hamilton Centre, contains two elements. First of all, it talks about a referendum on the question of abolishing the Senate. Second, it proposes appointing a special committee for democratic improvement, whose mandate would be to engage with Canadians to determine what should replace the current system and to advise the government on the wording of a referendum question concerning abolition of the Senate.

We are comfortable with this motion, but on two conditions. The first is that the Senate be abolished only if voted on through a referendum and that, in Quebec, as was the case with Charlottetown in 1992, the referendum be held in accordance with Quebec's Referendum Act, which has already been used three times. This method of consulting the population has proven itself and should help avoid some of the pitfalls experienced in 1995, when the federal government decided not to respect the Referendum Act and made massive investments to support the forces on the no side.

In the debate among Quebecers, the rules were followed and both the yes and no sides had equivalent means of expressing their points of view. I want to point out right now that we will support the NDP motion, but we must ensure that, in Quebec, the public is consulted in accordance with Quebec laws and regulations. We also agree with abolishing the Senate and with looking at a new voting system that would include elements of the proportional voting system. No other country but Israel has a truly proportional voting system. Most countries with such a voting system have elements of both representation based on ridings and representation based either on regions or on lists presented by political parties. There are a number of possible models. In Quebec during the time of René Lévesque, Robert Burns did some very important work that led to proposed reforms that, unfortunately, were never implemented.

With respect to the debate on a new form of representation in the House including elements of a proportional voting system, there is a set and established rule that Quebec's political weight cannot be less than its current political weight. That is not just one of Quebec's traditional demands. In the Charlottetown accord in 1992, all parties agreed that Quebec's representation within federal institutions should be at 25%. This is nothing new. We are opposed to Bill C-12, which would add 30 seats for the Canadian nation, because the representation of the Quebec nation within federal institutions—essentially this House of Commons—would be less than its current demographic and political weight, which is completely unacceptable for us.

● (1700)

The second condition is that, no matter which model is decided upon, as long as Quebecers are part of the Canadian political landscape, their political weight within institutions, particularly the House of Commons and future political institutions—who knows, perhaps there might even be proposals to create a house of the regions—must remain as it is now, approximately 25%. That is the spirit as well as the actual text of the amendment proposed by my colleague, the member for Québec, who is our democratic reform critic. We want to make it completely clear: the NDP motion will not be acceptable until it is modified by the amendment proposed by the member for Québec.

I would like to come back to the two major elements proposed by the member for Hamilton Centre. I will start with the abolition of the Senate. The Bloc Québécois has been calling for the abolition of the Senate for a very long time. The institution is completely archaic and dates to colonial times; it is a British legacy. High society has always distrusted the public. When the House of Commons was created, a counterbalance was thought to be necessary, as in London, consisting of representatives from society's elite to balance the decisions of those less thoughtful and rational than the elite. At that time, it was a question of the nobility and the upper classes. Now it is a question of Conservative organizers and friends of the regime. That is how it was with the Liberals, and that is how it is now with the Conservatives. It is an undemocratic counterbalance to the House, which is filled with democratically elected representatives of the people. It is completely archaic.

At the time, this fear of allowing the common people, the masses, to make decisions was reflected in American institutions as well. Tradition dictates that the electoral college votes according to the way the people in the various states have chosen their presidential electors. If, in the state of Massachusetts, for example, the majority of voters decide that the Democratic candidate should become president, then the presidential electors of that state will vote against the choice of the people of their state. However, there have been times when the presidential electors did not agree to vote for the candidate that had received the most support. That system was put in place after the American revolution, with the independence of the United States. It created a sort of second class. After the popular vote, there were these presidential electors who chose the president. This goes back to a time when the emerging democracy frightened the ruling elite.

The Canadian Senate is a legacy of that; it is a counterbalance. A few weeks ago, the Senate agreed to the decisions made by the House of Commons. Now, the Conservative-controlled Senate has decided to block bills adopted in the House by the majority of the members elected by the people. This is totally unacceptable. This only further proves the importance of getting rid of this archaic institution.

We have been in favour of abolishing the Senate for a very long time. However, let us not forget that the Senate is part of a constitutional agreement. We can certainly hold a consultative referendum on abolishing the Senate—and I hope the yes side wins—but there will have to be constitutional negotiations with Quebec and the provinces to determine how the Senate will be abolished and what will replace it.

● (1705)

The second element, a proportional voting system, or some of its aspects, will also require constitutional negotiations with Quebec and the provinces. Naturally, the special committee could make a certain number of recommendations and outline some options, but all decisions would require constitutional negotiations. As I have said from the beginning, we have one immutable condition: Quebec's political representation cannot be lowered, and Quebec must maintain its current political weight, at about 25%.

*Private Members' Business*

The House of Commons recognized the Quebec nation some time ago. Unfortunately, none of the federalist parties has wanted to implement measures to give tangible expression to this recognition. I introduced a bill on the application of the Charter of the French Language to the corporations and the 250,000 workers under federal jurisdiction in Quebec. We wanted Bill 101 to apply to these 250,000 workers. But once again, all the Liberals and Conservatives opposed this measure. The NDP was divided, but the majority of its members voted to not apply the Charter of the French Language to Quebec corporations under federal jurisdiction.

Although the Quebec nation has been recognized by the House, all federalist parties have always banded together to prevent this recognition from having a tangible expression. For me it is just a symbolic gesture. However, it will prove to be extremely useful when we win the referendum, which should happen soon with the election of the Parti Québécois in Quebec. Because Canada has recognized the Quebec nation, it will have no choice but to recognize Quebec's decision to embrace sovereignty. Although the recognition is symbolic, it is extremely important to Quebec and the sovereigntist movement.

The federalist parties have not yet wanted to give tangible expression to the recognition of the Quebec nation. However, the political representation of Quebec regions in the House of Commons, and in any future institution, will have to be 25%. Although this does not appear in the motion, I am opening a door, I am engaging in fictional politics. The special committee could decide to establish a second chamber with different representation from, for example, the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairie provinces and British Columbia. We believe this is imperative and it must be even clearer because the House of Commons has recognized the Quebec nation.

This is an important debate. In my opinion, the Liberal member raised a very important issue. In the debates that were held in Quebec, we discussed at length the difference between members who would be elected on the basis of their ridings and those who would be elected on the basis of the lists suggested by the political parties. There are advantages and disadvantages to both systems. What would be best is a combination of the systems in which proportional representation would be used but the regions and ridings would also have a say in the choice of members.

Personally, I see a problem in having some members be accountable to their constituents on the basis of their riding and others chosen on the basis of a party list. That is why I would prefer, particularly in a sovereign Quebec, that there be both proportional representation in the National Assembly and another chamber where the regions are represented to ensure that the voices of the smallest regions are not completely drowned out by the proportional representation. We could easily have a chamber with proportional representation, like the National Assembly, and another with more regional representation but still chosen via an electoral process. Such a system would ensure that representatives of that chamber would be linked to a region—in my case it would be the Lanaudière region—a little bit like in the American system.

● (1710)

I would like to close by saying that, for us, the best way to guarantee higher democratic standards in Quebec would be for Quebec to become a sovereign nation with full authority. That is our first priority. The Bloc Québécois has proven time and time again that it is not here to reform Canadian institutions or to prevent reform. However, we want it to be understood that our priority is certainly not to work toward the abolition of the Senate or toward a system of proportional representation across Canada but rather to work toward Quebec sovereignty.

