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—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 24, 2011

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

BREAST DENSITY AWARENESS ACT

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC) moved that Bill C-314, An Act respecting the awareness of screening among women with dense breast tissue, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to my private member's bill, Bill C-314, An Act respecting the awareness of screening among women with dense breast tissue, which calls on the federal government to encourage the use of existing federal initiatives in order to increase awareness among Canadian women about the impact of having dense breast tissue and the complications it poses for breast cancer screening.

Breast cancer touches many Canadian women and their families and friends, and is the most common form of cancer in women. I know this is something Canadians from coast to coast to coast care deeply about. Just last month Barrie held its annual CIBC Run for the Cure in support of breast cancer research. I saw 2,000 residents out early on a cold and wet Sunday morning to support the battle against breast cancer. Runs like that occur across the country because Canadians are deeply concerned.

In my community of Barrie, in less than 12 months, the Royal Victoria Hospital's regional cancer care centre will open. There have been literally thousands of fundraising events over the last five years to support this very large cancer centre. It will help battle a variety of cancers, including of course, breast cancer.

This year it is estimated that about 23,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and 5,000 women will die from this insidious disease. Over their lifetime, one in nine women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. This is very difficult to accept. It touches many women and their loved ones. Sixty-four Canadian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and 14 will die of breast cancer every day. It is my sincere hope that over time this bill will help reduce those troubling numbers. Health sectors in other areas of the world are beginning to more aggressively target dense tissue to enable early detection of breast cancer.

It is important for all of us to be aware of the fact that screening for breast cancer can save lives. Providing women with accurate information about screening will help them make decisions that are right for them. The federal government supports a number of initiatives to support Canadians dealing with cancer.

Bill C-314 aims to raise awareness about dense breast tissue and breast cancer screening. It will help women and their doctors make well-informed decisions regarding breast cancer screening. It includes a number of elements, which I will briefly outline. I will also address initiatives currently under way to address them.

First, this bill requires the Government of Canada to assess whether gaps in information exist relating to breast density in the context of breast cancer screening. Second, this bill requires that approaches be identified, where needed, to improve information for women in order to: one, address the challenges of detecting breast cancer in women with dense breast tissue; and two, raise awareness concerning these challenges. Third, the bill requires the existing Canadian breast cancer screening initiative to share information on dense breast tissue and its relationship to breast cancer screening and any follow-up procedures that may be deemed necessary.

Canada is fortunate to have screening programs for breast cancer. The provinces and territories deliver these programs to detect breast cancer before it has spread so that treatment can be started. We are learning more and more from scientific research about breast cancer and its risk factors. New and better treatments are being developed. However, there is still much to learn. We know that good information is fundamental to the decisions that each of us makes with the advice of our doctors about our own health. This dialogue is the key to doctor-patient relationships.

Let me take a few moments to explain how the issue of breast density relates to breast cancer screening. First, breast density refers to the amount of tissue in the breast. Dense breasts have more tissue. Breast cancer screening is done using a mammogram, which is an X-ray of the breast. A woman's breast density can affect the accuracy of a mammogram and it may be more difficult for a doctor to see an abnormality. There could be cancer present if the breast tissue is dense because both cancer and dense breast tissue appear white on mammograms.

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High breast density is also linked to an increased risk of developing breast cancer, although it is not yet known why this is the case. We also do not know how common dense breast tissue is among Canadian women, although some statistics point to the fact that it could be as high as 40%. Providing women with information of what is known about breast density would help them make well-informed decisions about screening and would open the door for women to engage in follow-up procedures, such as an MRI or ultrasound, if they have dense breast tissue which could skew the mammogram.

• (1110)

In addition to raising awareness on breast density, the bill recognizes the responsibility of the provinces and territories for providing breast cancer screening. Provincial and territorial breast screening programs are invaluable in the early detection of breast cancer in Canadian women.

As noted in the bill, the federal government plays a role in breast cancer screening by facilitating the identification and adoption of effective practices in screening. We also support the sharing of information on screening methods and outcomes through our federal roles in research and surveillance.

Through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, our government provides funding to researchers to investigate the full spectrum of cancer prevention and control. One of the priorities of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research is early detection of cancer. The CIHR works with partners both nationally and internationally to advance its research priorities, including breast cancer research.

Our government has demonstrated its commitment to breast cancer screening by investing in the Canadian breast cancer screening initiative. We work with provincial and territorial governments to measure the performance of breast cancer screening programs across Canada. This means that all jurisdictions regularly share information on the screening programs and discuss what they are learning. They share best practices, discuss the challenges they are facing and the questions that are important to all of them.

Information sharing about ways to improve these programs ensures that women receive the full benefits of early detection. This includes providing women with information about all aspects of breast cancer screening. The federal, provincial and territorial national committee for the Canadian breast cancer screening initiative provides opportunities for provincial and territorial governments to work together to develop their screening recommendations and approaches. This committee is comprised of medical professionals and key stakeholders.

For example, the committee is currently looking at breast cancer mortality and improving screening for underserved populations. We have the Canadian breast cancer screening database, which is a source of valuable information on breast cancer screening. Participating provincial and territorial screening programs contribute to the national database, which is used to monitor and evaluate breast cancer screening programs. Non-government organizations play a vital role in this process as well.

I am proud to say that our government is taking action on cancer through our continued investment in the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer which has led to the implementation of the Canadian strategy for cancer control. The partnership is the first of its kind and was established by our Conservative government. It covers the full spectrum of cancer control, from prevention to palliative and end-of-life care, policy to practice, and from research to health system applications.

Together with the cancer community, the partnership is accelerating the use of effective cancer prevention and control strategies. Its objectives are to reduce the number of cancer cases, minimize cancer-related deaths and improve patient quality of life.

In March of this year, our Prime Minister announced renewed funding of \$250 million over five years, beginning on April 1, 2012. This will allow the partnership to continue its invaluable work. In the words of the Prime Minister:

We are making progress on prevention, diagnosis, treatment and hope, and in tracking our progress closely, the partnership is leading us on the path to a cure.

The partnership plays a key role in providing information to women on cancer screening, which aligns with the spirit of this bill. The bill also recognizes the important role of organizations such as the Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation in providing reliable information that supports women in making decisions about their health.

All of us are familiar with the Canadian Cancer Society. This national volunteer organization works in cancer prevention, research, advocacy, information and support for all cancers.

The Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation is a national volunteer organization dedicated to working toward a future without breast cancer. The foundation funds, supports and advocates for research, education and awareness programs, early diagnosis and effective treatment, as well as a positive quality of life for those living with breast cancer.

Women's health organizations, such as the Canadian Women's Health Network, raise awareness on many health issues faced by women in Canada, including breast cancer.

Working with the above-listed breast cancer stakeholders, the federal government will continue to raise awareness through existing initiatives on the issue of breast density in the context of breast cancer screening. These stakeholders will be very critical in our battle to raise awareness about breast density.

This bill is particularly timely given that October is breast cancer awareness month. Through efforts to raise awareness, Canadian women and their families can become more informed about breast cancer. They will learn about breast density and its implications for breast cancer screening. They will be able to make well-informed decisions based on this knowledge.

• (1115)

I would like to thank Andrea Paine at the Ministry of Health in Ottawa, Dr. Rob Ballagh of Barrie, Mike Richmond from Toronto, and my assistant in Barrie, Shawn Bubel, for their assistance in the drafting of the bill.

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The bill provides an opportunity for the Government of Canada and the House to recognize the critical importance of raising awareness about breast density and breast cancer screening.

It would be an honour for me to have the support of all members in the House for this bill. Too many families have been touched by this form of cancer. I am hopeful that by ensuring women get the information they need which could lead to early detection, this legislation could potentially save lives.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to congratulate my colleague opposite for his interest in and his work on the fight against breast cancer, particularly cancer in those with dense breast tissue.

To promote breast cancer awareness and prevention, should the government not work with the provinces and territories to reduce the wait times for diagnostic tests and improve access to X-rays in the public health care system?

This would give disadvantaged women better, earlier and fairer access to the breast cancer screening program, since diagnostic X-ray testing is sometimes carried out in private clinics.

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud that this government has worked closely with the provinces and territories to assist in enhancing health care in Canada. Let us not forget that this is the highest level of health care funding in our history to the provinces and territories through this federal government. With an increase of 6% a year we have seen record investments in health care in all areas.

The bill sets out that we would work with the provinces and territories on enhancing the breast cancer screening protocols. I am very proud of what this government has done on health care. It is not limited just to the support for the provinces and territories in this new investment, but with the Canadian cancer partnership and a variety of other partnerships this government again and again does whatever it can to enhance health care in Canada.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the recommended initial age for breast screening as well as the frequency for screening changes from study to study. It also changes from province to territory.

How does a woman know that she is getting the initial screening and the frequency of screening according to need as opposed to according to what a province or territory wants to pay for?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, that is one of the benefits of the bill. It encourages the sharing and pooling of information. There is a variety of standards, but now with the provinces, territories and the federal government working on the Canadian breast cancer screening initiative, we will start to see more of a balance in terms of protocols.

I also note that the Government of Canada is investing in the CIHR for breast cancer screening. The CIHR has made that an area of interest. There are a lot of things we do not know in terms of breast cancer. That is why the research done by the CIHR is critical, as is having an active dialogue with the provinces, territories and the federal government on breast cancer. Research and surveillance are

going to be very much needed as we embark on this battle against breast cancer.

• (1120)

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Barrie for bringing this very important issue to the House. I have three adult daughters. My wife and I were talking about this the other day because of the CIBC breast cancer walk. It is phenomenal to see the number of women who have been able to be screened and have mammograms, and have moved into a new kind of life because of breast cancer.

Why has this not taken place already? Why has it come to this stage? We know there is so much information available. Maybe he could enlighten us as to why it is at this stage and what the process is to get this legislation through the House.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, we are learning more and more about breast cancer all the time. While it was not clear before, I know that in the U.S. and a few other jurisdictions they realized there were challenges with the screening due to the fact that dense breast tissue was skewing mammogram results. Possibly as high as 40% of females have dense breast tissue, which is a huge per cent of the population that we would have inadequate information on from a mammogram. Other health care jurisdictions are embarking on new screening initiatives, and this is an opportunity for us to learn from each other. Adopting more effective practices would be a very positive step for the Canadian fight against breast cancer.

In terms of why this is has not happened before, it is just that we had not learned about it before. This is something that Health Canada was looking into and it is something that was only started last year in the United States. This is something that was identified as a potential area where we could improve breast cancer screening. It is certainly worthy of the House to look into, if it could potentially save lives of 23,000 females who are, unfortunately, diagnosed with breast cancer every year.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, breast cancer is one of the most common illnesses among Canadian women. In 2011, an estimated 23,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and more than 5,000 women will die of it. On average, 64 Canadian women a day learn that they have breast cancer.

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A breast cancer diagnosis forever alters the lives of these women. First, there is the fear and anxiety that accompanies the tests, and then chemotherapy becomes a part of their everyday lives. They must miss work and find someone to help take care of their children. Sometimes, a diagnosis can mean surgery and the loss of a breast, along with all of the pain associated with that harsh reality. There is also the exorbitant cost of medications and the red tape of insurance companies. And then there are the women who have no insurance at all and must make sacrifices to get the essential medications they need to fight this illness.

Women need support for the duration of this process. I would like to acknowledge the initiative of the member for Barrie. It is remarkable that a man, who will probably never suffer from this disease, wants to get involved. However, this bill is incomplete. It is but a modest band-aid solution to a serious and complex disease. This bill would encourage the use of existing initiatives. In my opinion, we must do more. Although breast density may be a significant risk factor, it is nevertheless just one factor to be taken into consideration.

First, what is breast density? The member opposite explained it very well. Dense breasts have more connective tissue, glands and ducts. When a woman has a mammogram, the dense tissue appears white, the same colour as cancerous lumps, which can result in a false diagnosis. Other, more precise tests are then recommended. Better results are obtained for these women with magnetic resonance imaging, for example.

However, we must be cautious. Breast density only affects a small number of women. Focusing only on this aspect of the disease will not help improve cancer screening throughout Canada. This bill abandons all other women, the majority, who need better screening and health care measures. I would like to explain what would really make a difference in the fight against breast cancer.

First, the reality is that many women will not discover in time that they have breast cancer, simply because they do not have access to a family doctor, who is often the first contact in the health system. The family doctor knows the patient's history, weight and general health, and asks questions about the patient's lifestyle, nutrition, and so forth. The family doctor does the annual exam and may detect symptoms of the disease or an unusual lump in the breast. He or she may refer the patient to a specialist for tests and further investigation.

More than 5 million Canadians still do not have a family doctor. For years, the people of this country have been calling on governments to address the shortage of doctors. What is the federal government doing? Nothing. My colleagues and I have proposed numerous measures to fix this important issue. One significant way to help would be to work with the provinces to increase the number of spaces in universities in order to train an additional 1,200 doctors. Multidisciplinary teams should also be established to improve screening and patient care.

For example, at the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal, general practitioners, oncologists, nurses and radiologists work together to treat patients. Early detection has increased because there is constant communication between the various health professionals. In addition, treatment includes psychological services as well as support for relatives.

Second, breast cancer screening is not routine in Canada. Programs are sometimes inadequate or completely non-existent, as is sadly the case in Nunavut. However, specialists are telling us that the earlier the diagnosis, the higher the woman's chances of survival. Studies have shown that women are at a higher risk of developing the disease after the age of 40. The Province of Quebec implemented a routine screening program a few years ago. The program targets women between the ages of 50 and 69, and involves getting a mammogram. Every two years, women are contacted by the department and are encouraged to get tested. The program is fully covered by the Régie de l'assurance-maladie du Québec. According to statistics from Quebec's Department of Health and Social Services, breast cancer mortality rates in participating women dropped by at least 25% between 1996 and 2006.

The federal government should take the lead on this and work with the provinces and territories to ensure stable funding for routine screening programs for women 40 and over. In doing so, lives would be saved.

● (1125)

Thirdly, another major problem is access to diagnostic tests within a reasonable timeframe. New investments in imaging equipment have increased the number of scanners available, but have not necessarily led to shorter wait times, or so says the Health Council of Canada in its May 2011 report. Between 2008 and 2010, wait times for these scans decreased in Alberta and Prince Edward Island and increased in Ontario. Governments continue to face challenges in collecting data on wait times for diagnostic imaging, in part because many scans are done outside hospitals in free-standing clinics.

There is also the question of public coverage for diagnostic testing. Some provinces cover diagnostic tests and others do not. Some provinces provide coverage at hospitals only. In Quebec, for example, tests are covered only if they are done in a hospital. Nonetheless, patients can pay out of pocket to get tested at free-standing clinics. These private-sector tests are done by radiologists who also work in public-sector hospitals, which increases the wait times and creates two classes of people: those who have the means to pay for diagnostic tests and those who do not, the less fortunate. A number of doctors in Quebec, including the MQRP—also known as Canadian Doctors for Medicare—condemn this double standard.

A federal fund for improving public coverage of diagnostic tests, included in the next health report, is certainly one solution to consider. Establishing Canada-wide standards to improve breast cancer screening for certain women, namely women with dense breast tissue, is a concrete measure that would truly help these women. Is the government prepared to commit to such solutions? I hope so.

This government has been very lax when it comes to protecting and funding the public system. Under the pretext that health falls under provincial jurisdiction, the Conservatives clearly seem to think that the best thing to do is nothing at all. However, the federal government is responsible for working with the provinces to improve the health of all Canadians. Do the members opposite need to be reminded that one of the principles of the Canada Health Act is universality. People consider equal access to health care to be a right of citizenship, not a privilege for only the most fortunate.

Fourth, the cost of medication is a serious obstacle to cancer treatment. What is the point of improving breast cancer information and screening if women cannot afford to buy the medication they need to be cured? While the health care system provides cancer-treating drugs in hospitals, half the new treatments are taken at home and patients are therefore responsible for paying for them. A lack of insurance means enormous costs for patients and their families given that the average cost of treatment for new cancer-fighting drugs is exorbitant at \$65,000. Some people do not have insurance since they do not have the money to pay for a private policy.

Under the current health accord, which was signed in 2004, the federal and provincial governments agreed to create options for catastrophic pharmaceutical coverage. Since then, nothing has been done. What is the federal government waiting for to resolve this issue? Does the government have no idea how to reduce the cost of medication?

I have a few ideas. First, make better use our negotiating power when purchasing pharmaceuticals, specifically by joining with all the provinces and territories to buy in bulk. After all, there is strength in numbers. Second, reduce the administrative costs by making use of the public system. A Canada-wide catastrophic drug program would be less costly to administer than several small programs in the private sector. Third, eliminate rebates for pharmaceutical companies and pharmacists and provide funding for research based on the actual needs of the public rather than on profits for pharmaceutical companies.

Finally, breast cancer prevention could be greatly improved. This disease has many risk factors: personal and family history, obesity, and the use of alcohol and tobacco can increase the risk of breast cancer.

I hope that all these good ideas will help the members of the House to understand what a terrible illness breast cancer is. Although this bill has good intentions, it does not do enough. Nevertheless, we hope that the members opposite will propose a better and stronger Canada-wide strategy that will help all women suffering from breast cancer rather than just a few of them.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favour of this particular piece of legislation, but I would also like to make some further comments with regard to it.

The Liberal Party supports any efforts to increase awareness with regard to illness and research, to provide more information to Canadians, and to deal with screening issues. That is a given. We all agree with that and believe we should be doing this in many other

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areas. There are a number of areas within health promotion and disease prevention wherein the federal government could take a lead as well as an active approach to ensure that 60% of preventable diseases are prevented. There are broader issues we should be looking at rather than this one particular issue, but it is a start.

The federal government has signed an agreement on a pan-Canadian approach to breast cancer. If the legislation says that the federal government has a leadership role to play with regard to an issue like breast cancer, then it must also look at a pan-Canadian approach to many other things.

My colleague who spoke last talked about a pharmaceutical strategy. The 2004 health accord said that we need a pharmaceutical strategy because many Canadians do not have access to lifesaving drugs and drugs required to treat chronic disease. Drugs cost a lot of money and many people cannot afford them.

We must discuss how to implement some of the really important issues in the health accord that require federal leadership. The federal government cannot say that on the one hand it wants to lead pan-Canadian approaches regarding one issue, but on the other hand it does not want to do it regarding another issue. That would not be a reasonable or logical response to anything.

There is a huge role for the federal government to play in ensuring that no matter where Canadians live in this country they have access to the health care services they require when they need them and that in many instances they have access to integrated services that would prevent them from getting diseases. That would provide huge savings to the health care system. It would also help deal with disease chronicity which would help keep people out of hospitals and increase savings and cost-effectiveness in the system.

There are many things we must talk about if we want to open the door to a pan-Canadian approach. I am glad to see that the member has brought this forward. I hope his party will listen to him. I also hope that the government will take a pan-Canadian approach toward many necessary issues.

The bill calls for the federal government to work with the provinces and territories to increase awareness among women with regard to dense breast tissue. The issue I want to flag here is that while we want to increase awareness, which is a very positive step, we also want to be careful that we do not create anxiety among women who have dense breast tissue because there is not much evidence to show that the screening detection methods such as MRIs, et cetera, will give the wanted outcome and save lives.

There is one important thing to remember in terms of breast awareness and in terms of preventing breast cancer. It is not the yearly doctor visit for a breast examination that is so important, nor is having an MRI. What is important is that a woman examine her breasts every month at the appropriate time.

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Many people would ask how that monthly self-examination would help. If a woman examined her breasts monthly she would know what they normally felt like or how they felt the last time she had tests done and she was told her breasts were fine. I am not only talking about breasts. When a woman screens herself on a monthly basis she knows what is normal for her body. Therefore, any change she discovers will be a flag that something new has occurred. It may not be anything she needs to worry about but it will at least cause her to initiate a visit to her physician for investigation.

It is important for women, especially those who have dense breast tissue, to understand that self-examination is one of the most important things they can do for themselves. We can say the same thing with regard to men and testicular cancer, et cetera. Awareness is important.

I would like to see the federal government's role expanded in the bill to suggest that it could and should be a clearing house for best practices.

• (1135)

For instance, British Columbia has a solid record in this country for having the highest survivor rates and lowest death rates with regard to breast cancer. That is not only because of early screening but also because of an integrated approach wherein researchers and individuals dealing with genomics as well as individuals from the cancer society and the cancer agencies work together as an integrated team. It is important to emulate those best practices which give us best results. Therefore, another role for the federal government would be to take on a pan-Canadian approach by looking at some sort of clearinghouse on many issues.

Unlike the California bill, the bill does not create panic. It does not recommend that women should run out and demand MRIs or further screening. That is good because I would stress there is no evidence that this would help. However, what this bill is suggesting is important and necessary is increased awareness and discussion to help women understand what it is they need to do. Identifying gaps in information and improving information for women is and always will be a good thing.

This year 234,000 women in Canada will be diagnosed with breast cancer of which 5,100 will not survive. Those are very staggering figures. Many of these women are at the peak of their lives and may have children. It is important that they be prompted to exercise methods of prevention wherever necessary.

With regard to not causing panic, we must ensure women are aware that having access to an MRI is not an internationally based clinical guideline and that it does not create a sense of entitlement among women who have dense breast tissue that they should automatically be sent for MRIs. If that is not clear in the bill, it could create panic among these women which in turn could cause an inappropriate drain on health care system resources.

However, the bill is a beginning. If the federal government is interested in pan-Canadian approaches, which is a good idea, it is important that more research be performed to provide better information to women who are at risk of breast cancer. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research is there to increase that research. We need to work with conditions more often to determine

what are best practices. It is important that the federal government accept this, follow through on it and use it as a template with regard to how it can deal with many more issues.

I go back to the 2004 accord. My colleague made the important point that parts of that accord have not received the federal leadership nor political will necessary to provide good outcomes in health care and an effective use of the system. We know the medicare system is sustainable but we must ensure there is a pan-Canadian integrated approach to provide transformative change within the system.

The bill is a start. It flags the fact the federal government cannot say that it is a provincial jurisdiction which will create a precedent for it to not only work with provincial governments but also take on political and leadership roles that will benefit all Canadians.

• (1140)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I thank my colleagues for their excellent debate on this issue this morning.

I rise today to address Bill C-314, an act respecting the awareness of screening among women with dense breast tissue. I thank my colleague, the member for Barrie, for bringing this important bill forward.

As October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, it is time to draw attention to breast cancer and to raise awareness of this important health issue affecting Canadians.

Statistics tell us that breast cancer is the most common form of cancer among Canadian women. One in nine women will be diagnosed with the disease.

Those statistics are more than just numbers. They represent women whose lives are affected by breast cancer. They are wives, mothers, daughters and friends. This year it is estimated that thousands of women across the country will be diagnosed with breast cancer and that approximately 5,000 women will die from the disease.

Thankfully research is providing answers to many questions regarding breast cancer. We are learning more about prevention, risk factors and treatments. Our government's investments into health research through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research support scientific discoveries regarding all types of cancers including breast cancer. We are learning more about the early detection of breast cancer.

The bill focuses on raising awareness regarding breast density and its effects on breast cancer screening. It emphasizes the importance of this issue in an effort to help women and their doctors make well-informed decisions with regard to breast cancer screening.

Why is that important? More than ever before Canadians are taking an active role in their health and require good information to support that role. Canadians need information on what has been proven as well as what is not yet well understood. Only then can they weigh the risks and benefits of the different courses of action.

As well, the Internet revolution allows Canadians to find a great deal of information on health topics. It also means Canadians are faced with the difficulty of deciding what is accurate, inaccurate, important or misleading.

Therefore, providing accurate information to Canadians will increase their awareness and help them make well-informed decisions.

There is a great deal of information available on breast cancer and breast cancer screening which addresses the particular issue of breast density and its implications on breast cancer screening.

A mammogram is an X-ray taken of the breast and is used as a screening method for breast cancer. However, for women with dense breast tissue it can be more difficult for this method to detect small changes that could denote cancer.

Canada's breast cancer screening programs are delivered by the provincial and territorial governments under their jurisdiction for health care delivery. These excellent programs operate according to the highest standards. The federal government is helping breast cancer screening programs through investments made in the Canadian breast cancer screening initiative. This initiative measures the performance of breast cancer screening programs across the country. The information is used by those programs to improve the services they provide to Canadian women.

We are also assisting breast cancer screening programs in sharing their best practices. A key feature of these programs is the important information they provide to women on all aspects of breast cancer screening including breast density. That way we can build on the good work that is already under way.

National non-governmental organizations and their volunteers also play integral roles in raising awareness. The bill recognizes the important role of organizations, such as the Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, as well as numerous other women's health organizations. All of these organizations work to promote cancer prevention, early detection, effective treatments and research. They also provide education and awareness programs and work to improve the quality of life for those living with breast cancer.

The fact that so many Canadian organizations and programs already provide high quality information to women on breast cancer reflects upon the dedication that exists with regard to this enormous health challenge. Researchers, doctors, nurses and provincial and territorial cancer agencies are committed to reducing the rates of breast cancer.

Our government's investment in the Canadian strategy for cancer control and its implementation by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer is part of this national commitment. As its name implies, the partnership is working across the country to speed up the use of effective approaches to cancer prevention and control so that all Canadians will benefit. It is helping to fill gaps, build new models and expand existing programs where needed. Cancer screening is one of the partnership's priorities and its work to provide information to Canadians is consistent with the intent of the bill. The renewed investment in the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer announced

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by our Prime Minister in March will help that excellent work that is under way continue.

• (1145)

We have much to build on and many best practices to apply as we continue to support Canadian women in accessing the information they need to make decisions on their health. Of course, our efforts are in line with the role of the federal government in supporting health research and identifying best practices in creating partnerships and of promoting the health of Canadians.

In closing, Bill C-314 encourages the Government of Canada to use existing initiatives to raise awareness of breast density in the context of breast cancer screening. This is important for Canadian women.

I sincerely hope we have the support of all members in this House for this important bill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the member for Barrie on his bill. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and his bill's noble objectives are most appropriate.

On this side of the House, and I am sure on the other side as well, we recognize the impact that breast cancer has on the people of Quebec and Canada. This disease is unfortunately all too common. The statistics do not lie: one out of every nine women will suffer from breast cancer in her lifetime. What is even more tragic is that one out of every twenty-nine women will die from breast cancer. The considerable progress that has been made in recent years in research, treatment and screening has significantly lowered the breast cancer mortality rate.

Breast cancer is still too common among Canadian women. I should also point out to the House that, although it is less common, breast cancer can also affect men. An estimated 23,000 women will be affected by this type of cancer, not to mention the thousands of loved ones and caregivers who are also affected. The disease also has high social and economic costs. There are other human costs associated with this terrible disease: the loss of income can be devastating. Many couples do not survive these challenges, and loved ones become caregivers but receive little support from this government.

The bill introduced by my colleague opposite addresses a very particular issue: cancer in women with dense breast tissue. This is a real problem. Recent research has shown that dense breast tissue is a factor as important as age in the risk of breast cancer. Higher tissue density also makes breast cancer screening more difficult. During a mammogram, tumours and high-density masses in the breast both show up as white spots. It is much more difficult for women with dense breast tissue to get quick diagnoses with traditional equipment.

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It is also important to bear in mind that problems linked to dense breast tissue are not likely to diminish; quite the opposite. Studies have shown a link between being overweight or obese and denser breast tissue. I do not need to remind this House that the issue of excess weight has reached epidemic proportions in Canada. We can only assume that an increasing number of women will have dense breast tissue in the near future and that this trend is on the rise.

Once again, I would like to say how much I appreciate that the member for Barrie has brought this issue forward so that we can discuss it today. Awareness is always a positive initiative. It makes women more vigilant and ensures that health care professionals are better informed. Everyone supports awareness—it is a noble objective and a just cause, but it is merely one element of treatment. In my mind, this bill is pointless. It does nothing concrete for women who have or will have breast cancer. It does not ensure better access to a health care system that is so desperately lacking in its current state.

I am a doctor myself. I decided to go into politics to make a difference. Many causes are important to me, such as the recognition of foreign credentials—which affects me personally—the status of women and immigration. But health is at the top of that list. I know that the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert elected me because they believed in the NDP message that we will work for them. I am worried that this bill, while noble and having created the opportunity for debate, will not make a real difference in the lives of the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Quebec and Canada.

● (1150)

One of the issues my constituents talk to me about is access to a family doctor. This bill has nothing to offer people who do not have a family doctor. This bill will not improve access to our health care system. We know that a timely diagnosis helps significantly increase the chances of survival. Without access to a doctor, many Canadians will not have access to this timely diagnosis. Wait times for mammograms are also far too long in many places in Quebec and Canada. Those are two significant factors that are not addressed in this bill that would help improve treatment, survival rates and quality of life for breast cancer survivors.

That is why the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert voted for me. They want their daily lives to be better. They are demanding better access to health care, and rightfully so. Despite the good intentions of the hon. member for Barrie, this bill does nothing for the Canadian general public.

The hon. member for Barrie was right when he said in the preamble of his bill that the provinces are responsible for the delivery of health care. I agree with him, but I would like to remind him that he is wrong to think that his government has no responsibility in this. The federal government currently has a funding agreement with the provincial and territorial governments. Under that agreement, the different governments agreed to certain specific objectives.

This tool could be used to achieve the objectives of developing better breast cancer diagnostics and treatment for women with dense breast tissue. This is an agreement the provincial and territorial governments, including that of Quebec, signed on to. Why does the

member opposite not encourage his government to get on board? We could achieve better concrete results that way.

Perhaps the member for Barrie does not believe that the 2004 health accord is the right tool to allow us to meet these objectives. If that is the case, the 2004 health accord gives his government certain tools to determine whether the accord's objectives have been met, whether the funds transferred are being used in the manner agreed upon by the federal, provincial and territorial governments, and whether the funding is achieving the expected results. It is important for his government to be able to tell Quebeckers and Canadians whether the health accord, which will expire in 2014, is delivering the promised results. Such an accountability exercise, one to which Canadians are entitled, would be the first step in determining needs and the model that will be negotiated in good faith and in partnership with the provincial and territorial governments, including the Government of Quebec, of course. I therefore invite the hon. member to exert pressure on his government to report back to Canadians on the results of this accord and to begin discussions in order to ensure funding for our health care system and for the objectives negotiated for the well-being of all Canadians.

I would also call on the members opposite to address the underlying causes of the problem. I mentioned earlier that women who are overweight or obese are more likely to have dense breast tissue. Women who smoke and who have low levels of physical activity are also at higher risk of developing breast cancer. The Canadian Institute for Health Information indicated in a report that socio-economic status and poverty are significant social determinants of obesity. The Canadian Council on Learning has confirmed that smoking and low levels of physical activity are related to poverty and a lower socio-economic status.

I therefore invite the hon. member for Barrie and this government to address the employment problems facing Canadians, to implement measures that will help the people of Canada to live in dignity, and to find ways to help families in our ridings so that they do not have to live paycheque to paycheque in order to be able to buy groceries.

● (1155)

Quebeckers and Canadians do not have better jobs than they did two years ago. In addition, young people are once again more affected by unemployment than the Canadian average. Furthermore, the number of children living in poverty is not decreasing, far from it. This government's lack of action in this regard is negatively affecting the health of young people. Action must be taken immediately.

I would like to close by saying that I support the principles of this bill. In order to help all Quebeckers and Canadians, we must find a way to improve access to doctors and reduce wait times for the diagnosis and treatment of various illnesses.

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that I fully support a plan for breast cancer screening. I salute the member opposite for his initiative.

We all know that this disease claims the lives of far too many people and that many deaths could be avoided with early detection. We also know that women with dense breast tissue are four to six times more likely to develop cancer, which requires timely screening. Although we approve a complete breast cancer screening program for women with dense breast tissue, this bill is vague and clearly lacks substance. In addition, it will not have any tangible effects. Health care workers and women concerned need more than just encouragement to raise awareness and promote best practices. Once again, the government is failing to provide leadership. When will there be a funding and implementation plan for a real national strategy to improve breast cancer screening?

It is also important that we not neglect other forms of cancer and diseases that could be prevented with screening that is quick, accurate and, above all, accessible to everyone. Under the 2003 and 2004 health accords, the government made the following commitments: reduce wait times and increase the number of doctors, nurses and health professionals.

With this bill, the government is attempting use a band-aid solution to hide the commitments it did not fulfill. Seriously, are we really going to prevent breast cancer by encouraging women to be tested? What about women who do not have access to a family doctor and those who must wait six months for a second test? Everyone realizes that cancer can grow a lot in six months, and I know what I am talking about.

This bill should include the following measures, otherwise it does not serve any purpose, other than being a waste of paper. There must be adequate funding to create systematic breast cancer screening programs. These programs should be free for all women and men, since men can also get breast cancer. Particular attention should be paid to women aged 40 and up. There must also be standards for existing programs to help the provinces that already have a plan. There must be a plan for the particular issue related to screening for women with dense breast tissue. We must also work with Nunavut to help the territory implement its first screening plan. We absolutely must ensure that the entire Canadian population has access to a family doctor and to specialists within a reasonable period of time. We must also give general practitioners, gynecologists and oncologists the tools they need and the necessary equipment to conduct tests within a reasonable period of time.

I remind members that more than 5 million Canadians do not have access to a family doctor. That is what we should be addressing. We know that the earlier a cancer is detected, the more effective treatment will be. This applies to all forms of cancer. This government often neglects research, development and innovation. A lot of studies are currently underway but are underfunded. I do not think it is hard to understand: if we invest strategically in research, we can solve a number of problems at every level.

We must also make considerable investments in psychological care for people who are diagnosed with cancer and their families. Cancer affects most families in Canada, directly or indirectly. Even if we implement prevention programs, we also need assistance programs for people who are living with cancer.

Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in Canada. It is crucial that patients and their families receive support as they fight

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this terrible disease. We need to do more than simply create awareness and encourage screening. Organizations that fight against breast cancer agree that this bill does not bring significant improvements to screening measures for the women who are most at risk of developing breast cancer. They know what they are talking about. The Conservatives seem to think that this is another area of health care where the federal government has no role to play.

● (1200)

I will say it again—the government needs to take a lead role in health care issues and it needs to work with the provinces. In fact, what we need are large-scale improvements in existing screening programs. Of course, that includes better funding, as I have said before, along with clear standards and the establishment of screening programs in all regions of the country.

The NDP has long been calling on the government to play a fuller role in primary health care and preventive care. Obviously, breast cancer screening measures should be part of that.

A number of groups share our opinion. And I think that the government should listen to them from way up there in its ivory tower because they are the ones on the ground who know the issue.

Quebec's association of hematologists and oncologists says that while it is important to increase breast cancer screening, we cannot forget about other kinds of tumours. Improvements need to be made in the prevention of and screening for all cancers. We must not concentrate all our efforts on one group of women or one type of cancer.

The MQRP and Canadian Doctors for Medicare are saying that we have to ensure that patients have timely access to general practitioners and specialists in order to undergo the necessary tests to get a timely diagnosis. As I was saying earlier, cancer spreads quickly. Access to the health care system, according to the MQRP, to me and to the NDP, is the key solution in battling breast cancer and significantly increases patients' chances of survival.

Dr. Maté Poljicak, a surgical oncologist and director of an interdisciplinary team of breast cancer specialists at the Centre hospitalier universitaire at the Université de Montréal, says that in some cases, such as those for women with dense breast tissue, mammography is not an effective breast cancer screening method. MRIs and much more advanced imaging screens are needed in those cases.

The Canadian Breast Cancer Network, which is run by cancer survivors, does not believe this bill could improve screening procedures for women at greater risk of developing breast cancer.

This network is calling for—

● (1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I am sorry to interrupt, but the time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

Government Orders

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot has three minutes left for the next time.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

MARKETING FREEDOM FOR GRAIN FARMERS ACT

The House resumed from October 20 consideration of the motion that Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian farmers feed the world and they deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions, whether it is to market individually or through a voluntary pooling entity. We believe that all Canadian farmers should be able to position their businesses to capture the marketing opportunities that are open to them.

This bill aims to give western Canadian farmers the right to choose how to market their wheat, durum and barley independently or through a voluntary pool. The marketing freedom for grain farmers act proposes to end the Canadian Wheat Board's six-decade-old monopoly over sales of wheat, durum and barley in western Canada. It will give wheat and barley growers across western Canada the same rights that canola and pulse growers enjoy along with farmers in other parts of Canada, namely, the right to do what they want with the crop they paid to plant, grow and harvest. By allowing market freedom, grain growers will be able to market based on what is best for their needs and businesses.

I want to talk a bit about what the opportunity means for Manitobans, where wheat and barley are major drivers of the provincial economy, generating almost \$800 million in farm cash receipts and over \$900 million in exports just last year. Monopoly is a model no longer appropriate in a modern growth-oriented commodity sector in Canada. Milton Boyd, a professor and economist at the University of Manitoba, agrees. He has stated:

—all of the major grain marketing boards around the world have already disappeared (or have been privatized) over the last 20 years...mainly because farmers and consumers worldwide have wanted economic reforms, competition, and freedom to choose.

Under marketing freedom, we can look forward to increased innovation and new value-added industries. The removal of the monopoly would allow Manitoba farmers to sell their grains directly to a processor, whether it be a pasta manufacturer, a flour mill or any other of their choosing. Farmer entrepreneurs would have the option of starting up their own small specialty flour mills and pasta plants, without the red tape it currently involves.

There has been tremendous growth in value-added opportunities for oats, pulses and canola across the Prairies over the past 20 years. There is no reason not to expect more opportunities for wheat, durum and barley.

In Manitoba alone the acreage of oats has increased by over 250,000 acres since it was removed from Wheat Board control. This has allowed for the opening and expansion, as an example, of Can-

Oat Milling, a processing mill in Portage la Prairie. Just over the border in North Dakota from where I live, many new pasta plants have sprung up and created jobs that very well could have been created in Manitoba.

Recently we heard great news coming out of we Regina that a pasta plant was turning the sod to take Canadian durum next year. That is how quick it can happen. These are the types of value-added industries and jobs that exist when farmers have the option to market their products as they choose. This, along with increased trade, could create many new jobs and opportunities. We know this is a significant change involving a very complex set of issues.

The bill proposes to give farmers and the industry a transition period of up to five years to allow time to adjust to the significant and positive change to their businesses and business models. To avoid market disruption, the goal is for farmers and grain marketers to start forward contracting for the 2012-13 crop year as soon as it is possible. During the transition period, the interim Canadian Wheat Board will continue to offer farmers the option of pooling their crops with initial prices guaranteed by the Government of Canada. During this time, the interim CWB will develop a business plan for full privatization.

Our government is ready to work with the Canadian Wheat Board to chart the way forward because we believe that an open and competitive grain market can and should include a viable voluntary Canadian Wheat Board.

● (1210)

Because innovation is critical to the future of the Canadian grain industry, the proposed bill also provides for a voluntary funding mechanism to support research and market development. We fully recognize that there will be costs associated with this transition and the voluntary Canadian Wheat Board will be a smaller organization than the one existing today. Our government is prepared to assist with the extra ordinary costs associated with winding down this monopoly.

Farmers currently pay the daily costs of operating of the CWB with the overall costs guaranteed by our government. With this change, the government recognizes that farmers should not be left alone to deal with the costs of transition to a voluntary mandate and therefore our government is ready to assist, while making responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

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Another important facet of the bill deals with the Port of Churchill, which in the past has relied heavily on Canadian Wheat Board shipments. Our government recognizes, and has demonstrated, our support and commitment to the north. We understand the importance of the Port of Churchill as a valuable asset and we are working with stakeholders across the agricultural industry, as well as other industries, to explore development opportunities for the port and we are looking at a number of initiatives to continue to diversify the economy of Churchill.

Jim Carr, the president and CEO of the Business Council of Manitoba said, “We see Churchill as more than a port that takes Wheat Board grain. We see Churchill as the Arctic Gateway”. The managing director of OmniTRAX, Mike Ogborn, said that his organization “sees a strong future for the port and the railway”. Our government agrees with these comments. The Port of Churchill will remain the Prairies' Arctic gateway to the world.

With regard to the concerns around short lines, which have been raised by many members of the opposition, the Government of Canada, not the CWB, protects the right of producers to use short line railways and inland terminals and we will continue to ensure these producers have that access.

Grain growers in Manitoba are like any other business people. They want to make the right decisions at the right time for their farms and their families. They already decide what to plant and when to harvest. They make marketing decisions on their canola and pulse crops, their peas, lentils, beans, oats and many other crops. They just want the same marketing freedom for their wheat, durum and barley.

Spencer Fernando of *The Manitoban* said:

The end of the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly restores the rights of western farmers, and shows we respect the freedom of individuals to control their own labour and the products of that labour. It is the right thing to do, not just economically, but also because it lives up to the principles upon which Canada is based.

My government trusts farmers to make their marketing choices, based on what is best for their businesses, families and communities. We want to put farmers back in the driver's seat so they can continue to drive this economy. We believe that an open and competitive grain market can include a viable voluntary pooling entity and we are ready to work with the Canadian Wheat Board to chart that future.

We owe it to farmers, customers and shippers to provide market certainty so they can plan their businesses for the following year. With this change, our entrepreneurial farmers can expand markets, increase their incomes and attract greater investment now. So why make them wait? Marketing freedom has been a cornerstone of our platform since day one and it was part of our throne speech last spring. I am proud that we are delivering on our long-standing promise to the western grain farmers. As the Prime Minister has said, what we are seeing here is a new horizon, a new field of opportunity, not just for western grain farmers but for workers and businesses in western Canada generally.

An open grain market will attract new investment, encourage innovation and create new jobs for Canadians. I support that.

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to what degree does the member believe that the grain farmers in the Prairies should be able to influence the decision of the government

about the Wheat Board? I ask the member to reflect on the plebiscite that was conducted, in which 62% of the prairie wheat farmers suggested we needed to retain the Canadian Wheat Board. To what degree does he feel the government is obligated to listen to those farmers?

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, I respect the hon. member for his comments and concerns, but in my mind this is purely about farmers' right to grow and market their own product. I have lived in an agricultural community my entire life and I have seen producers spend hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars to prepare the soil, to plant the seed, to fertilize it, to treat it, to care for it, to swath it and then to harvest it, only at the end of the day to be told that they cannot market that product themselves. As rights across all of Canada, it is a right of farmers to sell what they produce.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know a number of farmers visited the member for Brandon—Souris at his riding on Friday and protested the fact that they were being denied their right to vote on this issue. My question is more along the lines of the code of conduct and the conflict of interest code by which all MPs are duty bound.

What is his view of MPs who make their living as prairie grain producers voting on a bill that their own party says will provide more money for those farmers? In that context I would remind him that when we voted on the bailout for the auto industry, some Tory MPs who were car dealers recused themselves from the vote because it would have a direct impact on the industry through which they make their living.

Does he believe those Tory MPs who are grain farmers subject to the monopoly desk of the Canadian Wheat Board should recuse themselves from the vote tonight and all subsequent votes on bill C-18?

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, if I have listened to my hon. friend correctly over the last several days, the suggestion from the opposition is that with the loss of the Wheat Board, all Canadian farmers' revenues will go down, so in reality, members on this side who are active in the agricultural industry would be voting for less income for themselves.

We are sent here to understand the issues. We know that western Canadian voters have supported our government's position on this issue since 2004. The fact that we made a commitment to the voters and are following through on that commitment earns us a great deal of respect in the community in the sense that we are actually doing what we said we would do.

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Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am following this debate closely. I represent a riding in Ontario, so it is not directly affected.

I appreciate the views and speeches by members of Parliament who represent western farmers. I think there is some confusion. The opposition parties are saying that the bill kills the Canadian Wheat Board. I thought the bill was about providing choice and options as to whether or not farmers would like to continue to participate in a wheat board or whether they would like to market their grain on their own.

Could the member explain whether or not the bill actually kills the Wheat Board, or whether it simply provides choice for farmers?

• (1220)

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, that is the crux of the whole bill: to give marketing opportunity and freedom to people who have not been able to choose for several years. I will use the opposition's concerns. Who would not want to become the CEO of a company that has 62% of the market share the day they open the door? Who would not want to have access to all the marketing people that it deals with around the world? Who would not want all that information?

I fear that the opposition, by scaring people into making decisions, is going the wrong way. It is about freedom. It is about freedom to do as farmers please with the fruits of their labour and energy. I do not see how that freedom could be debated by anyone.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for over 60 years the Canadian Wheat Board has provided an essential service to farmers throughout the Prairies. Today is indeed a sad day, as we see the government has made the decision to limit debate in an attempt to force the bill to the next level. We need to be very clear in terms of just how beneficial the Canadian Wheat Board has been to the prairie farmer over those years.

It is in essence farmers working with farmers in order to maximize a reasonable return so that they can earn a respectable living on prairie farms. Over the years the Canadian Wheat Board has established itself at the top in the whole area of branding, particularly in wheat, and I will focus strictly on wheat for now.

Throughout the world we are recognized as the best producers of wheat. In good part it is because of the prairie farmer and because of the fine work that the Wheat Board has done over the years. It is because of that history and that branding that we are able to get the maximum return for our farmers. Farmers are able to derive many benefits through the Canadian Wheat Board.

I would suggest that the action we are taking today is to the detriment of the Canadian prairie farmer. I appeal to government members to give a second thought and heed the advice in what people are saying, not only inside this chamber but as prairie farmers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

I will quote *The Economist*, which is a world-renowned news organization. It states:

Smaller producers, faced with mounting marketing costs, will inevitably have to sell their farms to bigger rivals or agribusiness companies. Eventually, this should lead to consolidation and fewer, bigger farms—making Canada a more competitive

wheat producer, but devastating small prairie towns, whose economies depend on individual farmers with disposable income.

Let there be no doubt that this bill is going to destroy Canadian wheat farmers. There are a number of wheat farmers who will be destroyed by the passage of the bill. Let there be no doubt that the bill would be to the detriment of many rural prairie communities. We need to realize that.

Farmers have spoken on the issue. Even though there was a legal obligation on the government, through the Canadian Wheat Board, to have a plebiscite in accordance with section 47.1, the government failed to meet that obligation. However, the Wheat Board went ahead and had an independent plebiscite on the issue. In the plebiscite 62% of our wheat producers clearly indicated that they wanted to retain the Wheat Board.

We know why the prairie farmers wanted to retain the Wheat Board. It is something they are far more familiar with than 90% of the members inside this chamber. They saw the value of the Canadian Wheat Board and they believe it is extremely important to the long-term survival of prairie farmers and their local rural communities. They saw the value in terms of producing that quality wheat and in having the brand of the Canadian Wheat Board. They understand the issue. They do not need to be lectured by the Prime Minister as to why it has to go.