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, March 8 at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

● (1715)

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

### PATENT ACT

The House resumed from January 31 consideration of Bill C-393, An Act to amend the Patent Act (drugs for international humanitarian purposes) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House this evening to speak in support of Bill C-393, An Act to amend the Patent Act (drugs for international humanitarian purposes) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act.

I strongly urge all members to support the bill and the amendments put forward by my hon. colleagues from Halifax and from Windsor West, calling for a one license solution to cut the red tape currently preventing the sale of generic drugs overseas and to also restore the definition of pharmaceutical products to protect the knowledge developed by name brand drug manufacturers. Accepting these amendments will simultaneously help those in the developing world and will also protect the investment and the knowledge developed by pharmaceutical companies.

On May 14, 2004, the Martin Liberal government passed Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Patent Act and the Food and Drugs Act (The Jean Chrétien Pledge to Africa). This act established the legal framework for Canada's Access to Medicine Regime, or CAMR, which sought to balance Canada's trade and intellectual property obligations with the humanitarian objectives set out in Bill C-9 and help us honour our commitment to realize the sixth millennium development goal to combat HIV and AIDS.

Despite this act's best intentions, CAMR was unsuccessful in its objective to facilitate timely access to generic versions of patented drugs for people in the least developed or developing countries to fight HIV-AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases. This act's complexities are blamed for the daunting inability and serious obstacles to the supply of generic drugs to fight HIV-AIDS in the developing world. As a result, drugs have only been delivered to one country on one single occasion, Rwanda.

Parliamentarians have made a number of attempts to fix the obstacles preventing the shipment of generic drugs to those who need it. Now we have another opportunity to meaningfully help those in need. The opportunity is right now. We have the chance to pass Bill C-393, which will help to clear these obstacles and reduce the complexity of the current CAMR regime, so we can begin to deliver on our pledge to improve the health of the world's poorest people. It is absolutely imperative that we do so, to stop people from dying when they could be living and to alleviate suffering when they could be blessed with an extension of their lives for their own well-being and the well-being of their entire family.

The statistics are alarming. There are more than 33 million people living with HIV-AIDS globally, 22.5 million of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. Three-quarters of all AIDS related deaths since 2008 occurred in Africa. There are 2.3 million children infected with HIV. One in two children with HIV in the developing world dies before their second birthday. Less than 15% of the children who need treatment are getting it. More than half a million children die of AIDS every year. Every day 7,100 people become infected with AIDS.

Yet statistics themselves can be desensitizing, thrown around at random to make a point. I have a hard time conceptualizing what 2.3 million children infected with HIV really means, so I thought I would put this into perspective.

I recall a documentary called *Paper Clips*, where children in a middle school in Tennessee, attempting to grasp the enormity of just how big the number six million really was, gathered six million paper clips, one for each life. If we did the same and placed the clips in boxes of 100, just like the ones we have in our offices, the number of children with HIV in developing countries would equal the number of paper clips contained in 23,000 of these boxes.

Let me give the House another comparison. Thirty-three million people in the world are living with HIV-AIDS globally. That is the entire population of Canada. Imagine attempting to treat this many people in a meaningful way, with our hands tied because of ineffective and cumbersome legislation that we can now change.

Developing countries in Africa are already suffering from the government's withdrawal of foreign aid dollars, which in part

### *Private Members' Business*

resulted in our loss of a seat at the United Nations Security Council. We must not allow this ambivalence to prevail.

• (1720)

If we do not vote for this bill, we will wake tomorrow and we as a country will be no better able to help the 7,100 newly-infected people with HIV tomorrow. Nor will we be in a position to prevent another 7,100 people from becoming infected two days from now. Today we have to make a choice and there is only one right decision. I am voting for Bill C-393. I am voting for helping people in need and for doing what is right. I implore everyone in the House to do the same.

I am acutely aware of the way HIV-AIDS destroys the lives of people, having personally witnessed this epidemic while doing international aid work in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, the city with the highest incidents of AIDS in Central America at the time I was there. As part of my continuing international aid work in central and South America, I have helped build schools in the hope that knowledge and health education can keep children safe and help prevent the infection of HIV.

A 2008 UN report estimated that seven million cases of AIDS could be prevented in the next decade if every child received a primary education.

I am also aware of the impact that AIDS can have through my work with Anne-Marie Zajdlík and the Masai Centre for the treatment of AIDS in Guelph while on the Bracelets of Hope Campaign, where we raised over \$1 million selling red and white beaded bracelets made by the women of Lesotho in southern Africa to fund AIDS treatment centres in that country.

In discussing this bill, Dr. Zajdlík said:

In the last 5 years I have treated hundreds of HIV positive children...Despite our best attempts, many, many of these children died.

In our world of unprecedented wealth, information and technology, no child should die of a preventable disease. The life saving miracle of medicine and medical technology is part of the intellectual property of the world and should be made available to all.

Prevention has to be taken seriously. This can be achieved in several ways. Building schools, improving educational programming, increasing HIV testing and treatment sites are but some. We must also facilitate the provision of antiretroviral drugs, or ARVs, that actually prevent the transmission of AIDS from a pregnant woman to her newborn. Providing these drugs will prevent infant deaths and will save hundreds of thousands of children from suffering from HIV-AIDS.

In 2009, 370,000 children were infected with HIV during the perinatal and breast-feeding period of growth. That is 370,000 children who could have been saved through the use of ARVs and other HIV-AIDS drugs that would have prevented the transmission of this virus. That is another 370,000 children who would not have grown into adulthood with the risk of passing HIV onto others.

*Private Members' Business*

While resources need to be devoted to preventing HIV-AIDS, we must also acknowledge that we need to do our part to help treat HIV-AIDS in the developing world until it is eradicated. That means developing the best legislation and regulatory system possible to ensure that generic and affordable medication is available for those who need it.

According to a 2010 UN report, access to antiretroviral drugs has resulted in a gain of 14.2 million life years worldwide. In Botswana, AIDS-related deaths fell from 18,000 deaths in 2002 to 9,100 deaths in 2009 as a result of antiretroviral drug use. Accordingly the rate of children orphaned by AIDS fell by 40%. This is not only a matter of life and death; it is also an enormous moral and social issue.

The House should be grateful for the efforts of the Guelph GoGo Grandmothers who have nobly and passionately worked towards the passage of this legislation. I can feel the impact that its members have had on the House. I sincerely hope its efforts have not been in vain.

If we pass this bill and embrace this noble strategy, we can prolong lives and prevent the transmission of this insidious disease. Imagine a world without AIDS, where people could live and thrive knowing that they would live to be able to provide for their loved ones and raise their children with the knowledge that they could have a child without transmitting HIV to them, a world where their energy could be spent productively contributing to their families, communities and economies.

Wishing this to be true will not make this happen. We must be intentional in our efforts to pass legislation so it will happen. I implore the members to vote with me in favour of Bill C-393 and make it happen.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this evening's debate at the report stage of Bill C-393. The purpose of this bill is to amend the Canadian Access to Medicines Regime, which was created to facilitate the development and sale of low-cost generic medicines to developing countries.

Bill C-393 was introduced in the House on May 25, 2009, by the former member for Winnipeg North so that this regime, which has been used only once so far, would be more flexible and therefore used more often. In fact, these changes were called for by the only generic pharmaceutical company to have ever used the regime. It sent a clear message that if the changes are not made, it would never use the regime again. However, we have been advised that, if Bill C-393 passes, it has promised to create and distribute a drug for the treatment of HIV infection among children in Africa.