I posed the question to the Prime Minister: why does he have a personal hatred towards the Canadian Wheat Board?

That is what this is all about. It is because the current Prime Minister cannot stand the Wheat Board, and that is well documented. He is not listening to the facts. He is not looking for any sort of research or documentation that proves that the demise of the Wheat Board is good for the prairie provinces. He has not tabled anything to that effect. The Prime Minister is treating our prairie farmers like trash.

• (1225)

What does the Prime Minister say specifically? On October 7, 2011, *The Globe and Mail* stated:

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has a message for all the critics of his government's plan to end the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board: Get over it.

"It's time for the wheat board and others who have been standing in the way to realize that this train is barreling down a prairie track," the Prime Minister said.

He continued:

"You're much better to get on it than to lie on the tracks because this is going ahead".

I have fairly thick skin and I can take the hurdles that have been tossed over from the other side, even if it is coming from the Prime Minister, but he needs to know full well that we are talking about tens of thousands of prairie grain farmers who disagree. These are the tens of thousands of prairie farmers he is telling to get on board or lie on the track.

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I have never seen such disrespect for westerners as I have seen from this particular Prime Minister. If he really wanted to listen to what people out west are saying, why does he not instruct our committee here in the House of Commons to go out west and listen first-hand to what the prairie farmers are saying, not the members of Parliament here in Ottawa? Let us take the debate to the Prairies.

The Premier of Manitoba has launched a lawsuit, I understand. There is phenomenal opposition to this legislation in the Prairies. Where is the intestinal fortitude? Where is a Prime Minister who wants to show leadership, take it to the Prairies and listen to what the farmers have to say?

Why not allow the Premier of Manitoba, the average farmer and others to go before the Manitoba legislature? I am sure we have some pretty good connections. We could arrange for committee rooms inside the Manitoba legislature to be made available for parliamentarians from Ottawa to listen to presentation after presentation of those individuals who want to send a message to the federal government. The recording, translation and all those facilities are in place there, and I can assure the Prime Minister that space would be made available in the Manitoba legislature. I am confident of that.

I would welcome the opportunity to open that committee by having the Premier of the Province of Manitoba indicate what he believes and why it is he believes the Canadian Wheat Board should remain.

I believe it is equally important that we hear from the prairie farmers, the individuals on whom this legislation would have such a profound impact. I would like to hear some of the rural municipalities come before a committee in the Manitoba legislature to provide their input.

What does the government have to lose if it is so convinced? The only argument the Conservatives put forth is freedom. They have no other argument. They argue that more flour mills will open up. They do not have any record or proof of that. They have no real tangible proof that will take place. In the last decade, how many pasta plants and flour mills did we see open in North Dakota, compared to the west? I suggest there have been more in the west.

I do not buy the argument of the Conservatives. I believe it is because the Prime Minister of Canada has a hatred for the Canadian Wheat Board. Now that he has his majority, he is prepared to do whatever it takes and even break laws that are currently in place. He is prepared to break laws to bring in this legislation. He will do whatever it takes.

I appeal to the Prime Minister to at least have the courage to bring it out and allow prairie farmers and others on the Prairies to contribute to this very critical debate on the future of the Prairies in Canada.

•(1230)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my friend across the aisle rail on and on and make many assumptive opinions, purely of his own, that have no basis in fact.

However, there are some real facts. I would like him to list all the ridings held by Liberal members west of the New Brunswick-Quebec border.

There may be some real truth to that message. If he takes it to heart, he will understand which party represents most of Canada, and certainly the west.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to respond to that question.

I would ask the member to look back to the late 1980s, to the F-18 crisis. There was an arrogant government, known as the Mulroney government, that made the decision to hurt the province of Manitoba in a very political way. Canadians in Manitoba recall that, and that is one of the reasons why, in 1993, Liberals won 12 of the 14 seats. Seats should never be taken for granted.

I would suggest that doing this to farmers, even though farmers do not support it, will have a residual effect. It is going to stick around. Farmers will not forget.

The Liberals might only have two seats in the Prairies and the NDP may only have three seats in the Prairies, but it just means that we have great potential for growth. That member is feeding that growth.

Personally, I would just as soon say to keep the Wheat Board and go from there.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to get up and ask my colleague from Winnipeg North a question.

First, I would like to make a very short statement. On the weekend I was in a riding in the heartland of rural Canada, in a place called Burdett. There was a fundraiser there.

I talked to numerous farmers, and every one of them said, "Tell me, when are we going to make the change to the Wheat Board, so that we can sell our own grains, our own wheat, and our own barley?" That is not my question.

My question for the member for Winnipeg North is, would the member agree that farmers who seed the grain, harvest the grain, own the grain and sell the grain on the open market should be sent to jail, like one farmer in my riding who sold his own grain?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I was in the heart of Canada, in the beautiful city of Winnipeg. We are all very familiar with Winnipeg.

Over the weekend, I, too, met with some farmers.

Some hon. member: Name them.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Keith Ryan is one. I met with Keith on Saturday, and I believe he might even be one of the individuals who is looking at some sort of a lawsuit in trying to deal with the Wheat Board.

The reality is that when I was meeting with farmers in Winnipeg, they made it very clear to me that I had to come back here and fight to save the Wheat Board, because it is the farmers who want the Wheat Board.

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To the member who just stood up and asked the question, I would suggest he come out to the prairie provinces. Winnipeg is a good place. I will be more than happy to arrange a meeting. That is the reason we need to have the agriculture committee come out west. There are some great people in western Canada. Let us hear what the west has to say about the government's agenda for the Wheat Board.

• (1235)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with almost half of the arable land in Canada, an estimated 44,329 farms, agriculture is an essential industry and economic driver in my province. With 14 ridings, all representing a significant rural component, 13 out of 14 re-elected members are on this side of the House. The farmers in my province have spoken.

As a member of Parliament from Saskatchewan, I am honoured to represent western farmers and very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the subject of ending the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly and giving prairie wheat and barley growers the freedom to choose how they market their product.

The naysayers and doom and gloomers tell us that change is bad, that our western Canadian farmers are not capable of marketing their own grain. Are they somehow different from the farmers in other parts of Canada who apparently know how to market their own product, including wheat and barley? Farmers take all the risks: what to plant, when to harvest, and how and when to market what they produce. That is, unless they grow barley or wheat in western Canada.

It seems to me that change has been a constant over the years and industries have grown and prospered as a result. Let us look at how change has already transformed the Canadian Wheat Board over its 76-year history.

The CWB was established in 1935 as a voluntary marketing agency for prairie wheat. That was the original vision. In 1943 sales of wheat through the board became compulsory. Six years later, the Canadian Wheat Board powers were extended to include prairie oats and barley. Therefore, from 1949 to 1974, 25 years, the board was the single desk for western oats, barley and wheat, whether for human consumption or animal feed. The changes up to that point resulted in a single desk monopoly.

Then change moved things in a new direction. With changes to the feed grain policy in 1974 and again in 1976, exclusive marketing rights over prairie grain fed to animals in Canada were removed from the board. Did the animal feed producers fall apart and stumble into bankruptcy? They did not. In fact, the use of cereal grains for livestock has grown significantly since then.

Flash forward to 1989 when oats were removed from board jurisdiction. Did oat producers flounder? Absolutely not. Two new plants were announced within weeks of the decision and a thriving oats processing sector has since developed in western Canada. Farmers quickly adapted to the changes and the CWB was not missed.

Historically, what started out as a monopoly has been evolving over the last 35 years until what we are left with is a single desk for barley and wheat for export and human consumption. What was

considered necessary during World War II is no longer what the savvy, smart farmers of the 21st century need.

Sylvain Charlebois, associate dean and professor of food distribution and policies at the University of Guelph, said:

At the end of the day, single-desk marketing should cease. Such a reform will make Canada more competitive, as the monopoly is a hindrance to our ability to compete globally.

Barley growers recognize that and so does the government.

The Canadian malting and brewing industry has lost confidence in the ability of the Canadian Wheat Board to reliably supply the malt and barley it needs to be competitive in international markets. Imagine what it is like to be locked into using one supplier and not have the confidence that the malt and barley will be there when the production line needs it.

It is time that western barley growers and wheat producers had some options. They take all the risks, they should be able to decide how and to whom to sell their grains. They know that commodity and food prices are rising to record levels, driven by growing demand for the high quality innovative food produced by Canadian farmers and food processors. This turnabout has boosted the bottom lines of our producers. Stronger farm incomes and higher prices are forecast well into the next decade.

• (1240)

The outlook for Canadian agriculture is bright and there is a newfound optimism in the farming industry in this country. According to a survey by Farm Credit Canada, three-quarters of farmers believe that their farm businesses will be better off in five years.

Knowing that farming has become increasingly modernized and competitive on the world stage, they are looking for new ways of doing business, new technologies and new marketing strategies. Succeeding in the 21st century involves looking at the Wheat Board through a different lens, a single desk is no longer needed.

The Minister of Agriculture asked department officials to meet with industry and stakeholders, including the Canadian Wheat Board, throughout the summer, in order to assist in developing a transitional plan for opening the market.

Our government has always said that it is open to seeing the continuation of the Canadian Wheat Board as a voluntary marketing option for producers. There will be producers who will continue to use the Canadian Wheat Board after the monopoly ends, and that is their choice. There will also be producers who prefer market freedom and they should have that choice.

Spencer Fernando of *The Manitoban* said:

Nobody is hurt by allowing farmers to freely market the products they worked to produce. Limiting the freedom of western farmers goes against one of the principles we believe in as Canadians.

Government Orders

Western Canadian wheat and barley farmers want the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other farmers in Canada and around the world. That is what our government has pledged to provide. That is what we promised when we were elected with a majority and it is what we stated in the recent throne speech. This promise will be kept.

This legislation, when passed, will give western Canadian wheat and barley farmers the freedom to position their businesses to capture the marketing opportunities that are open to them.

Change has always been a part of the Canadian Wheat Board's history and I expect it will continue to be.

Giving western Canadian farmers marketing freedom has been a long-standing promise of our government. Since I was first elected in 2008, I have been reminded of this promise over and over again. I am committed, along with our government, to work in the best interests of farmers and to give them the marketing freedom they deserve. By passing the bill, we will be keeping our promise.

I would like to thank the Minister of Agriculture and the parliamentary secretary for their dedication and hard work in bringing the bill forward and ensuring its swift passage. I encourage all opposition members to support the bill.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the government keeping its promise. It has made many promises. I recall that before the election the Conservatives promised that they would put this issue to farmers for a vote.

The Conservatives keep talking about the vast majority of Canadians having voted for them, but if I recall the number the Conservatives took office by was just 39%. That means that 61% of Canadians did not want the Conservatives in office but our system put them there.

Now the member is talking about the many promises that her government made. In order for the Conservatives to keep their promise the right thing to do would be to bring the issue to farmers and let them make the decision by voting on it instead of the Conservative Party shoving it down their throats.

Would it not be better to bring the issue to farmers and let them decide on their future? The Conservative Party made that promise before the election. The Conservatives said the issue would be brought to farmers and they would vote on it. The government should stick to what the majority of farmers decide.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, to be clear, 13 out of 14 re-elected members on this side of the House are from Saskatchewan. Of the 14 ridings, 13 are held by members on this side of the House. We represent farmers in Saskatchewan. Every riding has a rural component to it. We have listened to farmers. We promised that we would remove the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly and we are holding true to that promise.

• (1245)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member talk about western farmers wanting to make the changes. At the same time, we know that earlier this summer there was a survey. I do not know how valid the numbers are but they seem to be pretty solid. I think they were based

on a participation rate of about 56%. In the case of wheat, as I understand it, 62% of those who responded said that they would like to keep the single desk Canadian Wheat Board as is.

For those 62%, on the assumption that is correct, what would my colleague say to those 62%, assuming that they gave their heartfelt opinion about wanting to keep the single desk?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, no expensive survey can trump the individual right of farmers to market their own grain.

Our government has been very clear that the economy is our top priority. An open grain market would attract investment. It would encourage innovation and create value-added jobs, like the recently announced pasta plant in Saskatchewan. An open grain market would also build a strong economy for all Canadians.

Western Canadian wheat and barley producers deserve the same opportunities that farmers in the rest of Canada have access to. Our government is committed to giving them the opportunities that they want, that they have asked for and that they deserve.

I urge the member to support the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-18, on the Canadian Wheat Board. This bill proposes to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board and to eliminate the single desk marketing system for barley and wheat in Canada. The bill creates an interim board with voluntary pooling to be fully privatized or dissolved if it is not privatized within five years of the legislation coming into force. No elected directors may sit on the governing board of the interim board.

The government claims that this bill benefits farmers by giving them the market and giving them a choice, but they have no choice when it comes to dismantling the board. On September 12, a majority of farmers voted in favour of maintaining the Wheat Board. The government should drop Bill C-18. The single desk marketing system for wheat, durum and barley is an institution that has been very successful and is an essential component of the Prairie economy.

The bill is dangerous. It will ruin prairie farmers in these difficult economic times. Although the government's decision to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board has serious implications for farmers, it was made without any analysis of its repercussions and it goes against the wishes of farmers.

Taxpayers do not fund the What Board and the Conservatives do not have a mandate to go against the wishes of prairie farmers.

The Conservatives are acting in the interests of the big American grain companies by interfering in this matter, in order to lower prices and undermine market security for our own farmers.

Government Orders

Let us look at this from a different angle. The Conservatives say that they represent the majority in the West, on the Prairies. That is why they have made this decision. We must not forget that before the election—I would like to see the Conservatives rise and say this is not true—they promised that, if they were elected, there would be a vote on dismantling the Wheat Board. What has happened to that promise? Do they think that they do not have to keep that promise and not go back to face the farmers just because they were elected?

This is how I see things: there are some farmers who want to dismantle the board and who say they do not need it, and there are some farmers who want the board dismantled. However, taking a broader view, we can ask what the Canadian Wheat Board has done over the past 75 years. It has set prices and stabilized production. Looking at my region, we can compare farmers to our fishers.

● (1250)

[English]

I hope what happened to the fishermen on the east coast does not happen to the farmers in the west. Fishermen work hard to keep their boats. It costs a lot of money. They have to pay their fishermen and deckhands, but they have no control over prices. The market dictates the price.

As my colleague from Saint John knows, people who were fishing codfish were getting 50¢ a pound. Even last year, they were getting 50¢ a pound and people were paying \$4.50 a pound in the stores. As individuals, they have no control on the price. It will be big business that will run it.

I want to use the fishermen as an example for the people of the Prairies so the Conservatives do not fall asleep on this and shove it down their throats because they do not want have a vote. They do not want to give them the democracy that any group should have and be able to vote on it. Lobster fishermen were getting \$2 a pound for lobster. People go to restaurants and pay \$10.50 for the lobster on their plates. The fishermen are losing their shirts. They do not even have money to fix the engine on their boat when it breaks down.

What will happen to the farmers who are on their own and need to do the marketing themselves. They are lucky right now to have an organization to do it for them, to give it to them on a silver platter. If the government wants to do something for the farmers, it should do what is right. When it says that it received a big majority to make the decision, this is beautiful.

Only 39% of Conservatives got elected. That is not a big majority. However, when a survey was done, 62% of the farmers did not want it. It was 62% who wanted to keep the board and did not want the government to make the change. The government talks about being close to its people. If it is close to its people, why does it not keep its promise to the people? It had promised, just before the election, that there would be a vote on it. Why not allow the farmers to make that decision? What is wrong with that? What is the government afraid of? Why is it afraid of democracy if it believes in democracy? If it really believes in democracy, what is wrong with allowing all the farmers on the Prairies to vote on it and make a decision?

This has been working for the last 75 years.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Not now.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, some are not happy. Some think they will do better and some will do better, but, collectively, it is a big mistake for our country because we are bending on our knees to the Americans. That is what is happening. We are on our knees to the Americans because they want to get rid of it. How many times have the Americans asked us to get rid of the Wheat Board?

Mr. Pat Martin: Thirteen.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thirteen times. Does that make sense? For that reason alone, we should say that we want sovereignty in our country. The member for Winnipeg Centre just said that the Americans asked us 13 times to abandon the Wheat Board. Is that not reason enough for keeping it?

Why are the Conservatives worried about a vote. Are they worried about losing?

● (1255)

[Translation]

Are they afraid of losing the vote? All they have been doing since May is trying to destroy our Canadian institutions, whether it be the unions, the Canadian Wheat Board or others. They want to destroy our country. They are handing us over to the Americans—free—by adopting the American system. It is shameful to see how the Conservative government is acting. No democracy. No democracy! The Conservatives should be ashamed of themselves. If they are not ashamed and, above all, if they are not afraid, then they should hold a referendum. They should consult the farmers.

I spoke earlier about the lobster fishermen and groundfish fishermen who earn 50¢ a pound while others earn \$10 a pound. They will regret it when that happens. They will have destroyed a system that worked. Collectively, people in western Canada have been successful. The Conservatives are saying that they could have done better. Perhaps there are some who might have, but others would lose their businesses. Rather than having a board that sets prices for them, individual producers will have to set their own prices. Producers will have to hire more staff to market their products for them.

I have no regrets about voting against this bill. I do not believe that the Conservative government has the right to hold a vote here in the House without consulting producers and farmers and giving them the choice of whether or not to abolish the Wheat Board. The two sides agree on this issue. The Conservatives must give the farmers the chance to vote. That is what people from the Prairies are asking. If the Conservatives have any respect at all for farmers, they must let farmers make the decision by secret ballot. That is what the Conservatives should do.

[English]

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's comments raise a couple of questions. First, does he know what percentage of farmers voted to impose the Wheat Board on western Canadian farmers back in the early days? If he does not know, I will tell him. It was 0% because there was no vote by farmers then. It was imposed upon them by the government.

Government Orders

If the member, who is from part of the country that is not affected by the impositions of the Canadian Wheat Board, feels so strongly about it, would he be prepared to take that message across the rest of Canada and impose the Canadian Wheat Board regulations on his farmers, or is it just for western Canadian farmers, of whom he has no representation nor the ability to speak on their behalf, yet he wants to impose that upon us?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, first, when I was elected I was elected as a member of Parliament at the federal level and I can go anywhere in the country because I am a Canadian. Do the Conservatives want to take that away from me?

Second, when it was imposed, it was under a Conservative government, the same way it is going to be imposed under a Conservative government to take it away.

Why not give farmers the choice to vote on it? Before the 2011 election, the Conservatives promised them that they could vote on this. Why do the Conservatives not give them the right to vote on it? It is not for me as a member of Parliament to go there and shove it down their throats. They must be given the right to vote on it. That is what the Conservatives should do if they are not ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst for his spirited defence of the right of producers to vote on how they choose to market their products.

I know that my colleague from Newfoundland has been telling us recently how, at the very moment in time, when the Conservatives are dismantling the most successful grain marketing company in the world, wholly owned and operated by prairie farmers on a non-profit basis, the fishermen of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Atlantic region are contemplating creating a marketing board along the same lines as our freshwater fish marketing board, our dairy marketing boards, our egg marketing board and our turkey and chicken marketing boards. They know that supply management is an advantage and a benefit to producers. The fishermen of Atlantic Canada are coming to that realization.

How is it that Atlantic Canadian fisher people know when their best interests are served, when the Conservatives are blindly abolishing the very same system in the prairie region?

• (1300)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, even the people in Australia are regretting that they got rid of their board. They know they made a mistake now and regret what they have done.

When we look at the fishermen, it is very simple to explain. When lobster fishermen have a hard time getting \$2 a pound and restaurants charge \$10.50 a pound, between the consumer and the fishermen there are a lot of people in between taking their money. That does not happen with a board. Farmers would need to get their own price. The Atlantic fishermen are saying the same thing. Between the customer and the fishermen, there are a lot of people taking the money, and that is why they are getting 50¢ a pound and the stores are getting \$4.50 a pound. That is what would happen if they were to market individually.

Farmers should think twice about what they are getting into. There are some who will make money but the majority will not be making the money. The reason for this board 75 years ago was to look after farmers' interests.

This is a big mistake. The mistake is not by the farmers, but by the Conservative government not letting them vote on it democratically. If the Conservatives believe in democracy they should give farmers the chance to make that decision because it is important for the farmers on the Prairies.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this proposed legislation, which would be a major step forward for Canadian grain producers.

Our Conservative government knows that a prosperous farm means a prosperous economy. As others have said, this bill would give farmers in western Canada the same rights that farmers have in my home riding of Simcoe—Grey here in Ontario. They would share the same right to market their grain to a buyer of their choice and to do what is best for their businesses.

There is always a fear of the unknown, but in this case we do know that others who have gone down a very similar path of marketing freedom have had very positive results. I would like to speak to the wheat industry in Ontario as an example of the kinds of opportunities farmers can capture through a voluntary pool.

Ontario wheat producers moved to a voluntary marketing system eight years ago. Some Ontario wheat producers chose to market their crops through the voluntary pool run by Grain Farmers of Ontario. Others chose from a variety of other marketing methods that are right for their businesses. Since moving to marketing freedom, the Ontario wheat industry has been growing steadily over the past decade, topping a million acres last year and bringing more than \$300 million to the farm gate. It has become one of the province's largest crop exporters. Last year half of the two million tonne crop was exported, driving over \$280 million in sales.

Marketing freedom did not cause the sky to fall in Ontario, as the monopoly supporters would lead us to believe. Contrary to these baseless arguments, Ontario has a dynamic and growing grain industry, the largest this side of the Prairies. In fact, Dr. Terry Daynard, one of the founders of Ontario Corn Producers' Association, said:

...I am glad the Ontario Wheat Board ended single-desk selling years ago, allowing growers like me to market wheat independently.

Government Orders

The Ontario wheat industry shows what can be done when the entire value chain works together to grow market potential. Today, a strong and innovative value-added sector purchases about half the Ontario wheat crop to manufacture high-quality food products for Canadian grocery stores all over the country. Since moving to an open market, Ontario wheat growers have developed a number of exciting value-added opportunities over the past several years.

Several years ago, the former Ontario Wheat Producers Marketing Board, today Grain Farmers of Ontario, launched a wheat initiative fund to directly address opportunities to collaborate with all sector partners around value-added uses of Ontario wheat. This program has been so successful that Grain Farmers of Ontario is now looking for similar opportunities in corn and soy.

As an example, Grain Farmers of Ontario is supplying Ontario's wheat to an Ontario-based company that has become Canada's largest pita bread manufacturer. In my riding of Simcoe—Grey, where agriculture and farming are of incredible importance to many families, it is the hard work of local farmers like Ken Ferguson, who is my local mayor, Fred and Brian Dunlop, and Roger and Bill MacLeod who demonstrate that hard-working commitment is representative of all Canadian wheat farmers.

Under marketing freedom, GFO is still the recognized leader in export market development and there is no reason that a voluntary Canadian Wheat Board could not remain a recognized leader as well.

Of course, a major change like this would have a transition period. Farmers in western Canada recognize this. According to Jody Klassen of Mayerthorpe, Alberta, "There's always opportunity. There's a transition period, but the opportunities are there".

Everyone agrees that the Ontario industry is seeing increasing levels of collaboration between the GFO and its private trade partners when it comes to issues like export logistics, contracting, trade missions and promotion. With growing world demand and a high-quality product, Ontario farmers are well positioned to capture new opportunities for the years ahead. Our Conservative government thinks wheat and barley farmers in western Canada have a right to these types of opportunities as well.