Since we began examining the bill, the Bloc Québécois has always remained completely open and carefully studied the impact of the changes that Bill C-393 would bring to the Canadian Access to Medicines Regime. We have made it very clear from the beginning that we did not want the House of Commons to limit itself only to the study of Bill C-393. One of our biggest concerns was the importance of seeing more low-cost medicines distributed to some of the world's most needy populations.

Once again, we believe that other solutions, no doubt more consensual, could have been considered. For that to happen, Parliament would have had to clearly express its desire to reflect on this very important question without any partisan agendas. However, as he himself indicated on January 31, 2011, my colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes was unable to convince the members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology to take an interest in studying the regime as a whole.

How can we balance the objectives of Bill C-393 with the concerns that have been raised, such as respect for the requirements of our participation in the World Trade Organization, the need to encourage research and innovation of pharmaceutical products and respect for the altruistic spirit of the act that created the regime in 2004—the objective of which was not to create a tool to export medication for commercial purposes? We can do so simply by more closely monitoring its application to ensure that these irritants are simple concerns and not real problems. Today, the real problem is that there are entire segments of poor societies that are struggling with infectious and communicable diseases. This has reached proportions so high that it is impossible to turn a blind eye and do nothing. Today, we have the only option before us here, which is the passing of Bill C-393.

Of course, when the bill came out of committee some amendments were needed to bring out the essence of the bill. That is why the member for Halifax moved two motions that were then amended by the member for Windsor West. As we have said before, we are in favour of their adoption.

However, a third motion was moved by the member for Verchères—Les Patriotes, which is pragmatic, something that is more than necessary in this case. Since it is impossible to eliminate all of the potential irritants of passing Bill C-393 by studying the information available, without any concrete examples, we believe that we must create some examples.

Need I remind members that one single global transaction took place through Canada's access to medicines regime? This was the sale of antiretrovirals to Rwanda by Canadian company Apotex. We must experiment and use the modified regime to prove that all of the concerns were unfounded, while assuming our responsibilities as legislators and not disregarding the concerns raised by experts. This inspired my colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes to propose this sunset clause. He wants to create a sort of pilot project.

Pilot projects are strong tools to test and evaluate programs. They must not prevent decisions from being made. On the contrary, they should make decisions easier. That is why we agree that a fundamental part of the clause proposed by the Bloc Québécois is missing, which is feedback. What will we do, as parliamentarians, at the end of the pilot project?



*Private Members' Business*

• (1730)

Motion No. 3 is silent on this issue. That is why in a few moments I will be proposing a major amendment that will require hon. members to re-evaluate the plan in order, if possible, not to interrupt a plan that has contributed significantly to making a difference in getting drugs to countries that struggle, despite poverty, to bring relief to their sick.

I also propose making another major change resulting from the fact that in this matter, as in all matters brought to our attention, we have continued to listen to the people. When we were asked why we proposed a pilot project for four years, the answer was easy. It seemed and continues to seem clear to us that at the end of that period of time we would have seen concrete results from the changes made. If, at the end of four years, nothing has happened, then we will have to admit that the officials who told us that Bill C-393 would not change anything were right. However, one argument made us stop and think. What would happen to a drug being distributed at the very moment that the four years were over?

To prevent a drug from being withheld for that reason and to truly give Parliament enough time to study this new plan with access to real examples provided by the manufacturers and exporters of these new generic drugs, and, if possible, to make permanent the changes suggested by Bill C-393 before the sunset clause takes effect, we agree with the proposal made by a stakeholder we have encountered many times, to extend the trial period from four years to ten years. Therefore, there is every reason to adopt Motions No. 1 and No. 2, and Motion No. 3, as amended, in order to allow the desired changes to the plan to be made while ensuring that the plan remains consistent with the spirit of the legislation adopted in 2004.

Therefore, seconded by the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead, I move that motion No. 3 of January 31, 2010, be amended by replacing the words following “The provisions of this Act that amend the Patent Act” with the following:

“shall cease to apply on the day that is the tenth anniversary of the day on which this Act comes into force unless, before that day, the application of those provisions is subject to a comprehensive review by the standing committee designated by the House of Commons for that purpose, that committee recommends that they be maintained and the House of Commons approves that recommendation.”

[*English*]

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

• (1735)

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues from the Bloc for that amendment. We see it as a friendly and constructive amendment.

Bill C-393 has been debated at great length in this House. We have heard the reasons for it. I would remind members of the House that this is an urgent call to help and that we are talking about 2.3 million children under the age of 15 who are infected right now with HIV. We can help those who are in need of help right now.

One in two children with HIV in the developing world dies before reaching his or her second birthday. Let us think about that. Many of us in this House have children. Fifty per cent of those who contract the virus die, not because they cannot be helped, but because we are not able to help them right now.

That is what the bill is about. It is about life and death, and this House can decide to help save lives. It is that simple.

When we look at the numbers, there is despair, but there is hope. The despair is what the virus does. The hope is what we can do in the House today. What I just saw from my colleagues in the Bloc, what I have heard from my colleagues in the Conservative Party who support the bill and what I heard from my colleagues in the Liberal Party show that the will is there. It is goodwill. It is about people living up to their principles. It is about people putting aside their partisan differences. It is about people listening to the people who need our help. We have heard those voices loud and clear, some of us who have been to Africa.

When I went to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I saw a warehouse for medicines that could help save children and that warehouse was half empty. They want to see a supply of medicines and by passing this legislation, as amended, we can fill that warehouse to ensure those medicines get to the people who need it.

On another visit after I went to see that warehouse in the Congo a couple of years ago, was to some of the clinics where huge progress has been made to identify the HIV-AIDS virus.

However, if they do not have the medicines to help those who have been identified, then they will perish.

We are here today to look at the bill to ensure it can be amended and improve what the House passed previously.

I want to address, very directly, the amendments. If we are not able to get the one licence solution back in, as my colleagues know, then this bill is not worthy of going ahead. We cannot pretend. If the one licence solution is not put back in, the bill will not be worth the paper it is written on, and my colleagues know that.

To those who have concerns about compliance with WTO regulations, they will know it has been analyzed by experts and it is compliant. So, that argument does not hold weight. They know there are provisions and the amendments in the bill that would ensure standards are kept. We have ensured in the bill and the amendments that have been made that there are no concerns around leakage, in other words, that drugs would go to other countries. It is very precise. These drugs would go to the countries that have been put in the legislation.

We have an opportunity to put forward an innovative solution to help the millions of children who need it. We have an opportunity to improve something that this country has innovated. We have an opportunity, which excites me, to work together as parliamentarians to do something to help save lives.

I salute the people who have worked on this. I have been blessed with the opportunity to take the bill at this point. Many people have referenced my colleague from Winnipeg who started this, but it is because of every member in this House that I stand here today able to debate this bill.

*Government Orders*

●(1740)

Another thing happened in this place that was unusual and was welcomed. I put aside the bill I had and because of unanimity in the House, I was allowed to pick this bill up at the stage it was at. That means each party had to oblige.

I thank every member in the House for that. If members of the NDP did not get that support, we would have been unable to debate the bill. It does not matter whether members are in favour of the bill or not. I, the NDP members and the people who have worked on the bill thank each and every member of Parliament for that.

It is important to note that what we are talking about is, yes, saving lives. However, it also addresses what is happening in the world in terms of the disease itself. As we know, it is an HIV virus, which is mutating and changing, and we need medical regimes and medicines to change along with the virus. That is happening.

However, another thing is happening. As we know, countries like India have been trying since 2000 to become compliant with the WTO. They are unable to provide the same generic regimes they had in the past, so it requires innovation. We just do not have the drugs to support the people who need them now. The bill would help deal with that challenge.

For those who wonder what the bill can do, it can show the way forward to deal with not only the changes required in the regime of medicines needed, because of the change in the virus, but it will ensure that the progress made, with over five million lives saved in the last number of years, will continue. If we do not, make absolutely no mistake about it, we will potentially be going backward. Why? Because the drugs, which have worked so successfully, have to respond to the way in which the HIV virus and others are changing and mutating.

We cannot stand still. We have to continue to move ahead, and the bill is all about that. There are no concerns about WTO compliance. There are no concerns about quality controls. There are no concerns about leakage to other jurisdictions in terms of the drugs being sent somewhere else. They are in the bill and we would have oversight.

The only challenge is for the House to pass the bill, as amended. If we can do that, if we can put aside our differences, as we have before, and let our partisan shields down and ask what is the best for the people on the receiving end of these drugs, then we can show what Parliament is about. It is about working together from time to time. We have done that on a couple of occasions.

One of the proudest moments for all of us was witnessing, for instance, the apology to first nations. I will never forget that day and I hope we can do that again with this bill.

People are watching. I want to ask all of us to acknowledge the work that has been done by activists and civil society members. The grandmothers have been tireless and vigilant and have understood the importance of Canada working in solidarity with people in other countries. It is the finest example of what Canada and other activists, particularly from the coalition for HIV-AIDS, can do.

At the end of the day, it is very simple. I ask my colleagues to support the bill, as amended, so we can do what we can to help the people who need it. That is what I hope we will do. I hope next week

all my colleagues will see fit to pass the bill. I look forward to them supporting it.

\* \* \*

●(1745)

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

**Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to designate Tuesday, March 8 and Thursday, March 10 as allotted days.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**[*English*]**FREEZING ASSETS OF CORRUPT REGIMES ACT**

(Bill C-61. On the Order: Governments Orders:)

March 3, 2011—Second reading of Bill C-61, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of the property of officials and former officials of foreign states and of their family members—Minister of Foreign Affairs.

**Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I believe you would find unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, Bill C-61, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of the property of officials and former officials of foreign states and of their family members be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Does the government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** According the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

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

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

### PATENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-393, An Act to amend the Patent Act (drugs for international humanitarian purposes) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the NDP for his passion on this issue, for his interest in picking this bill up. I thank all hon. colleagues in the House, regardless of how they feel about this legislation, for voting unanimously to allow the member to pick up the bill so we could continue this important debate.

Bill C-393 is drafted to deal with the many challenges associated with access to medicines in the developing world.

Before I begin, I commend the Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign for their continued perseverance to keep this issue at the top of public debate. Although we may not agree on the legislation, I share with the grandmothers a commitment to bringing real and meaningful improvements to the health issues plaguing the people of the developing world, especially those who are most vulnerable, children and mothers.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology recently completed an extensive review of Bill C-393. The committee heard that Canada's Access to Medicines Regime, in its current form, enabled Canada to deliver two shipments of approximately 15 million tablets of an HIV-AIDS drug to Rwanda in 2008 and 2009.

This makes Canada the only country to have successfully exported generic versions of patented drugs to a developing country using a system like Canada's access to Medicines Regime, a significant achievement to be sure.

The committee also heard testimony that made the following point very clear. African countries depend on medicines from countries such as India, not Canada as some have suggested. The rationale is basic economics: they cost less. They cost less to produce and ship and systems are already in place that see millions of generic copies of patented drugs shipped from countries like India to the developing world.

This is why our government's primary effort to combat the shortage of drugs in the developing world has been focused on direct support to NGOs in Africa or to the global fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Supporting these worthwhile initiatives is the most effective means to help those in need.

However, that is not all that our government has done. In budget 2010 the government reaffirmed its commitment to double

### Private Members' Business

international assistance, bringing Canada's total international assistance to approximately \$5 billion

. Working with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, our government is at the forefront of the effort to develop an HIV vaccine, possibly one of the greatest medical breakthroughs of our time.

The committee heard from Dr. Frank Plummer, a world-leading HIV-AIDS researcher and specialist in infectious diseases, who said that to address this issue "we need multiple mechanisms, and the Government of Canada is doing that".

We will continue to do just that by focusing our efforts on worthwhile results-based initiatives worldwide. Our government's concerns with Bill C-393's proposal to water down Canadian patent laws are shared by members of the opposition, too.

To quote the Liberal member of Parliament for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, I would note the following. He says:

Patents are not an obstacle to accessing medicines in developing countries. In the words of Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, the debate about changing patent rules for drugs is a "red herring."

The notion that patent laws stand in the way of shipping drugs to Africa is simply false.

At the conclusion of the review by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, committee members voted to substantially amend Bill C-393.

These amendments were considered necessary by some members of the committee to ensure that the bill would both respect Canada's international trade obligations and maintain the integrity of Canada's framework for encouraging innovation and access to medicines for Canadians.

However, I still have reservations with the amended Bill C-393, which is why I cannot support it. In particular, I am concerned that, unlike the existing Access to Medicines Regime, the amended Bill C-393 does not include sufficient safeguards to ensure that drugs authorized for export are used for humanitarian purposes only and cannot be sold on the black market.

As well, the amended Bill C-393 does not have the necessary components to respect Canada's international trade obligations.

I, and I am sure other hon. members as well, am committed to improving the poor health conditions of people living in the developing world. In my opinion, the most effective way to do this is to improve the basic health infrastructure in the developing world. Low-income countries lack the trained medical staff, access to clean water, accurate diagnostic equipment, and reliable power that are crucial to improving health outcomes.

*Private Members' Business*

●(1750)

Canada needs to help these countries by continuing to support funds that assist countries to procure essential medicines, by providing technical assistance to help those countries navigate the drug procurement process and by helping to train qualified health professionals. All of this is in an effort to ensure that the primary health care needs of the world's most vulnerable citizens are being met. We need to focus on what works.

We heard before the committee that in 2003, 400,000 Africans were being treated for HIV-AIDS. In 2010, that 400,000 will grow to 5.2 million people. We need to continue to focus on what makes a difference in the lives of those people.

The testimony provided to the committee was essential to getting to the heart of Bill C-393 and its well-intentioned but flawed reform of Canada's Access to Medicines Regime. Access to health care in developing countries is a multifaceted issue. Neither Canada's Access to Medicines Regime nor the changes proposed by the bill currently before us will provide the additional health care professionals, infrastructure and other tools necessary to effectively administer life-saving drugs in Africa.

As our colleague, the member of Parliament for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, so succinctly stated recently:

Changing [Canada's Access to Medicines Regime] will have no effect on the ability of [Low Income Countries] to acquire medicines and medical supplies that are beyond their means to purchase or administer in the first place.

Bill C-393 is not the answer to solving the access to medicines issue. It is for this reason that I urge members to not support Bill C-393.

[Translation]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, unlike the hon. member across the way, I am supporting Bill C-393, which aims to correct the major issues with Canada's Access to Medicines Regime, or CAMR.