Wheat and barley growers in western Canada are like any other business people. They want to make the right decisions for their farms. They already decide what to plant and when to harvest. They make marketing decisions on their canola and pulse crops, their peas, lentils, beans, oats and other crops. They want the same marketing freedom for their wheat and barley.

● (1305)

This bill is fundamentally about innovation, freeing our farmers to innovate and grow their businesses. Our government understands that innovation is key to competitiveness. That is why we have invested up to \$4 million to help develop new grain and oilseed varieties that are tailored to meet the needs of the marketplace and increase profitability of Canadian farmers.

This research has already resulted in 10 new varieties of soya beans targeted at high-value food markets all across the country. There are others in the pipeline, including new varieties of winter wheat, corn, spring wheat, oat and barley that are higher yielding and more resistant to drought and disease.

The shift in market freedom in Ontario has been good for Ontario grain farmers. In fact, according to Harry Buurma, a farmer from Watford:

In the last 10 years the wheat acreage in Ontario has increased by nearly 50 percent, as further support that the change has been a good thing.

Likewise, we believe that the advent of market freedom will breathe new life into the western Canadian wheat industry as well and open up exciting new opportunities for western grain growers. The removal of the monopoly will allow western Canadian farmers to sell their wheat and barley directly to a processor, including new pasta manufacturers, flour mills and other types of processing plants.

There has been tremendous growth in value-added opportunities in Ontario wheat over the past decade. We have every reason to believe that our western wheat and barley growers have what it takes to succeed in exactly the same way.

The Government of Canada trusts farmers to make their marketing choices based on what is best for their own business. We want to put farmers back in the driver's seat so they can continue to drive the economy. We believe that an open and competitive grain market can include a viable voluntary pooling entity.

We are ready to work with the Canadian Wheat Board to chart the way forward. Marketing freedom has been a cornerstone of our platform since day one. It was part of the throne speech last spring.

I am proud that we delivered on our long-standing promise to western Canadian wheat and barley farmers. Our Conservative government makes commitments and we stick to them.

As the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food recently said, "Today we are turning a new page in our nation's history, and Canada and our sector will be better for it." Exciting new opportunities lie ahead for farmers in western Canada. This important step forward will help ensure that all farmers can position their businesses to capture these opportunities.

The opportunities that exist in this great country are enormous. In the 1800s my family came to this great country. They took the rail to Portage la Prairie, walked another 150 kilometres, set down their roots in Alexander, Manitoba, bought 1,500 acres of farm land and started farming wheat and barley. It was composed of three Leitch farms. My family's farming history is rich there.

That is why I am so passionate about this legislation. It finally provides the market opportunity that my late grandfather and his colleagues all desired.

Government Orders

Canadian farmers feed Canadian families around the world. They deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions. Western Canadian grain farmers, like my late grandfather, deserve the same opportunities and freedoms that the farmers in my riding of Simcoe—Grey in Ontario enjoy. They should be able to choose to whom they sell their grain and when they do it.

I encourage members to support this bill and give it timely passage in the House so that farmers will have the certainty they need to plan their businesses in the coming year. Our government is committed to delivering on our long-standing promise to give western Canadian farmers the marketing freedom they deserve, and we intend to make that happen.

• (1310)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague about two points she made in her speech.

First is the idea of certainty. In times of such economic uncertainty around the world, and Canada is not spared from the economic malaise that is going on, we have to wonder why the Conservative government would choose now to turn the prairie rural economy upside down and on its head with no guarantee that it will be stable or secure, or any better for prairie farmers come next spring should it succeed in abolishing the Wheat Board.

There is a more pointed question I would like to ask the member. She said that the whole point here is to give prairie farmers more choice in how they market their grain. Why then would the government not let prairie farmers choose by having a democratic vote which is guaranteed to them by legislation?

When the Ontario grain farmers did away with their single desk, it was by virtue of a democratic vote. The majority chose to have a dual marketing system. Why would the government not allow the prairie farmers the same choice on how to market their grain by a democratic vote?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I think the farmers in western Canada had their vote. It was on May 2. They chose to have a majority Conservative government represent them in this House and to make sure that it brought forward this legislation that was so important to them.

Farmers in my riding know that they control their destiny. They make the decisions about their farms and in which direction their businesses will go. We want to make sure that western Canadian farmers are given that opportunity.

With respect to the Wheat Board itself, it is not being eliminated. It will be moved to a voluntary entity so that people can participate in it if they so choose.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about market freedom and the access the Conservatives are trying to accomplish here. She noted the markets in her riding around southern Ontario.

I know that in southern Ontario if a person were to catch a certain amount of fish, he or she could put it out to any market he or she wished. However, there is an entity in Manitoba called the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, and it is a single desk. Assuming that the member truly believes in the free market, does

that mean the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation will also be relieved of its single desk incentive?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, let us not lose focus on what we are talking about here. We are talking about marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers. We received a strong mandate on May 2 to make sure that this legislation moves forward so that the western Canadian farmers like my late grandfather have an opportunity to market their businesses under the circumstances they wish to do so.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the representative of the government's position should reflect on what was provided in that particular exchange. The government has been insisting that principles of fair and free market access by individual producers should be allowed, and I think the glaring inconsistency of the argument has now been exposed. A very precise and very real example was provided where there is a single market seller for freshwater fish species for producers in western Canada and the Arctic.

Why is it that principle is not the word of the day in that argument, but principle seems to be the word of the day in this particular argument? What happened on May 2 for freshwater fish producers?

• (1315)

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, once passed, this bill would allow prairie farmers to seek their own contracts. We are talking about the Canadian Wheat Board. Our government is committed to giving western Canadian grain farmers the marketing freedom they deserve.

We encourage the opposition to ensure the swift passage of this legislation so that western Canadian farmers can plan for the future.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a Newfoundlander, with a particular interest in the Newfoundland and Labrador fisheries. Last week, for example, I introduced a private member's bill, the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery rebuilding act. I rise to speak out against the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board and to warn against it.

The bays and harbours, the cliffs and crags and the fishing grounds of Newfoundland and Labrador may be a world away from the western provinces, but fishing and farming have much in common these days across Canada. At this moment in our history, what they have in common is that they are under direct attack by the Conservative government. In the Prairies, the Conservatives are attacking the livelihood of farmers with their attempts to kill off the Canadian Wheat Board. On the west and east coasts, the fisheries are their target, with ongoing moves to gut what little is left of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

What the Conservative government should realize, and must realize, is that its buddies on Bay Street cannot feed Canadian families. That is a simple fact of life.

Government Orders

I do not understand why the Conservatives have it in for Canada's primary producers, fishermen and farmers. Why? Who will that benefit? Who will that threaten?

Ultimately, such actions could jeopardize our food supply, could threaten the family farm and family fishing enterprise, the small businesses on which our country was built.

As a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, I am particularly baffled over why the Canadian Wheat Board is being targeted.

At the same time that the federal Conservatives are attempting to kill off the Wheat Board, back home in my home province, the Progressive Conservative provincial government is moving toward the creation of a marketing board for fish. Therefore, the federal Conservatives are killing off the Wheat Board, which markets and brands Canadian wheat and barley around the world, at the same time that the provincial PCs in Newfoundland and Labrador are attempting to create a similar type fish board to market and brand our seafood around the world. It does not make sense to me. If anything, it shows that there should be more study, more investigation and more review so smart decisions are made.

The federal Conservatives are killing the Wheat Board, while the provincial PCs are birthing a fish board. I just do not get it. How does that make sense? The responsible and right thing to do would be to carry out a cost benefit analysis.

The Canadian Wheat Board is the largest and most successful grain marketing company in the world. That is an indisputable fact. It is also a fact that the Wheat Board is a Canadian success story, with a proven track record of providing the best possible returns for farmers and minimizing their risk.

Why mess with a good thing? Why mess with something that is working?

As the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre has pointed out in the House on numerous occasions, there has never been one shred of evidence that farmers would be better off without the Wheat Board. That is a point that has resonated with me and it should resonate with everybody in the House and with all Canadians,

• (1320)

How can the Conservative government, which bills itself as being a great steward of the Canadian economy in these tough economic times and which are destined to get tougher, be so reckless and irresponsible, to use two other words from the member for Winnipeg Centre, as to turn the prairie farm economy on its head without even doing a cost benefit analysis? That does not make sense to me.

Bill C-18 proposes to dismantle the farmer-controlled and funded Canadian Wheat Board by eliminating the single desk marketing of wheat and barley across Canada, but do farmers want that? Apparently not.

On September 12, a majority of farmers voted in a plebiscite to keep the Wheat Board. A total of 38,261 farmers submitted mail-in ballots during that plebiscite. It had a participation rate of 56%, which was, as I understand it, on a par with the last three federal elections. The result was that 62% of respondents voted in favour of

retaining the single desk for wheat, while 51% voted to retain it for barley.

Allen Oberg, chair of the Wheat Board's farmer-controlled board of directors, reacted by saying this:

Farmers have spoken. Their message is loud and clear, and the government must listen. Western Canadian producers have voted to keep their single-desk marketing system for wheat and barley. They cannot be ignored.

Sure, they can be ignored. Have they not heard of the Conservative government? For years, fishermen on the east coast of Canada, the fishermen of Newfoundland and Labrador, warned that they were not being listened to. The fishery eventually collapsed. One of the largest fishing companies, Fishery Products International, was later broken up and sold off piecemeal, including its marketing arm.

Today Newfoundland and Labrador PCs are moving toward a marketing board for Newfoundland and Labrador seafood products. The Conservative government is trying to move away from it.

Part of the marketing strategy would be to set up a council to promote Newfoundland and Labrador seafood in general. The government would also facilitate a consortium of companies so they could work together on branding their seafood products. Maybe they will even call it the Canadian fish board. Would that not be ironic?

The New Democrats say that the Conservative government should withdraw Bill C-18. In the interests of large American grain companies, the Conservatives are meddling to erode prices and market security for our own farmers.

The Canadian Wheat Board is a single desk. Farmers in western Canada sell their wheat and barley together through the Wheat Board, their sole marketing agent. The structure helps ensure farmers get their highest overall return, as it has an effective monopoly on the sales. Farmers have more strength when they act as one. It just makes sense. Fishermen have more strength when they act as one. Newfoundland and Labrador fishermen know this and prairie farmers know this. Why does the Conservative government not know this?

Western grain farmers can look to Australia to know what is in store for them once the single desk is eliminated, and it is not pretty. When Australia had its single desk power, Australian wheat could command premiums of over \$99 a tonne over American wheat, but by December 2008, it had dropped to a discount of \$27 a tonne over U.S. wheat. In three short years, Australia's 40,000 wheat farmers went from running their own grain marketing system, selling virtually all of Australia's wheat, to becoming mere customers of Cargill, one of the largest agribusiness corporations, which is privately owned by the U.S.

Government Orders

•(1325)

If we are not careful, the family farm and the family fishing enterprises of this great country will be no more. We should learn from the mistakes of the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery. We should listen to fishermen and farmers. We are stronger—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting to listen to his speaking notes. Is he actually serious that Australian farmers were getting \$3 a bushel more than U.S. farmers at one point? I do not think so. That is not even realistic.

However, he quoted the survey of the Wheat Board and he gave great credence to it. I want to ask him a couple of questions about some of the ballots. I know an older lady whose husband died last year. When it came time for the survey, she received a ballot for herself, a ballot for her dead husband and a ballot for the estate as well.

I know another little old lady who approached one of our political leaders and said that she wanted to talk about the Wheat Board. She told him that her brother and sister, who were both dead, received ballots for the Wheat Board vote. I also point out that I know some folks who farm 10,000 acres who are identified as pro-choice. They did not get ballots at all.

Could he explain some of those inconsistencies and why does he give credence to such a flawed survey?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, in terms of particular ballots for the plebiscite, I have no idea. I know that when I read the final tally, that 62% of respondents voted in favour of retaining the single desk for wheat, I wonder how the Conservative government cannot see the results of this plebiscite as a warning signal. There is as a storm brewing. There is a problem with the fact that the government is killing the Canadian Wheat Board. How does the Conservative government not recognize the 62% as a warning sign?

I have a question for the member opposite. It makes sense to carry out a cost benefit analysis. The member for Winnipeg Centre has consistently brought it up in the House. Why is there no cost benefit analysis? Is he afraid of the result?

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl a general question with which all members of Parliament should be concerned. He is a relatively new MP, but I am sure he is aware of the code of conduct and conflict of interest guidelines that all of us are duty bound and honour bound to uphold.

The member of Parliament for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, who was harassing him with some nuisance and mischief questions, is a grain farmer. It is the position of his government that grain producers in the prairie region will be able to sell their grain for more if it gets rid of the Wheat Board. If what he says is true, does that not put him in a direct conflict of interest and should he not be duty bound and honour bound to recuse himself from that vote, just as the member for Macleod, the member for Yellowhead, the member for Prince

Albert, the member for Crowfoot, the member for Red Deer, the member for Vegreville—Wainwright, possibly the member for Peace River and possibly the member for Blackstrap would be? Should not all of those grain producers recuse themselves from this vote because they stand to benefit personally and directly if their own rhetoric and profit—

•(1330)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, a shorter answer please.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. I am a relatively new member of Parliament. Prior to my election this past May as the MP for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, I was a journalist. I spent 20 years as a journalist in Newfoundland and Labrador. I can say for the member for Winnipeg Centre that if I have ever heard anything that sounds like a conflict of interest, it is exactly this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's main priority is the economy, in which the agricultural industry plays a huge role. Canadian producers feed families around the world. They deserve the freedom to choose how to market their products, whether it is done individually or through a voluntary pooling organization.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this debate and to correct some incorrect hypotheses and assumptions, such as that allowing wheat and barley producers in western Canada to choose how to market their product would undermine our supply management system.

[*English*]

Our government's support for marketing freedom for western wheat, durum and barley producers is an issue entirely separate from our support for supply management. There is no link between these two issues, and those who try, such as the opposition, to make links between providing marketing freedom to western Canadian grain producers and our government's commitment to support Canada's supply-managed system are doing so at the expense of farmers.

Such efforts are scare tactics that the opposition should refrain from, because its arguments are untrue and because these tactics do not serve farmers well. This is fearmongering. It is not productive because it unnecessarily destabilizes farmers who are not affected by the Wheat Board legislation.

[*Translation*]

I am a member of Parliament from eastern Ontario. I am very familiar with supply management and I wholeheartedly support our supply management system and the farmers who depend on it. I would like to explain some of the differences between the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management.

Government Orders

[English]

Producers in the five supply-managed industries—dairy, chicken, turkey, egg and broiler hatching eggs—worked long and hard to establish these systems. There was clear support by farmers in all cases for the implementation of the supply management system before federal and provincial governments put it in place. Producers who participate in our supply-managed system are supportive of it, and they thank our government for our strong defence of supply management.

This is clearly not the case with the Wheat Board. There is no unanimous support for the Wheat Board and its monopoly.

[Translation]

Supply management works with quotas that are based on consumer demand. That is not the case with the Canadian Wheat Board. In addition, the supply management system applies to all regions of Canada, while the Canadian Wheat Board applies only to western farmers.

[English]

It is important to note that supply management is focused on domestic consumption. The Wheat Board, however, is largely focused on export markets.

I congratulate the opposition in recognizing that both supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board relate to agriculture, but the opposition's lack of understanding is exasperating, because the similarities end there.

It is important to recognize that the vast majority of opposition MPs are from non-rural ridings in provinces not under the control of the Wheat Board.

[Translation]

The Canadian Wheat Board is a regional shared-governance organization. Right now, if you cultivate wheat, durum or barley in western Canada and you want to export it for food purposes, you must sell it to the Canadian Wheat Board. The board is far from being universally accepted, as is the case with the supply management system, and many producers want the same freedom enjoyed by farmers in the rest of Canada.

•(1335)

[English]

The Canadian Wheat Board itself conducts an annual survey of its producers, and the most recent results showed that a majority of prairie wheat producers, 58%, said that they would prefer either to have a market with no Canadian Wheat Board at all or to have the choice to deal with the Canadian Wheat Board or not.

Marketing choice, or dual marketing, which is what our bill proposes to implement, was the most popular choice when wheat producers were asked to choose between three options of no change to the Canadian Wheat Board, no Canadian Wheat Board at all, or a dual market. Apparently the CWB did not like the answer, because it decided to hold its so-called plebiscite.

This plebiscite was deeply flawed in its design, only offering farmers an all-or-nothing scenario. The option of marketing choice

was not even provided to farmers, even though the CWB has been told for years that when given the option, this is precisely what the majority of western grain farmers want. This may lead one to question whether the CWB intentionally framed the questions on its so-called plebiscite in such a way as to produce the answers that it wanted.

[Translation]

The official opposition should also take note that we supported supply management in our election platform. But the NDP election platform made absolutely no mention of it.

The NDP's veiled position on supply management during the election and its feigned indignation today do not fool anyone in the agriculture sector.

[English]

Over the past 40 years, supply management has been a source of stability and prosperity for dairy, chicken, turkey and egg producers right across the country. Supply management is important to the rural economy of Canada from British Columbia all the way to Newfoundland. Supply management creates jobs and prosperity for Canadians. Supply-managed producers listen to consumers and deliver what Canadians want. We promote and defend supply management because it has been so successful and has brought so many benefits to consumers, producers and others in the industry right across the value chain.

[Translation]

However, grain producers in western Canada have been saying for years that they want the opportunity to make their own business decisions. A consistent majority of barley producers have said that they do not want to be forced to sell their product solely to the Canadian Wheat Board.

[English]

As I mentioned earlier, this is not the case with supply management, whose producers strongly support their marketing systems. Our long-standing and continuing support for supply management and our commitment to marketing choice for western Canadian grain producers reflect our government's dedication to giving farmers what they need to succeed. We believe that all Canadian farmers should be able to position their businesses to capture the marketing opportunities that are open to them. An open market for western Canadian grain producers would attract investment, encourage innovation, create value-added jobs and build a stronger Canadian economy.

[Translation]

Our government is committed to implementing the most profitable programs and processes for producers and the industry as a whole

I implore the members to think seriously about this bill and remember that if it is passed in a timely manner, producers will be reassured and will be able to plan their activities for the coming year.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question I have for the member is with regard to why the government appears not to want to respect the wishes of a majority of the prairie wheat farmers.

Does the member across the way believe in principle that the grain farmer, who is directly impacted by the government's decision, should have the ability to have some input as to what the government is doing today? Would he support prairie farmers being able to have direct influence on what is happening with the Wheat Board?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, my response to my colleague is that it is obvious that we support western Canadian grain farmers. I point out to my colleague that when he talks about feedback from western Canadian grain farmers, I mentioned that the Wheat Board itself conducted a survey or poll of its farmers, which it does every single year, and when it did, it offered three choices. This was before the so-called plebiscite. They offered three choices to farmers: no Wheat Board at all, a Wheat Board monopoly or marketing freedom, meaning that the Wheat Board would exist but that farmers would be free to choose whether they would use it. Fifty-eight per cent of western Canadian wheat farmers chose wanting to have marketing freedom and to have a choice in whether or not to use the Wheat Board.

After that, the Wheat Board conducted its so-called plebiscite and only asked two questions. It offered all or nothing: either the Wheat Board with its mandatory lock on western grain farmers or no Wheat Board at all. The third question was missing. I have to ask why.

The other thing I will point out is that it is interesting to note that there are 57 MPs who represent grain farmers in western Canada affected by the Canadian Wheat Board. Of those 57 MPs, 52 are Conservative and 5 are opposition. That is very telling. We just had a federal election in May. The member is asking if we represent Canadian wheat farmers. We absolutely do, 52 seats out of 57.

● (1340)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture is from Ontario, and I want to thank him for all that he does and has done for agriculture across Canada, not just in Ontario.

The comments from the other side illustrate that the Wheat Board, in some way, seems to be the farmers. The farmers have grown quality wheat. Could the parliamentary secretary clarify whose wheat it is, who grows it and what the Canadian Wheat Board in the west actually does with the wheat?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, it is definitely the case that western wheat farmers feel the Wheat Board does not act for their best interests when it comes to selling wheat. That is why they want marketing freedom.

The growers of the wheat are the farmers themselves. One thing we have noticed is that farmers who used to grow only wheat are now growing other crops that are not controlled by the Wheat Board. For example, there are more and more canola farmers. Why is that? Yes, canola makes good money on the market, but it is not controlled by the Wheat Board. We are seeing a trend. This is a reflection of the

damaging effect that the Wheat Board can have on our wheat producers.

What we are asking for is marketing freedom. I do not know what the opposition members have against the word “freedom”. They should allow western farmers to choose to use the Wheat Board or not. If the Wheat Board has the value-added services that it says it offers, let it sell itself to farmers so that farmers will willingly choose it.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real pleasure to rise and support an economic sector that is critical to jobs and growth in this country. Make no mistake, Canadian farmers feed the world and they deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions.

Canada's farmers and food processors do more than produce the food for our tables, they drive over \$35 billion of our exports and generate one in every eight Canadian jobs. The grain sector alone is specifically responsible for \$16 billion to the farm gate and it is a major contributor to our economy. The agriculture industry has helped lead Canada's economic recovery and that is why it is a priority for the government.

The legislation that we have before us will help this vital economic sector continue to drive our country to new growth and prosperity. It will provide western Canadian wheat, durum and barley farmers with the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other farmers in Canada and around the world. It will allow grain producers in western Canada to make decisions based on what is best for their businesses, for their farms, for themselves.

I want to reiterate why marketing freedom is so vital to farmers in our grain industry. As we have heard the Minister of Agriculture say often, our government wants to help farmers make money from the marketplace, not from the mail box. Often that means levelling the playing field on the international stage. Sometimes it means getting government out of the way, so that farmers can farm and continue to drive our economy.

To empower our agricultural producers we need to open new markets and new avenues for profitability for farmers to accomplish that. They need the simple opportunity to succeed.

For the past six decades this has definitely not been the case for growers of wheat and barley in western Canada. The Canadian Wheat Board monopoly, born in a different time to meet different needs during the war, has cast a chill on key parts of the grain sector in western Canada. The six decade Canadian Wheat Board monopoly is yesterday's solution to yesterday's problems.

Government Orders

The fact is, today's entrepreneurial farmers are providing more and proving over and over that they can and will do better if they have control over their farm and businesses. For western Canadian grain farmers, this means a choice in how they market their own grain. It means a choice in when and where they will sell their crop. It means a choice on what price they sell their grain and between working through a voluntary wheat board or directly with the open market.

At the announcement in Acme, Alberta, a gentleman by the name of Bob Leinweber from Linden gave me a letter that he had written to a western producer. In it he talks about a letter from another farmer regarding the monopoly. Mr. Leinweber agrees with that individual. He wrote:

—monopoly sellers do enrich their owners as exemplified by OPEC in similar monopolies.

He went on to say:

The CWB was set up by the government as a buyer's monopoly to buy wheat from western Canadian wheat growers at less than the world price.

That was why the Wheat Board was set up. It is not a seller's monopoly, it is a buyer's monopoly. We know that western Canadian farmers are capable of marketing their own canola, pulse crops and oats. They do that already. They are also capable of marketing their wheat and barley.