It is true that the regime is not currently operating, but reforms could change that. CAMR has provided only one drug to one country since it was created by Parliament more than six years ago. We cannot expect the regime to be used again if it is not effectively reformed.

Doctors Without Borders told the committee that it had tried many times to use the regime to get drugs to patients, but that it had given up because of pointless hurdles in the legislation. Developing countries have said that CAMR is not flexible enough, that it contains too many restrictions and that it is not compatible with their procurement processes. Only one Canadian generic drug manufacturer used the regime, and it then said that it would not use the complex process again. But it is important to note that the manufacturer publicly committed to using the regime again if it were simplified, for example, to export a long-awaited pediatric formulation of an anti-AIDS drug that is not currently available from any other source.

●(1755)

[English]

Canadians want Parliament to take action to fix CAMR. According to a national poll, 80% of Canadians support reforming Canada's Access to Medicines Regime to make it more workable and to help developing countries get access to more affordable life-saving medicine. So do dozens of prominent Canadians, including our former prime minister whose government enacted CAMR, and many leading Canadian organizations, including all those that recently issued an open letter on World AIDS Day to our colleagues in the House of Commons.

[Translation]

We need to make sure that competition makes these drugs affordable. This is critical for developing countries and has already been recognized by Canada and all the other member countries of the World Trade Organization, the WTO. The ability to procure lower-cost generic versions of expensive patented drugs is the most important factor in making it possible to treat and save the lives of 5 million HIV-positive people in low- and middle-income countries. Another 10 million people living with HIV also need these drugs. There is an urgent need for competition in order to obtain and increase access to affordable generic drugs, and this need will continue in developing countries.

[English]

At the core of Bill C-393 was, and should be, a proposal to streamline CAMR with a simplified one licence solution. This approach would eliminate the regime's current requirement for separate negotiations with patent-holding pharmaceutical companies for individual licences for each purchasing country and each order of medicines. It would also remove the requirement to determine and disclose in advance of even being able to apply for a licence to export to a single recipient country and a fixed maximum quantity of medicines. These unnecessary requirements have proven to be the major stumbling blocks to the use of CAMR.

[Translation]

Independent legal experts have repeatedly confirmed that the reforms in Bill C-393, including the one-l licence solution, are compliant with Canada's obligations as a member of the WTO, unlike what my colleague across the floor said. This includes a world-renowned expert who appeared before the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, as well as experts brought together last year by the United Nations Development Program in order to examine Bill C-393 in relation to Canada's WTO obligations.

[English]

The proposed reforms in Bill C-393 offer value for money and its proposed changes to CAMR would cost taxpayers nothing. In fact, the one licence solution in Bill C-393 would make Canadian foreign aid more effective because limited resources could purchase more medicines and would also free up scarce resources to invest in making health systems stronger.

Scaling up access to treatment also means greater opportunities for producing and distributing good quality, Canadian made generic medicines, meaning more business and more jobs in addressing oppressing global health needs.

CAMR is not working rapidly and easily precisely because it requires one specific country and a fixed quantity of medicines to be determined and disclosed in advance before seeking a licence is even possible. It took years to get to the point of getting even one licence issued because of this. Claiming that it only took 68 days for the process to work is misleading because it ignores the entire process that was and is required. The one licence solution would streamline the process so that it can work.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-393 does not weaken measures aimed at ensuring the delivery of quality medicines to patients. The amendment to restore the one-licence solution will ensure that all medicines exported under the regime would still be reviewed by Health Canada. Furthermore, all of the regime's existing safeguards against diversion of medicines would remain unchanged.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Streamlining CAMR does not jeopardize pharmaceutical research and development, including those carried out in Canada. CAMR authorizes exports of generic versions of patented medicines to certain eligible countries only. These countries were already agreed upon by Canada and all WTO members in 2003 and are already reflected in the current CAMR, as created unanimously by Parliament in 2004. These countries represent a small portion of total global pharmaceutical sales and the profits of brand name pharmaceutical companies. Furthermore, the brand name drug companies are entitled to receive royalties on sales of generic medicines supplied to these countries under CAMR.

[*Translation*]

As for the amendment to include a sunset clause, there is no valid reason to include such a clause, which would automatically kill the crucial improvements needed for the CAMR after they have been in effect for just a few years. On the one hand, the need for more affordable medicines in developing countries could unfortunately remain a reality for many more years to come. On the other hand, it is no secret that the regime is flawed and, as a result, there is almost zero chance that it will ever be used again unless it is simplified.

So why would Parliament bother making improvements to the regime to make it more effective, only to turn around and put an expiry date on those improvements through a sunset clause, to return to the current system, which has proven untenable?

I support Bill C-393, An Act to amend the Patent Act (drugs for international humanitarian purposes) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, and I invite my hon. colleagues to also vote to support it.

[*English*]

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to talk about Bill C-393. In fact,

*Private Members' Business*

I am pleased that my friend from Ottawa Centre put his name to the bill and is giving me the opportunity to do just that.

As I listened to the various debaters today, it occurred to me there were some myths that perhaps I might have an opportunity to debunk today. I hope everyone is listening carefully as I do that.

The bill was first introduced almost two years ago in the House. The intention was to address deficiencies and limitations in Canada's access to medicines regime that have rendered it cumbersome and very user-unfriendly.

Parliament can and must deliver on its promise to people in developing countries struggling with the burden of such public health problems as AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

I will deal with myth number one. The myth is that Bill C-393 would weaken current safeguards aimed at ensuring medicines are not diverted and illegally resold. Critics of Bill C-393 have previously claimed that it would weaken Canada's medicines regime and the existing measures to prevent the diversion and illegal resale of medicines, or that it would allow substandard medicines to be exported to developing countries. These claims were never accurate. In any event, such objections can no longer stand since the relevant clauses were removed at committee and are no longer part of Bill C-393.

All of the requirements to disclose quantities of a medicine being shipped and to which countries are being preserved. These safeguards were already deemed satisfactory by Parliament when it first created Canada's medicines regime.

Myth number two is that Bill C-393 would remove measures to ensure the quality of medicines being supplied to developing countries. This claim is simply not true. Under Bill C-393 as it now stands, a Health Canada review would continue to be required for all drugs exported.

Myth number three is that the amendments in Bill C-393 would violate Canada's obligations under the World Trade Organization's treaty on intellectual property rights. In detailed analysis, including by some of the world's leading legal experts on the subject, have shown that this is not correct. All countries at the World Trade Organization, including Canada, have repeatedly and explicitly agreed that issuing compulsory licences on patented medicines to facilitate exports of lower priced generic medicines is entirely consistent with World Trade Organization rules.

The next myth is that Bill C-393 and the one licence solution would authorize unfair competition for brand name pharmaceutical companies. We heard my friend from Ottawa Centre and a number of other speakers today mention the one licence solution. The claim makes no sense. The proposed one licence solution would not, as some inaccurately claim, create unfair competition for brand name pharmaceutical companies.

*Private Members' Business*

To be clear, nothing in Bill C-393 prevents brand name pharmaceutical companies from competing to supply their patented products to developing countries. Rather, Bill C-393 simply aims to enable competition by generics to supply those eligible countries and preserves the requirement that generic manufacturers pay royalties to patent holding pharmaceutical companies in the event of any compulsory licence being issued.

Bill C-393 is about making workable something already endorsed by Parliament.