I was in the dentist chair a couple of weeks ago when an elderly farmer walked in and said, "Mr. Sorenson, my father told me that having that Wheat Board would be good for us. When I told my three sons, who are now farming, they said, 'Dad, that was yesterday's problem, just get out of the way and let us do it. We are not afraid of marketing our own wheat and barley'".

•(1345)

Our government is committed to giving farmers marketing freedom; a choice that, yes, they want and they deserve. As the Prime Minister recently said in Regina, "Our government is committed to giving western grain farmers the freedom to choose how to market their products—something eastern grain farmers have long taken for granted. This is not only a matter of principle, it will also lead to real economic benefits, to opportunities for years to come. An open grain market will attract new investment, encourage innovation, and create new jobs for Canadians".

That is a point on which many industry leaders agree.

Stephen Vandervalk, president of the Grain Growers of Canada, said:

Ending the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly is clearly sending a signal that Canada is open for business. Value-added processing means value-added jobs and more opportunities for farmers to locally market their wheat.

Brian Otto, president of the Western Barley Growers Association, said recently:

I see a future for investment in Western Canadian agriculture...Under this new commercial system I see job creation and the revitalization of rural communities.

Farmers in the market need clarity and certainty that marketing freedom and an open market is on the horizon.

An open market would attract investment. It would encourage innovation and create value-added jobs, which would build a stronger economy and which would build a stronger local economy

in many of our smaller communities and in our rural communities across the west.

An open market for the grain industry would strengthen the farming sector with better returns for farmers and for Canada as a whole.

We have had a taste, a small taste, of things to come earlier this month, with an announcement of a new pasta plant opening in Regina that would buy local Canadian durum wheat from farmers and create local jobs.

This is only a beginning. I look forward to many grand openings throughout the constituency of Crowfoot and the west of value-added processing, value-added pasta plants, value-added industries beginning in our rural communities. Marketing freedom would unlock new value-added investment, new jobs and new growth for Canada's economy.

The time is right for action. Canada's farmers grow world-class food in a global marketplace that is ripe with opportunity.

Our government will seize this opportunity for farmers. Our government will give farmers the marketing freedom they want and the marketing freedom that they deserve. Our government will free our farmers so they can continue to drive our economy and to feed the world.

Let me conclude by saying this. My grandfather moved to the place where I live, Killiam, Alberta, in 1905-06. For all those years, right up until he passed away in 1986, he farmed. I wish I could be like the member who spoke earlier who talked about the grandfather always having this fight. That was not the case with my grandfather. My grandfather said, "These are the rules. We'll abide by the rules. The Wheat Board is there. There's nothing we can do about it". He did not really step up and say, "Let's change this", although he was involved in municipal politics for 30 years.

This was never a driving force. However, over the years, less and less land got planted with wheat, less and less with barley, and there was just this drift into more and more canola, more and more pulse crops, and more and more of many of those other crops that were out of the Wheat Board's ability to market.

Canadian farmers have been voting with their air drills. They have been voting with what they are going to seed on their land. They have been putting in less and less wheat and more and more of the other crops. It is time we also allow them the ability to vote on this issue with their grain trucks and let them decide where they take their grain and to whom they market it.

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The Canadian Wheat Board, at one point, was the largest marketing agent in Canada. It has now slipped to number three, behind Viterra and Cargill. Farmers across the west realize that there are more opportunities than ever before to sell their grain and they look forward to the opportunity to have the freedom to do so.

• (1350)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Crowfoot is a veteran member of Parliament, and I am sure he is aware of the conflict of interest guidelines and the code of conduct by which all members of Parliament are duty bound.

If we were to believe the Conservative talking points, that farmers would in fact enjoy an advantage if we get rid of the Wheat Board and that they would make more money if we get rid of the Wheat Board, would the member not agree that any Conservative member of Parliament who farms, produces grain, finds himself in a conflict of interest by virtue of the fact of not just voting on this Bill C-18 but even participating in the debate promoting Bill C-18?

When we bailed out the auto industry, the GM and Chrysler auto companies, there were Conservative members of Parliament who actually had car dealerships, even though neither of them were GM nor Chrysler, but they had the decency to recuse themselves from the debate associated with subsidizing the auto industry.

Would the member not agree that he, himself, and at least seven other Conservative MPs must recuse themselves from the debate and the vote on Bill C-18?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I have run in five elections and been very clear that I believed in marketing freedom in all of those elections.

I think people expect me to stand here and vote, as I would expect most union members in the NDP would vote on issues that deal with unions. I am not certain how many of the NDP members voted on the postal agreement that we had. I think most of them voted.

Members on this side have never stood and said that we are going to receive more dollars for our wheat than we would under the Wheat Board. We have said that we want the freedom to choose. The rhetoric from the NDP and the Liberals is that there will be no markets, no rural Canada, no farmer left, and that the sky is falling.

On this side of the House, we have said that we want the opportunity to market our grain. Some may indeed decide to stay in the Wheat Board. That is why I like this approach that the government is taking. We have said that we do not want to get rid of the Wheat Board. It is the monopoly we want to get rid of, the single desk. We want to make certain that the Wheat Board is still viable. We have put in many new opportunities for the Wheat Board to become involved in marketing grain that it has not had before.

I look forward to this vote.

• (1355)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the remarks made by the member for Crowfoot and to what he was quoting from constituents.

We have been getting calls from quite a few of his constituents. I wonder why he never quoted some of them. They are saying that

when they talk to this member, all they get from him is, “We disagree on ideology”, and that is about the end of the conversation.

I found it interesting that he talked about his grandfather wanting to follow the rules, yet in his remarks the member goes on and talks about the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly lasting six decades as if it was the same thing. This member knows that the board was changed in 1997 to a farmer-elected board of directors, and this member is denying those producers a right to vote.

We in the Liberal Party are not saying, “The sky is falling”, we are saying that those members on that side are taking away farmers' democratic rights. I have to ask the member, why is he taking away the farmers' rights to determine their destiny through a vote, for or against the Wheat Board?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question coming from the former president of the National Farmers Union. This member stood and voted against the gun registry, and this member now stands voting against farmers' freedom for marketing grain.

We are not changing it so that there is no Wheat Board. This is where the court challenge may come from some farmer groups. We are not taking exclusive grains. We are not taking grains out of the Wheat Board's purview.

We are allowing the CWB to move into other provinces. We are allowing interprovincial transfer of grains. We are allowing the Wheat Board to function in other parts of Canada. We are not simply saying that we want to get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board. We want to give it the opportunity to flourish in Ontario, like this member believes it very well may.

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, listened to my hon. colleague talk about the Wheat Board and the benefits of having choice. That is really what the whole debate is about, whether we have a choice of how we market the products that we invest all of our life's energy and finances in growing.

I have a question for the member opposite in relation to the question that was just asked. Does he really believe that we should be jailing farmers, as was done under a previous administration, for growing and selling their grain? Does he really believe they should be in prison for doing that?

Statements by Members

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, that was a dark point in Canada's history when farmers stepped out to say that they wanted the opportunity to market their grain, to access higher prices across the border and to sell when and where they chose, and the Liberal government of the day responded by throwing in prison those who wanted that freedom. Law-abiding farmers, like Jim Ness, Rick Strankman, Tom Jackson and others, who had never broken the law and who had never stepped out even in the smallest place, were thrown into jail because the government lived with the ideology of big government doing everything for them. It was a sad mark on Canada and one that we want to clean up.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday, even though the Davie shipyard was completely shut out of the \$33 billion in contracts awarded to two of the three major shipyards in Canada, the NDP critic said, “This is a very good day for Canada, not just for the two winning shipyards. We are also happy to see that all of Canada will benefit.”

However, shipyards in eastern Quebec, in Matane and Les Méchins, were disqualified in favour of a strategy that groups the contracts in Nova Scotia and British Columbia. Faced with public outcry in Quebec, the NDP is now trying to amend its position by recognizing the interests of Quebecers, albeit a bit too late and without conviction.

The fact is that Quebec is an afterthought for this government and is a burden to the official opposition. The truth is that in this House, the federalist parties are happy for Canada even when it is a sad day for Quebec.

* * *

[*English*]

BRIDGE AWARDS

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, October 22, youth from the Blood Indian reserve, the town of Cardston and communities in the surrounding area presented the Bridge Awards, acknowledging the support of dozens of organizations and individuals who have contributed to building a more socially inclusive community and bridging the historical distance between local cultures, an ongoing project participants call Oneheart.

During the awards ceremony, first nation and non-native youth entertained guests with songs, speeches, dance and drama presentations. Earlier in the day, a play written, directed, produced and performed by local first nation youth called “A Tribute to the Highway of Tears” was presented. Later, Oneheart participants met and mingled with leaders from the Blood tribe, the town of Cardston and with provincial and federal representatives at an honoured guests dinner.

This event came to pass largely through the tenacity and vision of Sharon Unger and the Shinah House Foundation that she founded, and marks a major leap forward toward a new era of unity within diversity in the southern Alberta region.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SAINT FRANÇOIS ARCHIPELAGO

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, north of my riding, on the Mille Îles river, is the Saint François archipelago, which is made up of the Saint-Joseph, Vaches and Saint-Pierre islands.

These islands are a prime location for a fauna and flora conservation area and they have great potential for ecotourism and recreation. Two conservation organizations, Éco-Nature and “Sauvons nos trois grandes îles”, have collaborated on research proving that the archipelago absolutely must be protected for its extraordinary nature and its ecosystem.

More than 40,000 people have already signed a petition calling on the appropriate authorities to acquire these 200 hectares of land and conserve this environment. By protecting this space, all those who depend on it will be sure to enjoy better physical and mental health.

I want to thank the members of “Sauvons nos trois grandes îles” for their hard work and I sincerely hope they achieve what they have set out to do.

* * *

[*English*]

YMCA CAMPS

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I advise the House that thousands of London kids will now be able to experience camp for the first time in their lives.

Thanks to a dedicated team of volunteers, a group that I was privileged to chair, our Y Fore Kids committee raised more than \$1 million in just nine years, and created an endowment that will send less privileged kids from our London region to YMCA camps. To raise \$1 million is an extraordinary event, and this \$1 million endowment will be the gift that keeps on giving.

Colleagues, we all know how a camp experience can create better kids through leadership, opportunity and hope in a safe learning environment.

For these children, London's kids, Canada's kids, this will serve as one of the singular most powerful experiences they will ever receive.

I need to thank our sponsors and donors and especially want to acknowledge our title sponsors, Stevenson and Hunt Insurance, Hilton London and TD Bank. Their generosity and that of hundreds of other corporations over the years have our deepest gratitude.

For all of our volunteers, from the kids who will never know who they are but whose lives they have changed forever, we thank them for caring so much.

ROGERS COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer congratulations to Rogers Communications as it celebrates its 50th anniversary.

For years, Rogers has connected communities like mine by investing in the creation and the development of first-class local programming. Shows like *Grand Central*, *Skyways*, *Out of the Fog* are where Newfoundlanders and Labradorians come together to hear and discuss the stories that matter.

This year alone, Rogers TV will produce thousands of hours of informative local programming in Newfoundland and Labrador, benefiting constituents like mine.

Rogers' local commitment extends past community broadcasting. OMNI Television and Citytv connect multicultural and urban communities across the country. Rogers Media Funds has invested millions in the development and distribution of quality Canadian television and film production from coast to coast to coast.

Throughout its history, Rogers Communications has truly understood that local matters.

On behalf of the Liberal caucus, I congratulate Rogers Communications.

* * *

•(1405)

[Translation]

SOLANGE PARENT

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small gestures often make a big difference. Solange Parent embodied the spirit of kindness for her community and her family—her husband, Clément, and her children, Sylvain, Ghislain and Évelyne. She was a loving wife, devoted mother and kind-hearted grandmother who was always there for her family. Her infectious smile did not go unnoticed by young and old alike in the Lotbinière RCM.

On a daily basis, Solange humbly exemplified the values of sharing, caring and friendship. She was without question a courageous woman who brought happiness and good humour to all those around her.

Today, I am speaking on behalf of my community. I would like to say what a privilege it has been, for the Lotbinière RCM, to have had such an exceptional woman as Solange Parent in our midst. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family.

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COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANIZATION IN CAP-ROUGE

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the 35th anniversary of the Mouvement des services à la communauté du Cap-Rouge and congratulate this network of dedicated volunteers on the support it provides to low-income individuals and families, as well as to seniors, and on its cultural contribution.

This organization offers a place where people can meet, find a listening ear, talk and obtain referrals. It also offers many services

Statements by Members

such as a food bank, meals on wheels, activities for seniors, help for new mothers, family activities and a flea market.

I would like to draw the hon. members' attention to the fact that it is unacceptable that, in a society as rich as ours, despite the commendable efforts of organizations such as this one, needs are increasing and the contribution of such organizations is becoming increasingly essential.

Mouvement des services à la communauté du Cap-Rouge and its many volunteers have been helping to improve the lives of people in my riding since 1976, and I would like to thank them for their wonderful and exemplary work.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I attended the “Honouring our Local Veterans” celebration in Owen Sound. This 11th annual event, hosted by the Billy Bishop Home and Museum and the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 6, is one of the longest-running programs of its kind in Canada.

Over the past 11 years, over 83 local veterans who served in the army, navy, merchant marines or air force have been honoured at this event. Ten more local veterans were honoured yesterday for their courageous service to the Canadian Forces. They were Glen Rawson, Gladys Morris, Howard Donovan, Charles Dell, Michael Krulicki, Art Hawes, Percy Straight, Lorne Weatherall, Eric Eastwood and Yvonne Inkster.

Participating in events such as this gives me the opportunity to reflect on the dedication and tremendous personal sacrifices of our men and women in uniform.

With November 11 just around the corner, I encourage everyone to attend a Remembrance Day ceremony in their communities or to simply take a few moments out of the day to reflect, to respect and to remember. Lest we forget.

* * *

CANADIAN LIBRARY MONTH

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that the month of October has been designated as Canadian Library Month. The Canadian Library Association and library partners from across the country developed this idea in order to help raise public awareness of the valuable role that libraries play in the lives of Canadians.

The theme for this year is “Your Library: A Place Unbound”, which suggests that, as part of a changing world, libraries are growing and expanding their resources as they connect people to information and reading. Libraries are places of endless opportunity and play a key role in providing all Canadians with access to the material that is integral to ensuring that they are regular contributors to the economic, social and cultural successes of their communities.

Statements by Members

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Canadian Library Association on the great work it does. I am sure my colleagues in the House will join me in celebrating libraries and all those who work in them, recognizing the incredible range of resources and services they provide within our communities.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

DORIS CHAMPAGNE

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour for me to speak in the House as the representative for the people of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Today, I would like to highlight the extraordinary work done by volunteers in my riding, since they are the driving force behind our communities.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the exceptional work of Doris Champagne, who was named volunteer of the year in Argenteuil. From a very early age, Mr. Champagne has volunteered to organize a number of activities to support the well-being of others in his community. He continues to work tirelessly to improve living conditions for seniors.

Mr. Champagne is president of Villa Mont-Joie in Lachute, which celebrated its 30th anniversary this October. Villa Mont-Joie, which has over 400 members, serves as a meeting place for retirees and pre-retirees in Lachute. Mr. Champagne is always working to enrich the lives of its members.

Mr. Champagne's long-time involvement in his community is an inspiration and an example to all volunteers in the community. Congratulations, Mr. Champagne. We wish you well.

* * *

[English]

**WALTER BORDEN-WILKINS, MATTHEW DELLER,
TANNER HILDEBRAND AND VINCENT STOVER**

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, mourning continues today in my community of Grande Prairie after a tragic automobile accident left four families grieving the loss of their sons, brothers and grandsons.

Late Friday night, five members of the Grande Prairie Composite High School football team were travelling home when they were struck by a speeding pickup truck.

By morning we learned that four of these young men had lost their lives and the fifth was being treated in a hospital in Edmonton.

Words fail us at times like this. There are no words to adequately express our sympathy for the families, friends and teammates. Our thoughts and prayers are with each one of them at this time of tragedy.

On behalf of myself, members of the House and the Government of Canada, I wish to express our most profound sympathy. Our

thoughts and prayers are with those who grieve this tremendous loss. May they find some peace in the anguish and some hope in the grief.

Matthew, Vincent, Walter and Tanner will be remembered.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no business case for abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board, and members across find themselves in an untenable catch-22, because if we believe the minister's supposition that prairie farmers will make more money if they abolish the Canadian Wheat Board, then any prairie farmers in the Conservative caucus would find themselves in conflict of interest and therefore both duty bound and honour bound to recuse themselves not just from the vote we will be holding tonight, but from any debate that promotes the abolition of the Wheat Board.

They cannot have it both ways. If they believe the minister, then they cannot vote on it. If they accept our point of view that there is no provable material benefit for farmers from abolishing the Wheat Board, then it raises the question of why we would turn the rural prairie economy upside down and on its head if there is no advantage to prairie farmers.

It is a conflict of interest, plain and simple. I refer hon. members to section 8 of the code of conduct that governs all of us in this House.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow farmers will gather in Lethbridge for a reunion. It will be a bittersweet time.

Nine years ago 13 farmers went to jail for a cause they believe in. Reports from October 31, 2002 said:

There were few dry eyes in front of the Lethbridge courthouse Halloween afternoon as 13 upstanding citizens hugged their loved ones and marched resolutely off to prison.

Premier Ralph Klein told the crowd of 600, "When decent, hardworking Alberta farmers are willing to take the extreme measure of going to jail for the sake of fundamental freedoms, there's something wrong with the laws of the land. It's a system that has to be changed".

That system is now being changed.

The Liberal government had persecuted these farmers in every way possible, bringing the resources of several government departments against individual Canadians. These farmers would not back down. They stood fearlessly for what they knew to be right, and they paid a huge price for it.

Tomorrow they will be meeting to celebrate our commitment to marketing freedom. Their sacrifice will not be in vain.

•(1415)

[Translation]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the CBC, an integral part of Canada's social fabric, is celebrating its 75th anniversary. The CBC and Radio-Canada are our source for information and entertainment, a reflection of who we are and our social conscience.

Les Belles Histoires des pays d'en haut, Bobino et Bobinette, La Semaine verte, Moi et l'autre, Les Couche-tard, La P'tite Vie and, of course, hockey and the national news have all made an impact on our lives.

I have not even mentioned the radio—which is always there, always part of our day—or the Internet, which is increasingly present in our lives. Add to this the other TV networks, which include CBC News Network, Bold and Documentary, and it is easy to see why Pierre Karl is so jealous. As Bernard Derome would say, I predict that if the trend continues, in 25 years, the CBC will be celebrating its 100th anniversary.

The Liberal Party congratulates CBC/Radio-Canada on its 75th anniversary and says to the Conservatives, “Hands off our CBC.”

* * *

[English]

UKRAINIAN DAY

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 120 years ago the first immigrants from Ukraine landed in Halifax, having endured weeks at sea on the first leg of their epic journey, migrating to begin a new life in the wilds of the Canadian prairies, the untamed wilderness and unbroken land then called the Northwest Territories.

With herculean effort and indomitable pioneer spirit they persevered, cleared land, seeded crops and built their first homes from the very sod of the land they cleared. Families grew, churches were built and communities prospered.

Today we celebrate Ukrainian Day on Parliament Hill and celebrate the heritage of those early pioneers, people of resolute, determined will like my wife's great-grandfather, John P. Taschuk, who arrived with his wife Barbara and their two sons, Elia and Theodosie.

The 1.2 million Canadians of Ukrainian ancestry today celebrate the legacy of those first Ukrainian pioneers and the trek that began 120 years ago.

[Member spoke in Ukrainian]

* * *

[Translation]

RICK HANSEN

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the 25th anniversary of the Rick Hansen Man in Motion World Tour.

Oral Questions

In 1985, Mr. Hansen set out on a 40,000 km tour in his wheelchair. For over two years, he wheeled through 34 countries on four continents. Inspired by his belief that “anything is possible”, he raised awareness around the world of the potential of people with disabilities. He raised \$26 million, and every penny went to spinal cord injury research.

Although his dream to make the world more accessible and inclusive has not come true yet, Rick Hansen has contributed greatly to improving life for people with disabilities.

This Tuesday, Mr. Hansen will be on the Hill to mark the 25th anniversary of the Rick Hansen Man in Motion World Tour. It will truly be an honour for me to meet him during that ceremony.

Congratulations on this anniversary and long live the Rick Hansen Foundation.

* * *

[English]

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about crime and gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. There are few parts of that mandate more important than protecting the most vulnerable in our society, our children.

That is why our government has taken strong action to protect Canadians from pedophiles and sexual predators. We have strengthened the national sex offender registry, the DNA databank and our criminal record check system to ensure that sex offenders do not fall through the cracks.

We have also legislated mandatory reporting of child pornography by Internet service providers, and recently, in the safe streets and communities act, we proposed mandatory minimum sentences for those who commit sexual offences against children as well as an end to the shameful practice of allowing pardons for child molesters.

Shamefully, the opposition has obstructed these measures. I call on the NDP to start putting the rights of—

The Speaker: The hon. member is out of time.

Oral questions, the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

TURKEY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all members of the House share the grief and pain of the Turkish people following Sunday's earthquake.

Can the government provide an update on the situation, on the assistance that is available to Canadian citizens in Turkey, and on how Canada can help if asked to do so by the Turkish government?

Oral Questions

•(1420)

[English]

Can the government give us an update on Canada's response following the earthquake in Turkey?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like all Canadians, this government shares concern with the events in Turkey and the recent earthquake. As members know, the Canadian government has at its disposal certain assets and resources that can be deployed to assist if we receive a request. As of this point in time, we have not yet received a request from the Turkish government for such assistance, but we are fortunate that we are in a position to be able to respond if necessary.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 saga continues. First we had delays and cost overruns; now the technical difficulties are mounting. We learned today that these fighter jets will be delivered to Canada without communications equipment that functions in the Arctic. That is really something. Pilots of military aircraft operating in the Arctic primarily use satellite communications, but that does not work with the F-35s.

How can this government continue to justify the F-35s?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are going with the F-35 because it is the result of a competitive process that was carried out.

[English]

We are proposing to deliver to Canadian Forces the resources and equipment it needs to be able to protect Canadian sovereignty and security and to ensure that our defences are strong. The F-35 will have all the capabilities necessary to do so, including that primary, critically important mission of ensuring our northern sovereignty is protected.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at what costs? This is incredible. The F-35s Canada is buying cannot be refuelled mid-air with existing air force equipment, and they cannot land on short runways in Canada's north. Now we learn that our brave pilots will not be able to communicate while patrolling our Arctic airspace. Can members believe this?

What will happen to "the True North strong and free" if we buy a jet that cannot operate in the Arctic?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition asked if I can believe that, and the answer is "no". I cannot believe a single thing she said in that question, because those statements are all false. The reality is that we are delivering to our air force the resources it needs to do the best possible job. It will have capabilities that will be state of the art, the only fifth generation fighter of its kind.

We are going to ensure the air force can do the job that the opposition would rather it did not do.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the list of flaws with the F-35 is a long one. It includes bulkhead cracks, airflow problems, poor parts reliability, wing roll-off issues, drive shaft stretching and compressing, actuators burning too fast, defective lift fan, clutch and generator problems. The F-35s cannot even land on our short Arctic runways or communicate in the Canadian north, and the price tag per plane is double the government's claim.

Is the associate minister still planning on buying 65 of these things?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is a stretch of credibility is that the member opposite and his party, on every occasion, take every chance they can to try to denigrate the efforts of this government to invest in the Canadian Forces.

With respect to the F-35, as was just stated, this is a state-of-the-art fifth generation aircraft that will provide us sovereignty in our north and the ability to be interoperable with our important partners, the United States of America and other partners within this program. The F-35 is the best plane for the best pilots in the Canadian air force.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no logical or reasonable explanation for the government's inflexibility on the F-35s. The government is stubbornly awarding a \$30 billion contract for these jets without any kind of framework or bidding process. Not only was the process not transparent, but we now learn that the jets do not even work in the north.

Will Conservatives now admit that \$150 million per piece is a bit expensive for a plane that does not even work?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the premise of the member's question is completely false, including the cost of this aircraft, which is \$9 billion.

With respect to the operational requirements for communications in the north, this aircraft will have state of the art communications. We will not be taking receipt of the aircraft for another five years. We are working closely with the F-35 partners within the consortium to see that it has all of the operational capability for the 21st century.

•(1425)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the government House leader and the Minister of National Defence, one is inclined to ask the question, exactly what new piece of information will it take for the government to realize that an open tendering process is now required to make sure we get the best possible plane at the best possible price?

I would say in praise of the Minister of National Defence that the process that was run on shipbuilding was tremendous. Why not do the same thing for the F-35s?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member himself should know, there was a competitive process that resulted in the selection of the F-35. If he believes that process is deficient, that is a criticism of his own party which ran that process.

We acknowledge that the processes we are developing now made improvements and enhancements, but I can say that disrupting an already tendered process midstream is no way to create confidence among our military and among those who wish to bid for contracts. Part of playing by the rules is that one actually has to follow the rules once they are set.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are actually going to be able to have a discussion about facts. The government House leader's description of the process prior to the Harper government coming into office is in fact not correct.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I think the hon. member caught his mistake and I know he will refrain from using proper names.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, a fatal technical error on my part; I should say the reactionary government which took office in 2006.

The fact is, nothing in that process in which Canada participated required Canada to buy a single jet at any price whatsoever. That is the truth, and the government House leader knows it. He is raising a completely bogus argument when he talks about breaking a contract. There is no contract to break.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it may be that the leader of the third party is reaching back into his old days with another party and that he does not want to see a contract to purchase any aircraft.

The fact is the process had commenced, a process that commenced under the Liberal government which resulted in the selection of a preferred piece of equipment for the Canadian armed forces, the F-35, and that process set the path. We are continuing on that path and working with the suppliers to ensure that our forces have the very best equipment possible to meet our needs, including that of defending Arctic sovereignty.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was a member of a different party in 2001. Allow me to simply ask a question, once again. The fact is that the Government of the Netherlands, other European governments, the Japanese and the Koreans have all made different arrangements with the suppliers of this aircraft. Our problem is that the government is taking an obstinate, ideological position when it has another opportunity. It demonstrated last week that we can have a competitive system.

Why—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the choice that has been made for the F-35 to assist our military and provide the forces the equipment they need. We are also very proud that at this

time when we are trying to deliver economic benefits, jobs and economic growth, including to important regions like Toronto and Montreal, we are able to do so through the benefits that are coming from this program. We are going to have jobs created in those areas in the state-of-the-art aerospace industry. That is something the member would have us put to a halt and kill those jobs. We will not killed those jobs. We want to see jobs and economic growth for all Canadians.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the government plans a fire sale of military land, but it has not said what bases are on the line. This has left troops across the country, and the community jobs they support, wondering if they are on the chopping block. Soldiers, their families and communities deserve some transparency.

How many bases will close and how many jobs will be lost? How will these decisions be made, and will communities have a say? Canadians deserve answers, and they deserve them now.

• (1430)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Hamilton Centre for his first question in his new portfolio.

The reality is that our government has made historic investments in the Canadian Forces across the board in all four pillars, whether it be in equipment, infrastructure, personnel, or readiness. The only person speculating on the closure of bases, perhaps besides the member himself, is a Liberal senator.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that avoids the question. Is the minister prepared to stand up right now and say that there is absolutely no truth to any of the news articles out there, and that no bases are going to close and no jobs are going to be lost?

If the minister can stand in his place and give this country that assurance, then yes, the issue will go away. If not, it will do anything but going away.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the feigned indignation of the member. However, as I said, the only person that is rattling the nerves of the Canadian Forces is the member himself and now Liberal senators.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, 1,700 employees and their families are counting on CFB Bagotville to secure their future within the Canadian Forces.

The troops in Bagotville have served their country remarkably well, and I am very proud of them. The base is one of the largest employers in the region and injects over \$125 million a year into the economy.

These families are worried about their future. Will this government tell them exactly what to expect from the additional budget cuts? Our troops deserve more respect than this.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what members of the Canadian Forces, their families and those who work in the Department of National Defence can expect is what they have seen under the now five and a half years of a Conservative government, and that is historic investments across the board, support for them and their families, the services and equipment that they need.

If the member opposite and his party were in power, we know it would be a much different story.

[Translation]

Ms. Élane Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 7,000 employees of CFB Valcartier are also wondering what the future holds for them.

Valcartier is home to the 5 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group, the largest operational formation in Quebec and the only francophone brigade in Canada. It injects over half a billion dollars a year into the economy.

Will this government reassure the troops, their families and the community by promising not to make any cuts to the Valcartier base?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the historic contribution of the Royal 22nd Regiment, which is based in Valcartier.

[English]

What they, their families and the military across the country can expect is further support from this government. We know that the NDP members opposite voted consistently against every effort we have made to augment all services, equipment and personnel within the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, CFB Esquimalt's military forces continue to serve our country with honour, like the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The chair needs to be able to hear the question. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, this includes the HMCS *Ottawa*, which recently returned from a four-month tour of duty in the Asia-Pacific region.

At the same time, this base provides hundreds of millions of dollars of economic benefits in our community. It provides jobs for 4,000 military families and more than 2,000 civilian families. These Vancouver Island families need reassurance today.

Can the minister tell us today that none of these crucial jobs at CFB Esquimalt will be cut through some reckless fire sale by the Conservatives?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite and all members here today that the Conservative government will continue to make historic investments in the Canadian Forces. That is what the Canada first defence strategy was all about. That is what the decision to pursue these major procurements, whether it be for the army, navy, air force, or special forces, is about. We have seen historic growth in

terms of the numbers, capability and readiness. That has been on full display in places like Afghanistan and during the mission in Libya.

We know for certain that had the members opposite in the NDP had their way, none of those investments would have happened.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, CFB Goose Bay contributes over \$75 million to Newfoundland and Labrador's GDP, and 5 Wing Goose Bay has served our country with distinction in a strategic northern location. Shutting down this base would devastate the economy of central Labrador.

Can the minister come clean and tell us whether the government will axe this major contributor to the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador, or will it keep its promise to establish a rapid reaction battalion in Goose Bay with over 600 troops?

● (1435)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new member from Newfoundland and Labrador who is now sitting as part of the federal cabinet in the Conservative government has made incredible efforts to ensure that we continue to make these historic investments both in Gander and Goose Bay, and across the country. We will continue to do so.

It must be hypocrisy day for the NDP when it comes to the military.

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*[Translation]***SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY**

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, workers and their families, particularly those from Quebec City's south shore, are in limbo. The Davie shipbuilding company, one of the Quebec City region's economic drivers, still does not have an answer about its future.

Since the main contracts were announced last week, when does the minister intend to begin the bidding process for the remaining \$2 billion?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the national shipbuilding strategy will benefit all regions of Canada, including Quebec.

As far as Davie shipyards are concerned, as the member knows, there are over 116 smaller ships that have yet to be tendered. Davie is welcome to compete for those contracts.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all we want to know is whether the government is going to speed up the bidding process for these contracts. This government needs to give Quebec families some answers. Can Davie, like other shipbuilding companies, expect to receive contracts? Canada's shipyards need stability in order to ensure their growth. That is the very premise of the national procurement strategy.

Can this government tell us its plan for supporting the shipyards that have not been awarded any contracts?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the important parts of the strategy is dealing with the boom and bust aspect of the shipbuilding and marine industry to which the member is referring. Of course having this long-term strategy does that, because apart from the two large packages that were awarded last week, as I said, there are contracts for 116 smaller ships, as well as \$500 million to \$600 million of maintenance work ongoing. Any shipyards outside of the two that won are welcome to bid on those.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, \$2 billion in shipbuilding contracts have yet to be awarded. The Davie shipyard is in the process of restarting operations. Thousands of direct and indirect jobs in the Quebec City area are at stake, and other shipyards in the country are in the same situation. Last week, the member for Lévis—Bellechasse was strangely silent on this topic. Shipyards that did not receive contracts are waiting.

My question is simple: when will this government start the bidding process for granting the \$2 billion?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is a national strategy that helps regions in all parts of the country.

There are expected to be 15,000 jobs created. That is just in direct jobs. We should look at the indirect opportunities for the manufacturing sector and shipyards across the country. The member has to remember that it is not just Davie, there are shipyards in every region of this country that will benefit from this strategy.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the government kills the Canadian Wheat Board single desk, it could also kill Canada's brand in global grain markets.

Private companies will no doubt try to gather up the Wheat Board's \$6 billion in annual sales to enhance shareholder value for their owners, not for farmers. Then major foreign grain corporations are likely to come calling with takeover bids.

Why does the government think farmers are better off with all key decisions about Canadian grain being made in Minneapolis, Chicago or Kansas City?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the one thing I can guarantee to the member for Wascana is that if we accept the status quo and stay where we are, that is exactly what will happen, a doomsday scenario.

What we are doing is moving ahead with marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers. They will now have the ability to choose whom they market through. They are the ones, the stewards of the land, who guarantee the quality and consistency of supply. They will continue to do that. The line companies, whether they are an American, British or European multinational or a Canadian multinational like Viterra, which is global in scope, will continue to market that top-quality grain produced by our farmers.

• (1440)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a year ago the government was forced to reverse itself on potash. The government was originally in favour of selling off the industry, but flipped.

In the wake of that confusion, the government promised a new set of takeover rules, greater clarity on net benefit, more transparency, enforceable conditions, a precise definition of strategic asset, but nothing has been produced so far.

If a big U.S. grain corporation decides to go after, say, Viterra, does the government plan to declare the Canadian grain business a strategic asset?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian farming sector across the board is a tremendous Canadian asset. We have seen growth in canola, in special crops—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. There is far too much conversation going on during the answers to the questions being posed. Let us let the minister answer the question.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, if the member for Wascana and his party had any answers for farmers, they might have actually elected a couple over there. That did not happen. That is why this government is very strong and very solid with Canadian farmers and with the Canadian farm sector, coast to coast to coast. We will continue to do that.

We know the great work that Canadian farmers do. We know it is global in scope. We know that our processors can step up and produce as well using that quality as a basis. We will continue to support Canadian farmers, in spite of those Liberals.

*Oral Questions***FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is gutting science from DFO. This comes at a time when a dreaded virus has been found in B.C. salmon stocks, a virus which wiped out 70% of farmed stocks in Chile. Science is needed more than ever to ensure the health and conservation of our fish stocks.

Why does the government insist on putting Canada's fish stocks and our growing aquaculture industry at even greater risk by slashing science from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing is further from the truth. The DFO and this government have made huge investments in science over the course of the last number of years, since 2006, some \$30 million, as an example, including upgrades to 13 laboratories in sites across the country and \$36 million to construct those new science vessels.

In terms of the ISA, the ISA issue on the west coast is concerning. However, at this time, there have been no reported findings that at all make this finding conclusive.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's ongoing incompetence in trade negotiations is once again on display. After failing to obtain an exemption to buy American rules and opening the door to Europe's big pharma, now we learn that while Conservatives pretend to deal with border thickening, Canadians will now be charged every time they cross the U.S. border.

What is the government's explanation for its latest failure at the bargaining table?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the passage of the three new free trade agreements with the U.S., which include Colombia, Panama and Korea, is a clear recognition, which we applaud, by the U.S. lawmakers that free and open trade is the best way to create jobs and economic growth.

We are, however, disappointed that the bill includes the removal of the \$5.50 tax exemption on air and sea passengers, not on all passengers, arriving to the United States from Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean. We would hope the Americans recognize the error of their ways and that free and open trade is the way out of this economic depression, not into it.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that Canadians breathed a sigh of relief when they heard that confidence from the parliamentary secretary.

When it comes to defending the interests of Canadians, Conservatives have shown they cannot be trusted: the IRS pursuing law-abiding Canadians, the EU trade deal that lays us open to big pharma, buy America provisions that make a mockery of trade reciprocity, and now a surcharge on Canadians travelling to the U.S.

When will the government abandon the platitudes and empty promises and get to work protecting the interests of Canadians?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that free, fair and open trade is good for Canadians and is good for the rest of the world.

I wish the NDP member from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and his colleagues would just once in this place stand on their feet, support Canadian business, support Canadian workers and vote for free trade agreements, because it will help. It will provide jobs and opportunity.

You might want to listen to your own rhetoric sometime.

• (1445)

The Speaker: The member knows to direct comments to the Chair, not directly to his colleagues.

* * *

SENIORS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many experts have warned that tax-free savings accounts will not help poor seniors who have little income to save. The wealthy seniors can salt away hundreds of thousands in TFSA's and still receive the guaranteed income supplement.

New Democrats proposed a better plan to increase the GIS and raise every senior out of poverty, but those Conservatives refused. They ignored those in need and instead chose another subsidy for their friends.

When will they ever get their priorities straight?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP does not like lower taxes, does not like the tax-free savings account, voted against the tax-free savings account and voted against lower taxes. However, Canadians like the tax-free savings account, and I will tell members how much they like it. There were 6.7 million tax-free savings accounts in Canada as of the end of December. That is a lot of rich friends.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a tax expert has confirmed that under the current rules, a senior could have up to \$1 million in a TFSA and still be entitled to the guaranteed income supplement, a pension that is meant for seniors living below the poverty line.

Instead of helping seniors in need, TFSA's will redirect \$4 billion to the richest seniors.

Oral Questions

Is that really the government's solution to helping less fortunate seniors live in dignity?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the member opposite to have a look at the law with respect to the tax-free savings account and also the facts. In the tax-free savings account legislation, which her party voted against, we ensured protection for modest-and low-income Canadians. That was to ensure they could afford the tax-free savings account. As I say, 6.7 million accounts were opened, three-quarters of them by individuals in the two lowest tax brackets.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister will be representing Canada at the upcoming APEC, Commonwealth and G20 summits to help deal with today's global economic challenges and to promote Canada's economy, the NDP is busy talking down the Canadian economy. In a period of global economic turbulence, the NDP wants to impose more and more taxes on Canadians: a \$10 billion tax hike on businesses, a GST hike, a personal income tax hike, a new tax on everyday financial transactions, and the list goes on and on.

Could the Minister of Finance explain how our government is taking a leadership role on the world stage in response to today's global economic challenges?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): We are representing Canada proudly, Mr. Speaker, by leading by example, including the strongest financial system in the world, the lowest debt to GDP ratio in the G7, the best job growth in the G7, the best place to invest in the G7. We are leading with the next phase of Canada's economic action plan and lowering taxes to create jobs. We are leading with a prudent plan to return to balanced budgets and surpluses. Now it is time for European leaders to act quickly with strong, decisive and united leadership.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats are proud to stand with the people of Libya and people across the entire Arab region as they demand rights that Canadians hold to be universal. Canada has a key role to play in fostering democratic development.

In 2008 Conservatives promised to create a democratic development institute. Why has the government broken this promise just when the centre is needed most of all?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the key element of the foreign policy of this government is promotion of democracy. That is what we are doing in Libya. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was there.

With Mr. Gadhafi gone, we are looking at helping Libya set up a constitution and move forward with the promotion of democracy. That remains the key element of foreign policy for this government.

● (1450)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has proudly supported Libyans in their efforts to end the tyranny of the Gadhafi regime. Support for disarmament and reconstruction is essential, but we have the skills, resources and expertise to do much more. Protecting human rights is a key goal of the UN support mission in Libya and an essential part of the transition to democracy.

Is the government prepared to work with the UN and offer its support for the independent monitoring of human rights in Libya?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really do not know where the NDP lives. The Prime Minister went to the United Nations to work with his allies for post-Libya transition and to help with democracy. The Minister of Foreign Affairs just went to Libya about two weeks ago to promote women's rights. Perhaps the NDP should look at what the record of this government is and then ask some questions that are more relevant.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is a relevant question. The hypocrisy of the government continues. It has—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Once again I would ask members to hold their applause until the end of the question and not at the beginning.

The hon. member for Nickel Belt.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy of the government continues. It heralds free trade with the European Union, yet is threatening to take the European Union to the WTO to protect big oil companies and the oil sands.

The international community is concerned about the environmental costs of the oil sands. Instead of acting to address this, the Conservatives just keep giving larger and larger subsidies to these highly profitable companies.

How many more black eyes before Conservatives finally wake up and take action on the environment?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed and amazed that the opposition is taking the side of European bureaucrats against the interests of Canadian workers, the Canadian economy and a key Canadian resource.

The European Commission would unfairly single out the oil sands without taking into account the actual GHG emissions coming from crude oil from countries like Russia, Nigeria and others, which have the same or higher levels—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Nickel Belt.
[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that answer clearly shows that the Conservative government does not understand the consequences of its inaction. The Commissioner of the Environment and a number of unions fighting to protect jobs in Alberta have called the government's plan for the oil sands inadequate.

Instead of supporting a pipeline that exports our bitumen and our jobs abroad, why does this government not address international concerns about its management of the oil sands?

[*English*]

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the EU position is unscientific and discriminatory. I have written to the EU Commission for energy and I presented Canada's strong case, as I have with several of my European counterparts.

Furthermore, if it is an objective of the EU to reduce GHG emissions, its position is also illogical since it discriminates against oil it does not import and gives a free pass to oil it does import.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week Libyans cast off more than 40 years of autocratic rule, and much of the success is owed to the women of Libya.

In keeping with this legacy of nation-building and at a recent international conference, Libyan women declared that they wanted to be talked to, not about.

In light of the recent debates about Sharia law and the rights of women, can we count on the government to support the desire of Libyan women to be part of the National Transitional Council and any future Libyan governments in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1325?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear. As I said before, human rights is the cornerstone of this government's policy, including rights for women. We made that very clear when the Minister of Foreign Affairs was in Libya.

I can assure the member that we will stand up for those rights when we talk to the NTC as it moves ahead post-Gadhafi in building up its new constitution.

* * *

● (1455)

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is about to undermine public safety by getting rid of the gun registry. While the government is rushing to turn its back on its responsibility to protect the safety of Canadians, some provinces seem ready to take on that responsibility.

Will the government help provinces, such as Quebec, that might try to create their own gun control system? Will the government give

them the data already in the registry? Second, will the government allow police across the country to continue consulting the data already in the registry?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have consistently opposed this wasteful, ineffective measure that does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Our government has strongly and consistently opposed the prior Liberal government's \$2 billion boondoggle.

Provincial governments are free to proceed as they wish, but we will not assist in setting up another registry. Records held by the Canadian firearms program will not be shared with the provinces.

* * *

G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Muskoka minister said:

If I was the decision maker, if I had set up a parallel process...and created a situation where the auditor-general did not know...I'd be resigning right now and turning myself into the local police office.

However, the minister managed applications from his constituency office. He evaded the AG and evaded access to information laws.

Will he stand now and take responsibility, or is he too busy looking for the address of the Huntsville police department?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts still have not changed. The Auditor General's appearance at committee confirmed that the issue has been totally aired. We have said that we have accepted the Auditor General's recommendation, so I do not know what the problem is.

I will join the Minister of Finance and talk about some good news. The good news is that every dollar was accounted for. All 32 projects came in under budget. The program itself was under-spent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the spokespeople may change, but the broken record sounds the same.

Oral Questions

We know that the minister was involved in 32 projects, that he implemented a parallel process that was hidden from the Auditor General and administered from his constituency office, and that he did not submit a single document to the Auditor General even though senior federal officials were at the meetings. After being promised transparency and openness, Canadians are disappointed and for good reason.

When we will have a complete parliamentary investigation to shed some light on all the abuses of ethical and financial trust involved in the G8 funding?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member. It is the same old story. The facts have not changed. How many times do I have to tell him that the facts have not changed?

The Auditor General has aired this issue thoroughly. What else can I say? She came in front of the committee and said this very clearly. If he were a member of the committee, he would have known what the Auditor General said. I will repeat again that the facts have not changed. The answers will remain the same.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Egypt continues to deteriorate for Coptic Christians. Copts, who make up 10% to 15% of the population in Egypt, are being targeted and persecuted for ethnic and religious reasons by hateful enemies. Countless murders of Copts have been reported in Cairo and across Egypt, and many others are going unreported.

My question is for the minister. What is our government doing to address this unprecedented violence toward the largest religious minority in the region?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I met with some 30 leaders of Canada's Coptic community to express Canada's solidarity with that community, particularly their loved ones in Egypt, to express once more this government's condemnation of the violence, particularly that by, apparently, members of the Egyptian military two weeks ago, killing innocent Coptic civilians.

The Prime Minister led the inclusion of an expression of concern about vulnerable religious minorities in the Arab Spring declaration of the G8 at Deauville. We have called upon the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate the most recent killings. We are creating an office for religious freedom to, in the words of the Prime Minister, make the promotion of religious freedom a key pillar of Canadian foreign policy.

We will always stand in solidarity with those who face this kind of persecution.

• (1500)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been five full months since the terrible flooding in Manitoba and the evacuation of the first nations. The community of Lake St. Martin First Nation is still devastated. There were 727 citizens evacuated, most still occupying rooms spread across six hotels in downtown Winnipeg at a cost of \$1 million per week. Children are not in permanent schools and families have no hope in sight.

Will the minister commit today to rebuild Lake St. Martin First Nation on the higher ground that is right next to that community?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes, Lake St. Martin is a very tragic story and we know that the community has been relocated. The children are now getting their schooling and we are working with the Province of Manitoba. I sent a special representative to look into the situation. We will be working with the province and looking at a relocation of the community.

* * *

CANADIAN AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are again planning to dismantle the Avro Arrow, this time in Downsview, Ontario, and literally cutting it apart with torches, just like in 1959.

The Air and Space Museum has been evicted and is on a growing list of our heritage buildings facing the Conservative government's wrecking ball.

Last week, Rob Cohen, the CEO of the museum, said, "It is all pass the buck politics". When will the Conservatives stop passing the buck and step in to save this historic museum?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, even though it is called the Canadian Air and Space Museum, it is, in fact, a private museum and a private collection. The museum had a fundraising campaign, but it was not as successful as it had hoped it would be. This was a decision by Downsview.

The museum has not been paying its bills and it has not been paying the taxes, I understand. This was a responsible decision made by Downsview and by the Department of Public Works.

I have asked my department to work with our national museums and to ask the management of that museum what in their collection they would like to save, and to work with the government to make some of the collection available to some of our national museums.

We are showing leadership, both to the museum and to the collection, but also to taxpayers.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about the situation in Pakistan.

Routine Proceedings

While that country was recovering from the 2010 floods, monsoon rains, which began in August, have battered Balochistan and Sindh provinces.

Could the Minister of International Cooperation please inform the House how Canada is responding to pleas for relief?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, Pakistan is once again suffering from a flood this year. Last year, when I visited Sindh province, I saw how floods can devastate families and children.