Another myth is that Canadian generic manufacturers will not be able to supply medicines at prices that are competitive with generic manufacturers elsewhere. This claim is simplistic and unfounded. The goal is not to get business for Canadian companies. The goal is to get quality medicines at the lowest possible price for as many patients in developing countries as possible. However, it makes no sense to simply assume that Canadian companies cannot compete globally because they already do.

• (1805)

My friend from Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont was talking about the inability of countries to actually deal with the issue and to work with the drugs. That is another myth that I will debunk.

The barrier to greater access is not the price of medicines but rather widespread poverty and inadequate health systems. The myth is that widespread poverty, inadequate health systems and not enough doctors, clinics, nurses and so on are the barriers to delivering these.

I spent almost six years living in west and southern Africa working for a Canadian aid organization and I can tell the House that there are multiple barriers to accessing medicines in the developing world which vary from country to country and even community to community. However, major progress has been made in increasing access to treatment, including by strengthening health systems. It is simply inaccurate to claim that the quality of health or physical infrastructure in some developing countries presents an insurmountable challenge to delivering affordable medicines.

For example, with determination and innovative approaches, AIDS treatment is being delivered effectively in some of the most resource limited settings imaginable. In just a few years, millions of people have been put on life-saving AIDS drugs in developing countries, thanks to both effective global investments in health systems, for example through the global fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and the use of generic medicines purchased at dramatically lower prices.

Every credible organization and expert recognizes the obvious fact that the price of medicines is a key factor affecting access to those medicines and that the price of medicines prevent many patients with HIV or numerous other conditions from accessing life-saving treatments. Prices are higher when medicines are only available from brand name pharmaceutical companies that hold patents on those medicines. Instead of the word patents we could use monopolies if we wish.

Making medicines affordable, strengthening health systems and other initiatives to tackle poverty and improve health in developing countries are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are complemen-

tary and all are necessary. All the clinics, doctors and nurses in the world will not be able to help patients if medicines are priced out of reach, and that is the bottom line, and that is why we have this bill before us today.

• (1810)

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be speaking once again to Bill C-393. I want to recognize Judy Wasylycia-Leis, the former member for Winnipeg North, who did a terrific job in this House for the whole 12 years she was here, particularly with respect to this bill.

It seems so typical that when we find issues like this, we always seem to be up against the Conservatives who are finding ways to oppose bills like this, seemingly always taking the side of big business and the drug companies, trying to put up roadblocks to the good work that was done by the member. Now I recognize there are a few members across the way who have supported the bill, but in a general sense, we predictably find the Conservatives supporting the corporate agenda.

I want to also thank the Bloc because it has made some amendments that actually change the bill in an extremely substantial way. Prior to this, we were looking at a five-year sunset clause. Five years is a very short period of time for something like this, particularly when we recognize how long it takes Parliament to get anything done in terms of legislation. Amending it to deal with a 10-year review seems a much more reasonable approach, and I want to thank the Bloc for that.

There are a number of issues that we can deal with on the bill. I know I do not have a lot of time, but we are talking about over 16,000 lives lost per day in the world to HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and other treatable infectious diseases, according to the Global Fund. In 2009, 33.3 million people around the world were living with HIV-AIDS; 1.8 million of them died from the infection and 260,000 of them were children. Ninety-seven per cent of the people infected with HIV-AIDS live in low- to middle-income countries. Almost 15 million people infected with these diseases were in need of antiviral drugs and only 5.2 million were treated.

It is significant that we have seen in the last three or four years, Warren Buffet and Bill Gates in the United States make a commitment while they are still alive to give away half of their \$50 billion fortunes and challenging other billionaires in the United States and, I believe, even around the world to participate with them. But the foundation of Bill and Melinda Gates, supplemented by half of Warren Buffet's money, showed some very good direction. They could have picked many different causes in the world, but they chose Africa and the AIDS issue as a point to concentrate on when other groups and other governments were not interested in that. Thus I want to compliment them.

I also want to compliment all of the people who were involved in the development of this bill and getting it to this stage.

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

**Some hon. members:** Question.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The question is on the amendment to Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I declare the amendment to Motion No. 1 carried.

(Amendment to Motion No. 1 agreed to)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The next question is on Motion No. 1, as amended. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I declare the motion carried.

(Motion No. 1, as amended, agreed to)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The next question is on the amendment to Motion No. 2. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I declare the amendment to Motion No. 2 carried.

(Amendment to Motion No. 2 agreed to)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The next question is on Motion No. 2, as amended. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I declare Motion No. 2, as amended, carried.

(Motion No. 2, as amended, agreed to)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The next question is on the amendment to Motion No. 3. The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

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

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

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

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

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

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The division stands deferred.

Normally at this time the House would proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions at the report stage of the bill. However, pursuant to Standing Order 98, the division stands

deferred until Wednesday, March 9, 2011, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

**ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

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

●(1815)

[*Translation*]

## GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on November 16, I expressed in the House my great concern about the news that the use of food banks in Canada had increased by 28%. That is the highest rate of use since 1997. The government claims that it does not have the money to help close to a million Canadians who are currently in need of food aid in a land of plenty like ours.

It is true that the government must balance its responsibilities with its limited number of resources, but that did not stop it from spending \$14 billion on fighter jets, \$14,049 on glow sticks for the G8 or \$6.5 million on an advertising campaign for its economic action plan. The Conservatives' irresponsible spending led our country's economy back into a structural deficit even before the actual recession.

How does the government intend to get its reckless spending, which demonstrates a complete lack of respect for taxpayers, under control if it continues to act this way?

[*English*]

It is obvious from their spending priorities, such as corporate tax cuts, fighter jets and tough on crime legislation, which have not yet even been fully calculated, that the Conservatives' plan to balance the budget by 2015 is not credible. Their priorities are completely shortsighted, ineffective and just poor economics. How can we build an educated, healthy, skilled workforce if we do not invest more in social infrastructure? Economic growth built at the expense of social infrastructure is just not sustainable. We need to think about the future.

A recent report of the human resources committee on the federal poverty reduction plan has found that nearly 30% of aboriginal children under age 15 live in low income households compared with 12.5% of non-aboriginal children, which is also an unacceptable level.

The report states that poverty is much more gruelling to the young who find it difficult to escape that poverty trap.

●(1820)

[*Translation*]

Given the poverty levels in Canada, \$14 billion for 35 fighter jets is completely astronomical.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

“Astronomical” is the same word the Conservative members used in their supplementary opinion to describe the cost of implementing the recommendations to reduce poverty in Canada set out in the report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The Conservative members said that the lack of costing for most of the recommendations raised issues of credibility for them. They also said that it was difficult for the government to determine which recommendations for reducing poverty were prudent and practical to adopt, given its “important commitments” to deficit reduction and keeping taxes low.

[*English*]

Indeed, how could a government take crucial steps to assist low income families, provide affordable housing, institute pay equity or improve the employment insurance program all without adequate figures? Yet the government seems perfectly capable of implementing crime legislation, making corporate tax cuts and buying those fighter jets without making adequate figures available to Parliament or to Canadians.

The fiscal transparency report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer discovered that the true costs of each of these initiatives has not been calculated or released. Overall, the budget officer identified 11 areas in the new crime legislation alone for which the government has inadequately provided—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. The four minutes has expired for the hon. member.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as late as today I met with members from the food bank and listened to their concerns. I certainly have respect for taxpayers. If one wants to talk about the lack of respect for taxpayers, the member should look at the previous Liberal record and the 13 long and dark years of Liberal government.

I am here today speaking on the subject again as I have previously this week, and our government's position has not changed since the last time I spoke. Our government is focused on creating jobs, increasing the safety and prosperity of Canadian families and working to ensure that the economy continues to grow and recover.

We are accomplishing things for Canadians in these areas, whether it be through our low tax plan, our measures to fight crime, or our actions to help Canadians through Canada's economic action plan.

With respect to lower income Canadians and those who were hard hit by the recession, our government believes that the best way to help is to get Canadians working again. Thanks to the action we have taken, that is exactly what is happening.

In fact, since July 2009, there were 460,000 jobs created. We have made unprecedented investments in skills training and helped over 1.2 million Canadians last year alone to transition into new jobs. We introduced the working income tax benefit, which is very popular, to make work pay for Canadians who are trying to get over the welfare wall. There were one million low income Canadians who benefited in the first year alone. The member opposite for Dartmouth—Cole

Harbour has praised the government for introducing that particular program.

We have also introduced the historic registered disability savings plan to help Canadians save for the long-term financial security of a child with a disability. We will continue to pursue our low tax plan so that Canadians have more money in their pockets to spend on what is important to them and their family. We have improved social transfers to provinces so that they now have access to predictable and growing funding. These are a few examples, but there are many more initiatives we have taken and introduced to help low income Canadians and their families.

Our record is one of action to help Canadians, whereas the Liberal record is one of empty talk and failure. When the Liberal government was in power it decided to slash social transfers to provinces by a whopping \$25 billion. Liberals spent drastically less on funding for health care, post-secondary education and programs that help low income Canadians. They raided over \$50 billion from the EI account and balanced their books on the backs of ordinary Canadians. Those cuts hurt Canadians plain and simple. That is what the Liberal record is. That is what the Liberals accomplished.

The Liberal member from Markham—Unionville, a colleague of the member, admitted that those cuts had a devastating impact. He said:

I think, in hindsight, the Chrétien government—even though I'm a Liberal—cut perhaps too deeply, too much offloading, with the benefit of hindsight. And there were some negative effects.

Of course there were. The Liberal finance critic, the member for Kings—Hants, thought much the same thing when he said that the Liberal government made the wrong choices and slashed transfers to the provinces. The provinces are still scrambling to catch up on the lost Martin years of inadequate funding.

Now the self-proclaimed tax and spend Liberal leader is pursuing a campaign to raise taxes on Canadians and job creators. Independent experts have stated that the Liberal plan to raise taxes would kill an estimated 400,000 jobs.

The member from Kings—Hants said:

—we cannot increase corporate taxes without losing corporate investment. If we lose corporate investment, we have a less productive economy. That means lower paying jobs. That means fewer jobs. That means more poverty.

I would ask the member to listen to her finance critic and abandon her plan to raise taxes.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is usually very logical and rational, so I do not know why he insists that we want to raise taxes, because no one on this side has ever called for such a thing.

However, a weak and timid labour market strategy is not enough. We need a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy that provides a strong social infrastructure that will support families and children.



*Adjournment Proceedings*

There are many Canadians who do not have access to these programs—even though there are a number of good programs, they do not have access to them—and who need more targeted assistance.

That is what we are asking the Conservative government to do, and that is what it has failed to do thus far.

[*English*]

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member to listen to her leader who proposes a \$6 billion tax hike. We will not do that. Thanks to our Conservative government, more Canadians are working, families are paying less in taxes, they have more money in their pockets and vulnerable Canadians are benefiting from significant investments. We are investing in areas like skills training, housing and persons with disabilities, among others.

The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour admitted that the Liberals failed to help low income Canadians. He said: “We didn't get to where we wanted to get”.

His Liberal colleague from York Centre agreed that the Liberals failed. In speaking about the government's record on poverty he said: “We didn't do as well as we would have wanted to do”.

That is a fact. In fact, the steps the Liberals took while in government hurt the most vulnerable at the most difficult time by the actions they have taken.

## CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on November 18, 2010 my question about temporary visitor visas was not properly addressed by the hon. member for St. Catharines. I hear from my constituents that the Conservative government does not give visitors' visas out. For that reason, I am alarmed about the transparency of Canada's temporary visa determination process.

While deciding who should be allowed in Canada is important, I disagree with the government, which places too much faith in the visa officers and gives them unaccountable discretionary powers. It shows that the government does not have in place a clear temporary visa determination process, but relies on random procedures.

A person is inadmissible to Canada if he or she has been charged with a serious crime, or is a threat to Canada's security, or has been involved in crimes against humanity. However, I know people whose applications have been refused many times, even though they have never committed any of these offences. I have seen cases of people who have money, well-paid jobs, and all of whom's family members in their home countries are well established, but they still are not granted temporary visitor visas.

Many individuals have visited their Canadian relatives before for important events such as funerals, weddings, family reunions, and anniversaries, but today for no reason they are being denied temporary visitor visas. They did not break any Canadian laws. They spent their money in our great country. However, now the government denies them entrance for important family events. This is outrageous. The system is obviously contradictory and subjective.

The hon. member for St. Catharines once said that each case is assessed on its own merits and not against any pre-established minimum levels of income, property value, or family relationship.

To say that is to say that the visa officers can do whatever they want because they will not be held accountable to any minimal, normal standards. This means that visa officers can exercise their discretionary powers in unaccountable ways. The system is inhumane as it fails to consider the last wishes of Canadians on their deathbeds who want to see their relatives before they die.

The government should establish an accountable process of issuing temporary visas based on compassionate grounds and create visa bonds for these persons. Visa bonds would provide insurance that these people will return to their countries of origin. A visa bond is the only viable solution to the problem of the high rate of refusal of temporary visitor visas by the government.

● (1830)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, Citizenship and Immigration Canada is responsible for facilitating the entry of visitors into Canada while at the same time protecting the health, safety and security of Canadians.

All visitors to Canada require a temporary resident visa, except citizens of countries where an exemption has already been granted.

All applications from around the world are assessed equally against exactly the same criteria, regardless of the country of origin.

Visa officers outside Canada review temporary resident visa applications and make their decisions based on the requirements of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and in accordance with the principles of procedural fairness.

Those requirements include satisfying the immigration officer that they are in good health, that they do not pose a health risk, that they do not have a criminal record, that they do not pose a threat to Canada's security, that they have not previously violated immigration legislation, that they have enough money to support themselves while they visit Canada, and that they have sufficient ties to their home country to indicate that they will leave Canada when their visa expires.

Visa officers consider several other factors before deciding if the person is a genuine visitor who will leave Canada voluntarily at the end of his or her stay.

Among the things considered are the person's ties to the home country, the purpose of the visit, the person's family and economic situation, the overall economic and political stability of the home country, as well as invitations from the Canadian host.

As well, the Immigration Refugee Protection Act provides sufficient discretion to immigration officers to respond in a flexible and humane manner to emergency situations.

In cases where an applicant does not meet the requirements for the issuing of a visa, but where there are compelling reasons to allow him or her to travel to Canada, visa officers can issue a temporary resident permit.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

We understand that people are disappointed when their visa applications are refused. However, it is our responsibility to make sure that all visitors meet the requirements to come to Canada, as set out in Canada's immigration law. The safety and security of Canadians and the integrity of our immigration system absolutely depend on it.

Our current system balances the need for safety and security with the realization that there are times when there may be compelling and compassionate reasons to allow a foreign national to enter Canada temporarily.