Canada did its part last year and will do so again, with \$11 million this year to help Pakistan.

Canadians know that our government will ensure that victims get the food, clean water and health care they need.

* * *

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian consumers need protection from the predatory practices of the banks and credit card companies.

Excessive interest rates and high ATM fees hit consumers' wallets, while skyrocketing merchant fees make prices higher in Canada than our neighbours to the south, yet the Minister of Finance and the approach of the government have little effect.

Will the minister now admit that his approach is not working and agree to pass binding legislation to protect Canadian families, as outlined in the NDP motion passed by this House in 2009?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member probably knows, one of the Senate committees has been asked by me, in my capacity as Minister of Finance, to have a look at cross-border pricing.

The committee is already hearing witnesses. I appeared before the committee last week. I look forward to the Senate committee reporting back with the facts. I would be happy to share those facts with the hon. member.

* * *

● (1505)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question today for the Prime Minister is in relation to the fact that in the next few days we will be seeing the Canadian office of the International Association of Firefighters, representing 22,000 Canadian professional firefighters, on Parliament Hill asking us for three specific things.

They are looking for a national public safety officer compensation benefit, for access to vaccines and anti-virals in the case of a flu pandemic and for changes to national building codes to make it safer for them when they do their job.

Will government members commit that we can get this done for our firefighters?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with the firefighters on a number of issues and we continue to look forward to working with them.

I might point out the specific example that our government brought in with respect to hazardous materials and the moneys we paid in that respect to help train the trainers. We also brought forward the tax credit for volunteer firefighters, which the opposition parties voted against, which was very unfortunate.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a certificate of nomination, with biographical notes, for the proposed appointment of Michael Ferguson as Auditor General of Canada. I request that the nomination be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

* * *

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-335, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan (deductions — disabled child).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will briefly describe the intention of this bill. As members know, a lot of amendments are proposed in this House regarding the Canada pension plan, employment insurance, old age security and the like. It is a very complex formula to provide people benefits once they reach 65 years of age or 60 if they choose to do so.

This bill would change the formula slightly to allow people to get credit for the years they were not working because they were looking after a disabled child. The way to do that through the tax system is through tax benefits they receive by looking after a disabled child in the earlier years of life, maybe in their 30s or 40s. We would ensure they would not be penalized for the years they missed, once they apply for their Canada pension plan at age 65. I think that would be a small change in the formula but the principle is sound, it is beneficial for them and substantial for people who are unable to work because, unfortunately, they must look after a child who is disabled.

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

* * *

EGYPT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the consultation continues but I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following. I move:

Routine Proceedings

That a take note debate on the subject of the ongoing violence and vicious attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt, and their institutions, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1 take place on Thursday, October 27, and;

notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, when the House begins the said proceedings, no quorum calls, requests for unanimous consent or dilatory motions shall be received by the Speaker and; any member rising to speak during debate may indicate to the Speaker that he or she will be dividing his or her time with another member.

● (1510)

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the 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)

* * *

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from people all over Ontario who are concerned about the proposed mega-quarry, in Melancthon Township in Dufferin County, which is approximately 2,300 acres.

The petitioners are concerned by a number of things, one of which is that the proposed mega-quarry would remove from production some of Ontario's best farmland. They are asking that the Government of Canada conduct an environmental assessment under the authority of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act on the proposed Highland Companies' mega-quarry development.

RAILWAY SAFETY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition calling on the government to amend the Railway Safety Act to require that areas with high pedestrian volume, where trains are known to dim or extinguish their headlights, be fitted with large street lamps, powered by solar energy and operated by motion detector.

This petition is in response to a terrible accident that took place almost a year ago in Montreal around the tracks under the Turcot exchange where, unfortunately, three wonderful, talented young men were killed and two, fortunately, escaped. Apparently the lights were dimmed at that time.

There needs to be a way to ensure these areas are properly lit when a train is on its way so that, if there are people in the vicinity, they will be alerted to the fact that danger is coming.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians from all across Canada who call upon Parliament to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known. They point out that more Canadians now die from asbestos than all other occupational and industrial causes combined

and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world.

The petitioners also point out that Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use. Therefore, they call upon the Government of Canada to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities in which they live, to end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and abroad, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by many western Canadian grain and barley farmers, the very farmers to whom the government is currently refusing to listen. They are concerned with the government's ideological plan to kill the Canadian Wheat Board without first holding a plebiscite of its membership as it is required to do by section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

Western Canadian farmers' livelihoods are at risk should they lose the clout of the Canadian Wheat Board to set the best price for their grain, negotiate fair treatment and prices from the railways, and lower transportation costs among the many services it provides.

The petitioners demand that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food honour their wishes as expressed democratically through a plebiscite. As members know, the government failed to hold a plebiscite. As a result, the farmers held their own plebiscite and a full 62% of wheat farmers and 51% of barley farmers asked that the government maintain the single-desk system. This petition asks the government to honour their wishes.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of my constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country to table a petition asking the Government of Canada to publicly condemn the Chinese communist regime's illegal persecution of the practitioners of Falun Gong and help rescue the listed family members of Canadians who are incarcerated in China simply for their belief in the Falun Gong faith.

● (1515)

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition with regard to the Canadian Wheat Board.

The livelihoods of western Canadian farmers are at risk should they lose the clout of the Canadian Wheat board to set the best price for their grain, negotiate fair treatment from the railways, lower transportation costs, and lose the many other services it provides.

Speaker's Ruling

The petitioners demand that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food honour their wishes as expressed democratically through a plebiscite. These wonderful prairie individuals want the government to listen to what the prairie farmers actually want.

* * *

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.

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt, however, the House has granted consent for a take note debate on the subject on Thursday.

The member for Scarborough—Agincourt is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. There was some confusion as to the date that the emergency take note debate would take place. Last week the House unanimously agreed that we needed to move on the issue and the government was given marching orders, yet last weekend there was a disagreement as to when the debate would be held. There was a general consensus that the debate would take place on Monday. However, now it is to take place on Thursday.

Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my request. However, I want the House to know that we are ready for the debate to take place tonight and unfortunately the government is not.

The Speaker: There is no need to engage in debate on this. The House did not grant unanimous consent last week for a take note debate to take place tonight. However, it did grant consent today for that to take place on Thursday. It is a simple matter in the eyes of the chair.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, there was consent and the parties talked about the debate taking place Monday night. Perhaps you were not privy to that information but there are members who were.

The Speaker: The Chair can only comment on things that happen within the chamber in these types of instances.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

LEGISLATION TO REORGANIZE THE CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD—
SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on October 18, 2011 by the member for Malpeque concerning the admissibility of Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the member for having raised this matter, as well as the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the

Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House, and the members for Guelph and Winnipeg North for their interventions.

[*English*]

In raising his question of privilege, the member for Malpeque stated that the government had violated a provision of an existing statute by having introduced Bill C-18 without having previously allowed grain producers to vote on any changes to the structure and mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board as is required in section 47.1 of the existing Canadian Wheat Board Act.

In doing so, he claimed:

...my privileges have been violated due to the expectation that I will be required to engage in and cast a vote upon legislation that begins from the premise of a deliberate and overt violation of statutes passed by the House with the expectation that those provisions would be respected most of all by members of the House.

[*Translation*]

The member for Malpeque explained that he was not asking the Speaker to rule on the legality of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act, but rather whether his privileges were violated as a result of the government introducing legislation he claimed contravened an existing statute passed by Parliament.

The government House leader countered that the Chair was in fact being asked to make a ruling on a matter of law by interpreting provisions of a statute, despite the well-established practice that it is not for the Chair to rule on legal or constitutional matters.

[*English*]

He also challenged the member for Malpeque's contention that section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act rendered the consideration of Bill C-18 unlawful, arguing that such an interpretation was tantamount to asserting that the enactment of a statute could fetter the House's consideration of future legislation.

He suggested it:

...would result in a delegation of the ability of this Parliament to make decisions to individuals outside of...Parliament, effectively giving them the power to legislate the law of this land rather than Parliament—

He emphasized that Parliament is free to consider whatever legislation it sees fit, including legislation to amend existing statutes.

In addressing this very point, Peter Hogg's *Constitutional Law of Canada*, Fifth Edition, Volume 1, on page 352, notes:

Not only may the Parliament or a Legislature, acting within its allotted sphere of competence, make any law it chooses, it may repeal any of its earlier laws. Even if the Parliament or Legislature purported to provide that a particular law was not to be repealed or altered, this provision would not be effective to prevent a future Parliament or Legislature from repealing or amending the "protected" law.

This citation rightfully underscores Parliament's continued right to legislate.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

The government House leader also spoke to the role of the Speaker in preparing rulings, and quoted from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, at page 261. For the benefit of the House, I would like to cite the full passage, which reads:

Finally, while Speakers must take the Constitution and statutes into account when preparing a ruling, numerous Speakers have explained that it is not up to the Speaker to rule on the “constitutionality” or “legality” of measures before the House.

[English]

The footnote to this citation, footnote 75 on page 261, refers to an April 9, 1991 ruling by Speaker Fraser at pages 19233 and 19234 of *Debates*, in which the Speaker ruled that the Chair must avoid interpreting, even indirectly, the Constitution, or a statute. This is a well-entrenched practice that remains in force today and to which I alluded when this matter was first raised on October 18, 2011.

[Translation]

Accordingly, it is important to delineate clearly between interpreting legal provisions of statutes—which is not within the purview of the Chair—and ensuring the soundness of the procedures and practices of the House when considering legislation—which, of course, is the role of the Chair.

[English]

The hon. member for Malpeque has offered the House his interpretation of a law, in this case section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. He has concluded that the government has not respected its provisions and is therefore precluded from proceeding with Bill C-18. For my part, like my predecessors, when faced with similar situations, I must decline to follow the hon. member's example. It is not for the Chair to interpret the meaning of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. I have confined my review of the matter to its purely procedural aspects.

Having carefully reviewed the submissions on this matter, I must conclude that, while the member for Malpeque may feel aggrieved by the government's approach and by its introduction of Bill C-18, there has been no evidence offered that the government's actions in this case have in any way undermined the ability of the member to fulfill his parliamentary functions.

Therefore, the Chair cannot find that either the introduction of Bill C-18 or the fact that members are being asked to consider the bill constitutes a *prima facie* question of privilege.

[Translation]

I thank all members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

MARKETING FREEDOM FOR GRAIN FARMERS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-18, an Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-18. However, I am disheartened by the method the government is using to kill the Canadian Wheat Board and deny farmers their legitimate say in the process. This

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attack on a Canadian institution that was placed under farmer control in 1997 I believe is unprecedented in Canadian history.

We see many countries around the world moving to democracy, some as a result of support received from the Canadian military, yet here at home we see the very principle of democracy being taken away under the iron fist of this regime. The government is violating a law passed in Parliament. It is denying farmers the right to a vote that was established in law at one point in time as well as eliminating the ability to use access to information a little further down the road. Also, the minister, and his parliamentary secretary specifically, have violated their oaths of office. As well, there has been an unbelievable amount of misinformation and propaganda about the Canadian Wheat Board and its farmer-elected directors by this particular regime.

For quite a while we have seen this taking place by the government. Since it came into power in 2006, it has set out on a concerted attack against the board.

It fired directors who were appointed by the previous government specifically to further the efforts of primary producers around the world. They were experts in international law and marketing. They were replaced by government toadies whose objective in life was to destroy the board while working within it.

Against the wishes of the Canadian Wheat Board's elected board of directors, the government fired its former CEO, Adrian Meisner, who was working on the farmers' behalf. It put a gag order on the Wheat Board.

When farmers were to elect directors to the Wheat Board's board of directors, in every election the constituency offices of government members were used to spread propaganda against the Wheat Board in an effort to have anti-board directors elected. This failed every time because eight out of ten of the directors were in fact pro board.

If this was happening anywhere else in the world, some would suggest that we send in the military. That is how I feel about it.

These actions go well beyond the Wheat Board. Canadians should be concerned. This has happened to one law in one institution using the methods by which the government operates. However, the denial of legitimate rights to one group is an infringement on the rights of all.

I just cannot imagine how backbenchers in that party can sit there and not speak up. I asked a question of the member for Crowfoot earlier today as to why he does not quote those who are opposed to what the government is doing. We are receiving many calls from producers who tell us that the response they have received from Conservative members is that there is a difference in ideology and that they do not want to talk to them. Elected members of Parliament have a responsibility to all constituents, not just to the Prime Minister who seems to be their boss and is destroying the Canadian Wheat Board based on ideology.

In this instance, we are talking about orderly marketing. The same principles that allow for orderly marketing, i.e., through the Canadian Wheat Board's function, make supply management possible.

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● (1525)

The same principles that allow single desk marketing to function on the Prairies are the same principles that apply in terms of maple syrup and beef in the province of Quebec. A similar principle applies to collective bargaining for unions.

In this case, the government is denying the rights of the majority, as was clearly spelled out in the vote that was held by the Canadian Wheat Board itself. Eight out of ten of the farm-elected directors oppose what the government is doing and 62% of producers oppose what the government is doing. What I find amazing is that others, like supply management groups, fail to speak out in the Wheat Board's defence.

I am going to ask this very directly. Is it the fear of the jackboots approval of the government that makes others voiceless in this country? Is it the fear that if supply management speaks out against what the government is doing to the Canadian Wheat Board, it will feel the wrath of the government? Where is the farm leadership in terms of support of the Wheat Board? Supply management tells us privately that it supports orderly marketing and opposes what the government is doing, but it fails to speak out.

My question to the backbenchers over there is this. When they have an issue or a law that they are concerned about, who will stand up for them when their time comes and the government, based on ideology, wants to target them rather than somebody else?

The minister in this case is selling out to United States grain interests. What is he doing? What is the minister actually doing for Canadian farmers? Let us again look specifically at the bill. Bill C-18 begins from the premise of denying farmers their legal right to determine their own future. If the government believed it had the support of the majority of farmers, a plebiscite would have been held under section 47.1, as the legislation demands.

Who is the Minister of Agriculture really working for? Bear in mind that United States grain interests have accused the Canadian Wheat Board under United States and international trade laws of trading unfairly on 14 different occasions. The United States has lost every time. I submit that the Minister of Agriculture is serving up the Canadian Wheat Board to those United States interests on a silver platter.

An economist working with the office of the chief economist of the U.S. department of agriculture, with regard to the United States' efforts to challenge the Wheat Board, stated the following:

The U.S. wheat industry has persistently claimed that the CWB is able to undercut commercially offered export prices in select markets or sell higher-quality wheat at discounted prices, but can offer only limited anecdotal evidence to support those claims.

In fact, it has no claims.

The Canadian Wheat Board sells as a single desk seller and prevents the deterioration of the lowest sellers setting the price and through the Canadian Wheat Board, it is the highest seller, maximizing returns in the marketplace back to primary producers. The Canadian Wheat Board has shown that time and time again, but the minister is selling out to United States interests and farmers will be the losers.

In a May 26, 2011 statement supporting the elimination of the CWB, the United States wheat associates acknowledged the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board could, "initially mean more Canadian wheat moving to parts of the United States... However, the huge price incentive that currently drives that desire would dissipate very quickly". The president of the United States wheat associates had this to say on an earlier occasion on the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board, "There could be opportunities created for U.S. farmers to access markets in Canada and we can access the transportation systems as well".

Further, a study prepared for United States Senator Kent Conrad stated, "If the CWB's single desk authority is eliminated...the United States may become more competitive in offshore markets.

● (1530)

That same report also found that by eliminating the Canadian Wheat Board:

The U.S. and Canadian markets would become more integrated without the CWB. It would be possible for multinational grain companies to buy wheat in Canada and export it from U.S. ports.

The bottom line is, clearly, this is a bill that would give advantages to American producers, takes advantages away from Canadian producers, gives advantages to the multinational grain trade, and Canadian farmers would be the losers. The government is doing that, imposing that on Canadian farmers without allowing farmers their right to vote under the law.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has made a lot about the vote that was taken, or plebiscite, I should say, by the Wheat Board. Even the Wheat Board itself admits that this should not be taken as representative of all farmers. Many farmers in my riding did not receive a ballot. This vote was not a legitimate vote.

In fact, this weekend, we took a straw poll in my riding of 20 farmers. We did not select these farmers. This was a random sample.

I wonder if the member would comment on the fact that not one of those farmers wanted to maintain the status quo. Every one of the 20 who were called wanted to have choice. That is what is happening on the ground.

That vote was not representative because many farmers did not receive a ballot who should have received a ballot.

● (1535)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. If the member really believes what he is getting in his straw polls, then why does this law and order party not abide by the laws that are on the books?

I find it amazing that the Minister of Agriculture and several colleagues, obviously with speaking notes from the PMO, stood and talked about the fact that the Canadian Wheat Board was designed in 1943 and that there have been no changes since.

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Yes, there were. In 1997, the board was changed to include 10 farmer elected directors, time at a time, and by the way it includes the director in the parliamentary secretary's riding who is pro-board. They win 8 out of 10 every time. That is 80%.

The minister has the right under the act, has the responsibility under the act, to hold a vote, and the government fails to do it.

If they are people of their convictions, then allow that vote to be held and let us see where the chips fall. We will support what producers want, if it is done by way of a legal plebiscite.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have read in *The Economist* statements that have been made about the deterioration of small farms in western Canada, along with it the deterioration of small economies in smaller towns and villages in western Canada.

Then we read in *The Wall Street Journal* how it is heralding the opportunities that dismantling Wheat Board would give large Canadian and international grain companies which would now be sucking the profits out of farmers out west and keeping them for themselves and their shareholders.

I wonder if the member for Malpeque would express any concern he might have for western Canadian small farms and communities.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that there is a concern for western farmers, western wheat and barley growers, as a result of this particular legislation.

There have been statements after statements made by grain companies, by directors of grain companies, and Viterra believes its shares are going to go up. The U. S. wheat associates is very pleased with what is happening. This is going to be a gain-gain for the grain multinationals of the world.

The Canadian Wheat Board has been the vehicle that has been willing to challenge the railways. It has been able to glean money back from the railways that goes back to primary producers. Who is going to stand up for producers against the railways when the Wheat Board is gone? It has the economic power to stand up against them. The winners will be the railways. I maintain we will see loss of producer cars and short line railways over four or five years. The international grain corporate sector is going to be gaining and the losses are going to be the primary producers.

Just who is the minister working for?

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to speak to the changes that we are making to the marketing of wheat and barley in western Canada.

The member for Malpeque, who just spoke, has had the opportunity his entire farming career to market outside of the Canadian Wheat Board because of his location in this country. Unfortunately, my constituents and my family have never had the opportunity to capitalize on market situations not only domestically but around the world and take advantage of those opportunities and put those dollars directly into their own pockets.

This has been an extremely divisive issue in my riding of Selkirk—Interlake, and a lot of that is because of the fear and smear that has been spread by the opposition and by the Wheat Board directors themselves. It is really unfortunate because we market all

sorts of other crops, like oil seeds, and we do not have these types of divisive debates over whether or not farmers have the right to sell their own products.

It is completely unacceptable that in a democracy individuals in a certain region of Canada do not have property rights over their own personal property, that they are subjected to an organization that has been empowered by the Government of Canada to take away their production and market it for them, whether they like it or not.

I have many friends who are farmers. I am a farmer myself, although I have never been a wheat farmer, and I put that out there right now. I am a cattle producer. However, my family does grow wheat and barley and other commodities.

This has been a divisive issue. I have said throughout this whole debate that some of my friends support the monopoly at the Wheat Board and some are against it. On this issue, I stand with my friends. What I mean by that is that farmers on both sides of this issue have things that are important to them from a personal perspective.

I have talked to farmers over the last several years since I have been a member of Parliament and before that when I was in farm politics for several years. I have always made the point that the Wheat Board, in its new format, has to be there for those producers who still want to collectively market their product, who want to pool their resources. This legislation would do just that.

My father and my brother are farmers. They are organic producers. Because they grow organic crops, the Wheat Board has never been a viable option for them to truly capitalize on the market opportunities that exist in the organic industry. They can sell directly their oats, their flax, their organic canola, but when it comes to wheat, they have to sell it through the Wheat Board. So, for years my father and my brother have not grown organic wheat because the premiums in the marketplace are removed from them and subjected to the pool, so they can never profit from it.

However, there is the buyback option. The member for Malpeque is going to jump in and say they can buy it back. They can buy it back at the price being offered in the marketplace. They sell it at a commodity price to the Wheat Board and then buy it back at the premium value as an organic commodity. There is absolutely no advantage of being able to move that market directly to the consumer. It is wrong.

This legislation would provide those producers in my riding and across western Canada who want to be involved in the Canadian Wheat Board with a great opportunity. The government is still going to support the new voluntary Wheat Board. The government is going to underwrite the pool accounts. The government is still going to help set initial prices. The Canadian Wheat Board fund is going to be moved over into the new voluntary Canadian Wheat Board.

The producer cars that the Wheat Board always took credit for are still going to remain with the Canadian Grain Commission. It will ensure that producer cars are available to farmers who want to ship directly.

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I am a huge fan of the Port of Churchill. Our government is going to ensure that the Port of Churchill receives up to \$5 million per year over the next five years to help it deal with any losses it may incur if there is a reduction in the volume of wheat and barley shipped through the port. More important, the Port of Churchill's future is going to depend upon the voluntary Canadian wheat board making use of that port and opening up new railway opportunities, such as the Hudson Bay rail line in northern Saskatchewan that CN Rail is now abandoning.

• (1540)

That line has been out of service for about 20 years and unfortunately it has not moved grain from northern Saskatchewan through the Wheat Board position at Port of Churchill. That in itself is a savings of \$7 per tonne in shipment for each and every farmer in northern Saskatchewan if they can capitalize through the Wheat Board on making use of the Port of Churchill.

My colleague from Yorkton—Melville just made this point about the Wheat Board plebiscite. The question on that plebiscite is whether every producer had the right to exercise a vote in that plebiscite. So many producers over the last 10 years have walked away from the Wheat Board and have grown alternative commodities so they do not have to deal with the Wheat Board. Those farmers were never given an opportunity to vote.

The other thing that is really skewed in the whole process is that we never had all the opportunities or all possibilities on the ballot. It said “Do you support the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board, yes or no?” It never mentioned “Do you support a voluntary Canadian wheat board?” If we talked to most of those producers who supported the Canadian Wheat Board on that plebiscite question, most would say that they would support a voluntary Canadian wheat board, especially one that has the built-in safety net that we are providing from the Government of Canada.

We do not have a clear question. We do not know who really had a chance to vote. Not everyone had an opportunity in the agriculture industry to vote in the plebiscite. We know in the fundamentals of democracy the one thing true in the House of Commons is that we respect the minority position. Because we won government, we do not make every Canadian and every member in the House of Commons become a Conservative. We do not do that because we need to have a robust opposition. However, under the Wheat Board plebiscite, it is all or nothing according to the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. This means that farmers, whether they support the Wheat Board or not, have to become a component of the Wheat Board monopoly, or some people might say dictatorship. That is not the right way to do business.

Aside from respecting the minority position of farmers in western Canada, there is the whole issue of respect for personal property rights. That is a key fundamental value of any democracy anywhere in the world.