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi:** Mr. Speaker, I know of people whose applications have been refused many times even though they have never committed any of the offences listed. I have heard of cases where people who have money, well paid jobs, and family members who are well established in their home countries but are still not granted temporary visitor visas.

The government should listen to Canadians who demand that it establish temporary visa bonds and make the system more compassionate. In Canada we should not rely too much on the discretionary powers of visa officers.

The United States is much more generous in giving out multiple visas than Canada. In Canada we are so tightfisted.

The government should pursue this policy with diligence and not ignore it, as it is doing today. The government should start listening to the people now and increase the number of temporary visitor visas granted to people who want to visit their relatives in Canada for important family events, such as funerals, weddings, anniversaries and other important events.

• (1835)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Mr. Speaker, we certainly do listen to what individuals say when they want to come to this country and who have put their applications forward. However, we also take our responsibility for protecting Canadians very seriously.

Our visa officers review temporary resident visa applications and make their decisions based on the requirements of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and in accordance with the principles of procedural fairness. The act also provides these officers with sufficient discretion to respond in a flexible and humane way where the situation warrants, as may be the case with a family funeral or another emergency situation.

We understand that people are disappointed when their visa applications are refused. Applicants are advised in writing when their applications are refused, and the letter sets out the reason for that refusal.

Refused applicants can submit a new application with a new processing fee, along with more supporting documents, or they may seek judicial review by the Federal Court of Canada.

Our visitor application process facilitates the entry of visitors into Canada while protecting the health, safety and security of Canadians.

SMALL BUSINESS

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to continue the Liberals' attempt to get answers from

the government in relation to its fixation on giving unaffordable tax breaks to large businesses. These corporate tax cuts, to the tune of \$6 billion per annum, translate to \$8 million per day. The Conservatives will be borrowing \$6 billion during a time of high deficits to give tax breaks to large corporations. This is unbelievable. It shows the government's lack of economic competence.

Each and every working Canadian, therefore, will be burdened with extra taxes so that the Prime Minister can give his friends a huge profit. Small and medium-size enterprises employ 53% of all working individuals. They are the economic engines, but will not receive one penny from the \$6 billion. Working Canadians also will not see a penny of these \$6 billion, but will be forced to pay extra taxes as this unaffordable corporate gift will increase the government's deficit and debt.

When Liberals left office, they left the treasury with a healthy surplus of \$13 billion, which was a result of sound fiscal management. The Liberals had to clean out the horrendous mess the previous Conservatives had left. As sound economic managers, the Liberals brought Canada back to a healthy fiscal framework. This ensured better services and billions of dollars in personal and corporate tax cuts.

The Conservatives have blown the surplus through mismanagement. They now have a deficit of \$56 billion, to which they will add another \$6 billion per annum, with more likely for their ideological spending.

The government is creating a further disadvantage to small and medium-size businesses. By cutting taxes for large corporations, they are effectively taking away the competitive advantage for the SMEs. This will allow the big box store chains even greater ability to force their smaller competitors out of business.

Canadians may be facing an election soon over the upcoming budget, which will implement this giveaway of taxpayers' money. The choice at the ballot box will be clear. Do people favour a tax break for big business that will cause greater debt for all Canadians and put small and medium-size business at a competitive disadvantage or do they want a Liberal government that looks after every Canadian?

Can the minister explain to Canadians why he favours this corporate giveaway?

• (1840)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there we have it, the first election speech of the Liberal Party right here in the House of Commons.

In any event, our government's top priority is in fact the economy. I appreciate the question from the member for Don Valley East. That is why we will continue to put in place the right conditions for businesses to succeed in this country.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

We have made it easier for entrepreneurs to access the funding they need to start and grow their businesses. Under the Canada small business financing program, the government has increased the maximum eligible loan from \$250,000 to \$350,000, and up to \$500,000 for loans toward acquiring real estate.

In my city of St. Catharines, Niagara College and Brock University have received federal support that will allow both of these institutions to help local business innovate and bring new products and processes to the market.

Other businesses in my community that have benefited from government actions are companies like Silicon Knights. The funding received by Silicon Knights will help ensure the city of St. Catharines's continued transition from traditional manufacturing to the tech industry. Their growth and success are important to my community. Not only in terms of job creation but also in terms of attracting and retaining the types of highly skilled workers Niagara needs to prosper.

Our government is taking action to help improve access to business financing. The business credit availability program, Export Development Canada and the Business Development Bank of Canada are providing significant dollars in direct lending and support like mentorship, accounting and consulting advice all play a role in assisting those companies.

Our government is also working to relieve tax burdens on small businesses. Canada's economic action plan raised the amount of business income eligible for the small business tax rate of 11% to \$500,000 from \$400,000 as of January 1, 2009.

Moreover, the economic action plan provided significant funding over two years for the National Research Council's industrial research assistance program. This new funding will increase the research, development and commercialization skills of small and medium-sized businesses across Canada, and contribute to the improvement of their productivity and competitiveness.

We have created the advisory committee on small business and entrepreneurship to provide us with insight on the issues and importance of small and medium-sized businesses.

We have heard already from these companies that one of those issues is to simplify regulations and cut red tape. As a result, the government has also created the red tape reduction commission, which has already visited over 10 cities across Canada and is chaired by the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism.

In March 2009, we announced that we achieved our goal of reducing the paperwork burden by 20%. This government believes entrepreneurs should spend their time and energy on building their success and not filing and filling out paperwork.

We have also provided the Canadian Youth Business Foundation with significant dollars over the last two years to support its work with young entrepreneurs and Canada's next generation of business leaders.

We have bolstered our support for the Canada Business Network, where small and medium-sized businesses and entrepreneurs have

access in person, on line, and toll-free phone service information about how to start a business, how to manage employees and get specific advice concerning importing and exporting.

The goal of these federal government initiatives is very simple and it speaks directly to the point that the member for Don Valley East has tried to make. We want to make it easier for small business to invest, to create jobs and be successful in this economy.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Speaker, I have a few simple questions for the government.

Why is the Conservative government increasing payroll taxes for individuals to the tune of \$8 billion while giving a tax break of \$6 billion to the wealthy corporations?

Why is the government imposing airport fees and other indirect taxes on working Canadians while allowing big business tax breaks which Canada can ill afford, especially since the corporate tax rate is the lowest in the G7?

Why is the government increasing debt on the backs of all Canadians?

Canadians are tired of this arrogant, secretive, contemptuous government. Liberals are in favour of lower taxes and have given huge breaks to Canadians after cleaning up Conservative mismanagement.

Can the government explain why putting an extra \$6 billion of debt on the shoulders of all Canadians to give benefits to large successful corporations is fair?

•(1845)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Mr. Speaker, our government continues to deliver for Canada's small and medium-sized businesses and enterprises, the backbone of our economy and a major source of job creation across this country.

The last thing we should do right now is what the Liberal leader and the Liberal member have spoken about this evening which is to raise taxes on the job creators in this country. Many small businesses sell their products exclusively to larger companies.

The Liberal \$6 billion tax hike would put small business right out of business. In fact, what it would do is bring this recovery that we finally have, that we have worked so hard to create, back down. The member mentioned the G7 and the G20. We are ahead on all counts in terms of where other countries are.

A \$6 billion tax increase to do what? Bring this economy back down onto its knees. I do not think so. This government will not be doing that.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)



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