Aside from questions around the plebiscite, the questions around whether producers want or do not want a monopoly or a volunteer wheat board, we have to look at this from the whole aspect of agronomics, the dollars, the opportunities and the increased value of products that can be produced in the prairie region. Farmers are finally allowed to make true market-based decisions on what they

can find in the marketplace. Under the bill, they would have the opportunity to be free to contract directly with buyers, processors and millers that they would love to contract directly with farmers to grow certain varieties. Through the Wheat Board process that is extremely limited.

This will also engage farmers who have opted out of the monopoly of the Wheat Board to now re-enter the marketplace because they have the freedom and the ability to market and risk manage their own commodities. They do it already with oilseeds, with coarse grains, with pulse and other specialty crops. Now they can take that expertise and apply it to growing and marketing wheat and barley for export. They can contract specific varieties or contract specific months of delivery, pricing options, bases options with various companies out there.

This will provide more value-added activity. We are already seeing that with the announcement of the new durum milling plant in Regina. We have already experienced this in my home province of Manitoba when we took oats outside of the Wheat Board. Can-Oat Milling setup and developed a great new mill. It has increased the number of acres of oats grown in Manitoba by over 250,000 acres. This is just one plant having that type of impact in one province.

• (1545)

The agronomics is great. It is good for crop rotation and people can make better decisions that way.

This has been a divisive issue, but all the farmers out there, their friends and neighbours do not have these types of battles over their other commodities. At the end of the day, they will still be friends and neighbours with a voluntary Canadian wheat board.

• (1550)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the idea that the voluntary wheat board could operate is nothing but government hypocrisy. The fact is the board is moving. The government, through this bill, would fire the farmer-elected directors, who were elected by the farm community, and it would either appoint or leave in place its appointed toadies from the last board, one of which the agriculture committee had said was not qualified to do the job.

The member talks about the Wheat Board. The Wheat Board has asked for several things, and I would ask the member if the government is willing to provide them all. It has asked for \$225 million in capital to finance grain inventories, financing and borrowing guarantees, \$200 million to fund a risk reserve to back-stop cooling, guaranteed access to elevators and port facilities and regulated authority to direct farmers' grain to the right port. That is what the elected board of directors has asked for, and the government is only providing guarantees.

Why has the government chosen, once again, to ignore what the elected board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board is saying is required for this voluntary board to work? Is it just a farce, or what?

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Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, the member for Malpeque is the biggest naysayer and cheerleader for complete defeatism in western Canada. I cannot believe the rhetoric that he continues to spew.

If we can believe the plebiscite and 62% of producers believe in the Canadian Wheat Board, then which organization would not want to stand and say that it would go out there, work with them and sell their wheat and barley? Sixty-two per cent of the people endorse the idea of collectively pooling resources and moving ahead. Therefore, there is a great opportunity out there for a voluntary wheat board. There is a basis of where we could start from and build upon. There is an opportunity for it to prove to those who do not support the Canadian Wheat Board that it can do the job.

There will be opportunities for the Canadian Wheat Board to sign shipper deals with railways, to sign deliveries through different elevator terminals. Most of the elevator terminals we have in western Canada are proud, Canadian-owned entities. Those terminals do not want to give up on the marketing of the Wheat Board through their facilities. They want those elevation tariffs. They want to be able to work with their local producers because those producers deliver wheat as well as other commodities. They would have an obligation and responsibility to work with the local farmers and a new voluntary wheat board to get the job done.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I had an exchange with the hon. member for Peace River and I have gone back to check that indeed the Wheat Board will allow for sales of organic wheat. I agree the Wheat Board will not go out of its way to help farmers sell organic wheat, but it is possible to do a single contract. The buyback paperwork is a bit of a hassle, but they are able to sell organic wheat at a premium price.

How does the hon. member distinguish how we treat western farmers from what happened to the Ontario Wheat Producers Marketing Board, also started back in the 1950s? There was a plebiscite and a two-thirds majority vote of those Ontario wheat farmers is why they are not covered by a marketing board. Why is the government applying a different standard to the western Canadian hard wheat farmers?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I can tell members that our personal experience on my family farm is that the Wheat Board is extremely oppressive when it comes down to dealing with it with organic wheat. We do not get the premium because of the buyback, the paperwork and the associated costs. Even though the wheat never leaves the producers' yard, it is still stuck in their bins. They still have to pay the transportation costs as if it is going to port position. Those are dollars the producers lose automatically even though we will have contracts with millers and organic food processors who are actually FOB in the yard. They are paying the trucking costs, not my dad, my brother or other organic farmers. That is why there is such a discrepancy and why producers in the organic industry do not appreciate Canadian Wheat Board one way or the other.

• (1555)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate for several days and there is really nothing new coming up here. I am going to speak primarily for those who are watching via television because some of the discussion here may not be relevant to them and they may not understand it. I am going to start by relating a couple of stories.

A young farmer in my area grew some high quality wheat. It was over 13.5% protein. Wheat of course is the main ingredient in bread and pasta and wheat ground into flour is part of the diet of many people around the world. This farmer wanted to get as high a return as possible for his grain. Like many entrepreneurs, he went to the Internet and he found a flour mill in Ontario that wanted his excellent high quality wheat.

Farmers go to great lengths to maximize the quality of their product and, in this case, producing high protein wheat that lends itself well to making good quality bread. The higher the protein content, the better bread it makes.

The farmer made all the arrangements to deliver his wheat to the mill in Ontario, which really wanted his grain. Somehow the Canadian Wheat Board heard about it and put a stop to the transaction. This cost the farmer dearly and impacted hugely on his operation. He was then forced to sell this wheat to the only entity that was allowed to buy it, the Canadian Wheat Board.

That is a very fundamental violation of property rights. He does not own his own wheat. He can buy it back from the Canadian Wheat Board and then sell it to the flour mill in Ontario, but he has to accept the price that the Wheat Board sets. He also has to pay the freight from his farm all the way to Thunder Bay, Ontario, before he can take legal ownership of a product which he took all the risk and cost of growing.

He has to pay those transportation costs although he does not incur them and he has to accept the price of the Canadian Wheat Board. Those transportation costs are the highest costs per acre that a farmer incurs and he has absolutely no control over that cost. A farmer has to pay the railroad costs even though he or she does not use it if the product is marketed through the Canadian Wheat Board. The farmer has no choice. I want viewers who are watching this to be aware of that. It is unbelievable but it is true. Guess why this farmer wants marketing freedom?

Let me tell people another true story to illustrate why farmers need choice. This story comes from Manitoba and again it involves a young farmer who grew wheat for sale on his farm. Due to some adverse weather conditions, a little too much moisture possibly and other conditions, a fungus invaded his crop and he produced a small percentage of black kernels, which made wheat of a lower quality. The Canadian Wheat Board refused to buy it.

Out of desperation, this farmer sought and found a buyer in the U.S. that wanted his wheat. He loaded up the grain and began hauling it to this market. When stopped at the border and asked what he was doing, he explained the situation. He said because he could not sell his grain in Canada, he would go broke. He was told by Canadian authorities, not U.S. authorities, that he could not do that.

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The iron curtain for prairie wheat farmers came down hard. This iron curtain surrounds the farmers of the Prairies. It does not allow them to send their bread wheat to Vancouver, to Ontario or to the U.S.

The young farmer, who had grain the Wheat Board refused to buy, was sent to prison. He was literally put into leg irons and chains. He was strip searched. He was humiliated beyond belief in front of his wife and children. He was made an example of by the authorities so no one else would attempt to sell their wheat.

I invite people to read the story of this young farmer. I farmed in partnership with my brother. This story just tore at my heartstrings. This young farmer's entire operation was completely destroyed because it depended on the sale of that wheat.

• (1600)

Canadians might find that hard to believe, but it happened in Canada, and it is still happening today.

I have a farmer in my area who has a large quantity of wheat. The Wheat Board refuses to buy it. He cannot sell it. The iron curtain that prevents this farmer from having marketing choice, from owning his own product and having the rights other Canadians enjoy, has come down on him as well.

We can have a strong Canadian Wheat Board. This debate has often been twisted to mean that we are out to destroy the board. No. If the board wishes, it could become a very strong board, in my opinion. This debate is about giving farmers a choice. The Wheat Board, if it wishes to remain a co-operative for those farmers who want to use its services, could expand, and it might include all kinds of other commodities. I can see huge potential for it. It could be a very strong marketing agency.

Let us remember that the Wheat Board is using farmers' money to protect its monopoly. It is courting opposition MPs, portraying this issue to them as a threat to dairy farmers, as we just heard, and as a threat to egg producers and chicken and turkey ranchers and to other industries. This is pure baloney sausage—BS, for short. There is absolutely no connection between the two.

It has been portrayed as a takeover by large corporations. If people are speaking to someone who does know what we are talking about and does not understand agriculture today, they can use that line. However, farmers do not just grow the one crop, wheat. There are many other non-board crops that are sold to private companies, and they would be sold in exactly the same way. Canola is a good example.

I have also heard the argument that this is going to hurt family farms. If we scratch below the surface on that issue, how will giving farmers a choice change that? Again, it is a completely bogus argument. It is pure baloney sausage. Wheat producers who follow worldwide commodity prices could sometimes get from \$1 to \$2 per bushel for their bread wheat. That could mean the difference between running a profit or a loss.

Another aspect of the board that many do not realize is that because of the structure of the pooling system, farmers who are part of it, meaning that everybody gets the same price, often have to wait a year or a year and a half for their final payment. In the meantime,

these farmers incur huge costs for raising their crop, including fertilizer, fuel, various chemicals, transportation, machinery costs and repairs. Farmers need that cash flow, yet they are forced to wait. It just does not make sense.

Some time ago I used an illustration, and I will bring it up again at this point. It just shows how unfair this is. I am going to propose a new kind of board, and people can think about it in the context of what we are doing. I would like to propose a board for those who are defending the system. Under this board, which I will call a “lawyer board”, the rules and the principles would be the same as what farmers have to follow under the Wheat Board. This board would only apply to lawyers in Quebec and Ontario, and they could not deal directly with their clients, who would have to deal only with those lawyers whom the board said they could deal with. They would not be able to charge fees on how hard they work or the quality of the job; they would all be paid the same as every other lawyer.

When I proposed this idea some time ago, people over on the other side began to be livid. They were angry. If they had to wait a year for some of their revenue or their final payment, they would be extremely upset. In fact, we could try this with some other things. It shows how blatantly unfair it is to deny farmers their property rights.

We do not need more of this iron curtain stuff; we need to bring down the iron curtain that separates prairie farmers and barley producers from the freedom other Canadians enjoy.

• (1605)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member talks about baloney sausage, he makes it sound as though it is just the opposition or just a few board members who are opposed to the dismantling of the single desk system. In fact, there are protests over the demise of the board going on across our western provinces now; they started on Friday and they are continuing this week.

The member only need look at *The Economist* or *The Wall Street Journal*. They speak of the profits that large Canadian grain companies are going to suddenly make, and they are not going to make those profits because they are going to sell the wheat for more: they are going to make them because they will be taking the profits from the farmers. In fact, Viterra's shares spiked when Canadians found out that the Wheat Board would be gone shortly. Alliance Grain Traders is suddenly going to open up a pasta-making plant. Why? I propose it is because it knows it will get its grain for a cheaper price.

I ask this simple question: why does the hon. member not look at those facts, instead of the ideology that he is basing his decision on?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, this is an example of what I was talking about. There is no focus on property rights. There is no focus on the rights of individual farmers to control their product and market it as they wish. This is a bogus argument.

Government Orders

How is wheat different from canola? The member did not address that, nor has any other member on that side indicated how farmers' marketing of wheat would be different from that of canola. I submit that there is very little difference.

These grain companies enjoy marketing canola, and the majority of farmers would not want to go back to a wheat board situation in which canola would be controlled in the same way. I think that is one of the best arguments to indicate that what the member is saying is bogus.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech and his long-time effort to free western Canadian wheat growers from the shackles of their mandatory requirement to sell through the Canadian Wheat Board.

The hon. member just mentioned that there is not much of a difference between canola and wheat. I would assert that there is a difference currently for western Canadian grain farmers. Western Canadian grain farmers currently get the world price for canola. That is the product they are marketing themselves through enterprises that they choose. On the flip side, they do not get the world price for wheat: they get less.

I am curious if the hon. member could tell me why it is that intelligent, strong, business-minded farmers are able to get the world price for canola, which they sell in the free market, but are not able to get the world price for the wheat produced on the same farms as their canola.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I apologize if the message came out differently from what I intended. I wanted to explain to everyone that the marketing of wheat would be no different than the marketing of canola once we give farmers a choice. That is what I was trying to indicate, and I appreciate the clarification. These farmers would have the same choice with wheat as they now have with canola, and they would be able to reap the world price for their product.

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition parties pretend that they oppose marketing freedom because they are defending democracy or something. However, when the Liberal government passed legislation allowing same-sex marriage without a referendum, they said it was on the correct principle of our democracy being founded on the principle of protecting minorities against the majority. When the NDP was asked why the postal union did not allow members to vote on the strike or the negotiations, NDP members said it was on the correct principle that we elect representatives to deliberate on our behalf and that not holding a referendum does not contradict democracy.

Can the hon. member explain how the proposed legislation is the fairest, most just way to allow each and every farmer not only to vote for their preference, but to get what they vote for regardless of whether they vote in favour of or against co-operation, regardless of what their neighbour votes for?

•(1610)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville may give a short answer, please.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I wish I could give a short answer.

I think the member makes a very good point. It is self-evident, and I do not think I need to comment more on it. It is obvious that with choice, these things will happen.

One thing I have not heard many people mention is that the board is supposed to report to the agriculture minister on a regular basis and that it has to answer his questions. This has not happened once. It has not reported to him. He has sought information on its marketing practices, the prices that farmers are getting and so on. If it did not have anything to hide, it would be willing to report to our minister.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The minister made that comment the other day. The Wheat Board reports in an annual report every year. The board has said itself that it has reported.

Why does that member, his minister and the parliamentary secretary continue to provide misinformation to this House and Canadians?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, that is not what I was talking about. I was saying that the minister has asked the board questions about its pricing practices, and the board does not answer.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to know how to use the 10 minutes allocated for this stage of the debate, but let me begin by saying there are many times in the House of Commons when reasonable people can reasonably disagree, and this is one of them. This is one of those cases where the farming community is divided. We do not know if it is 60:40 or 40:60 because there has not been, by the government's accounting, a fair test of the actual will of the people.

What we do know is that there has been no empirical evidence whatsoever presented by the government to convince our side of the argument, which I argue is a perfectly legitimate point of view. The government has not presented any paperwork, documentation or business case as to why or if farmers will be better off. It tells us over and over again that farmers will be better off, but it is anecdotal. It is much like my colleague just said. He did a straw poll of 20 farmers in his riding and all 20 of them said they wanted to get rid of the Wheat Board. That is not very scientific when there are some 75,000 prairie farmers producing grain. We do not have the tools we need to do our job. If we are going to have a reasonable debate, we would all benefit from the same base level of information.

We have empirical evidence. We have 75 years of evidence that says the Canadian Wheat Board has served farmers well and provided the best possible price at the minimum possible risk for farmers in an inherently unstable industry. We have asked the government to produce something, anything, to support its contention. In the absence of any documentation, business plan or cost benefit analysis, we can only assume that no such documentation exists. This leads me to the conclusion that it is a reckless and irresponsible action on the part of government to undertake such a comprehensive change in the way the rural prairie farm economy does business without so much as a business plan.

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The government accuses us of all kinds of things, but nobody in his or her right mind would dismantle a successful \$6 billion a year corporation without an impact study, a business plan and some justification and documentation as to why and if it will be better. We have heard nothing. To add insult to injury, not only has there been no evidence, no documentation and no proof, other than the notion and the whim of some self-interested Conservative members of Parliament who in fact farm grain themselves and who, I will argue later in my speech, are in a direct conflict of interest, now the Conservatives have even shut down debate. They have moved closure so that we will not be able to do our due diligence.

It is our job as members of Parliament to analyze, assess and test the merits of legislation put before us with reasoned debate, but we are not going to have that opportunity. A lot of people do not realize that the Conservatives pulled a fast one regarding the committee. Instead of sending the bill to the agriculture committee or even the international trade committee, they are sending it to a special legislative committee, which, by some happy coincidence, is not allowed to bring in witnesses other than technical witnesses to talk about the technical details of the bill.

Nowhere in the study at the committee stage will farmers be brought in to discuss the merits of the bill. The committee will only be able to discuss what various sections of the legislation actually do. That does not help members with hearing witnesses about whether or not they like using the Canadian Wheat Board. At no point in this process will we be discussing the merits of this sweeping, profound and permanent change the legislation contemplates in the way prairie farmers market their grain.

I have some quotes which I think members will find interesting. It seems almost everybody, except the Conservatives present, recognizes that the Canadian Wheat Board has been a net advantage to prairie farmers.

• (1615)

Robert Carlson, president of the North Dakota Farmers Union, said that he is convinced the Wheat Board earned Canadian farmers big premiums compared to U.S. prices and that the end of the monopoly will further weaken North American farmers and give more control to the giant multinationals. He said that it has been consistently true that the Canadian Wheat Board has earned more money for Canadian farmers.

Americans have been aware that the Wheat Board is an advantage for years. That is why they filed 13 separate trade complaints at the GATT and the WTO claiming that it is such an advantage to farmers it constitutes an unfair trade practice. Thirteen times they lost.

Alan Tracy, president of the U.S. Wheat Associates, said that the elimination of the single desk would leave a void in farmer advocacy, market development, customer support, export promotion, and quality assurance.

Listen to what the president of the Canadian National Millers Association said:

The CNMA knows of no research or evidence that demonstrates or even suggests that tinkering with the Canadian Wheat Board's mandate will create new North American market demand and opportunities for Canadian wheat flour millers.

He went on to say:

We do not anticipate the ultimate survival of the CWB without its current single-desk authority.

It kind of puts to lie this myth that the voluntary wheat board can survive when we all know this is chimera. He went on to say:

And we are certain that the CWB will not continue to be a reliable, full-service supplier to the Canadian wheat milling industry under those circumstances [of a dual market].

Perhaps one of the most revealing quotes we came across was by one of these big agrifood industry giants that will be the ones that will benefit. Our contention is, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary I believe it should hold, this particular action would take hundreds of millions of dollars out of the pockets of prairie farmers and put them into the pockets of the shareholders of the agrifood giants, one of whom I will now quote. We all know Mr. Paterson, a Winnipeg grain giant. We have seen the Paterson stamp on all kinds of grain elevators all across the Prairies:

"We'll do better than we do now," says Mr. Paterson...whose family firm has climbed to more than \$1-billion in annual revenues. "Our best years were in the time before the wheat board," and that pattern should reassert itself, he says.

They are salivating. He is being quite controlled and temperate in his comments, but behind closed doors they are salivating and wringing their hands with glee that finally they can return to the bad old days of the 1920s and the 1930s. They could gouge Canadian farmers mercilessly when they owned the industry, when they owned the whole food supply chain, from the seed in the ground to the final finished product on the store shelves. They want it all. They want that vertical integration. They are going to gouge farmers, and that is how they are going to get it.

I have done some research on what the prices were like in the years when they had a single desk and the years when they did not; in the years when they had the five-year wheat pool and the years when the pool was gone; in the years when they had a voluntary wheat board and in the years when the single desk Wheat Board came in, in 1943. We studied these things. We have the graphs, the charts and the empirical evidence to draw from. The Conservatives have produced nothing, not a single word in support of their arguments, but the anecdotal whim and notions of a minister who is deluded and obsessed and who came here for one reason and one reason alone and that is to abolish the Canadian Wheat Board.

We are dealing with people who are in a direct personal conflict of interest. If they had any honour and decency, they would abstain from this debate and they would recuse themselves from the vote, because they personally stand to gain from abolishing the Wheat Board, if they believe their rhetoric. They say that prairie farmers will get more money if they abolish the Wheat Board. If that is true, they should abstain from this debate and recuse themselves from the debate altogether. If one accepts, as our argument is, that they would not make more money, then why are the Conservatives turning the rural prairie farm economy upside down and on its head when they have no evidence whatsoever it would be at the advantage of Canadian prairie farmers?

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•(1620)

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member insists that MPs who are prairie grain farmers refrain from voting and debating. It is not surprising since it is a fundamental doctrine of his ideology that big brother knows best and that those people who are actually impacted by these decisions, who have first-hand knowledge of these things, could not possibly be smart enough to govern themselves.

Mr. Pat Martin: Let them vote.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Mr. Speaker, every member gets to vote for himself or herself and is not required to be forced by big brother or his or her neighbour.

Would the member explain why prairie farmers are not deserving of this equality, while people of minorities across the country are always afforded this freedom? Why not the prairie grain farmers?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Lethbridge makes my point for me, exactly. Why not let prairie grain farmers vote on how they want to market their grain? That is how this whole debate began, continues and will end. We are insisting, if the government wants to give prairie farmers more choice in how they market their grain, let them vote on it, which is what the legislation says. My colleague has helped us to make the very point we are trying to make.

The conflict of interest is so profound and so obvious. Any member of Parliament who has read the conflict of interest code that guides all of us in our conduct will know that they are duty bound and honour bound to step out of this debate and not vote on this particular piece of legislation.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on that very question, what Bill C-18 does is it puts big brother back in charge, does it not?

Prior to 1997 the board was run by three commissioners. The government of the day changed it to allow an elected board of directors, five appointed and ten elected. Now this bill fires the ten farmer-elected directors and puts in place five appointed directors. Big brother is now in charge.

I would submit that there is a terrible conflict of interest.

One of the directors is a guy by the name of David Carefoot. He has served as chief financial officer for Viterro Inc. and spent six years with Agricore United. Viterro itself has indicated that breaking the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly could be worth 50¢ to 75¢ of per share value to Viterro.

Why is the government taking the fate and control of the Wheat Board away from farmers and turning it over to government hacks who are working for multinational grain corporations from the inside? Does the member agree with me?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, it does beg the question of which side the Conservatives are on.

If the Canadian public only knew some of the dirty tricks associated with the Conservatives' efforts to stamp out the Wheat Board, they would be horrified. They carpet-bombed the whole prairie region with taxpayer-funded misinformation and propaganda. The government imposed a gag order that prohibited the Wheat

Board directors from even defending themselves and correcting the misinformation. I do not think the Canadian public with a democratic sense and a sense of right and wrong would ever tolerate such a thing.

Let me say simply that the member for Macleod should not be voting on this bill. As well, the member for Yellowhead, the member for Vegreville—Wainwright, the member for Red Deer, the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, the member for Crowfoot, and the member for Prince Albert, none of them has any right to vote on this bill.

In fact, it will be a contravention of the conflict of interest code if they stand up and vote on this bill tonight. They should not even be participating in the debate because, by their own arguments, they stand to benefit personally.

•(1625)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. 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 Nanaimo—Cowichan, Service Canada; the hon. member for Etobicoke North, The Environment; and the hon. member for Charlottetown, Veterans.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address some of the myths regarding our government's actions and our commitment for marketing freedom.

Western Canadian farmers gave our government a strong mandate to provide that marketing freedom. I want to point out, for all my colleagues in the House who will ask questions later, that the mandate is very loud and clear, particularly in central Alberta.

The legislation we are proposing would bring an end to the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board. It would give western Canadian wheat and barley farmers the marketing freedom they want and they deserve. It has been a well-known plank of our platform for years and western Canadian rural ridings continue to support our government by electing representatives who believe in marketing freedom.

Some critics may say that we are ignoring the law and the Canadian Wheat Board Act, which is hogwash, and that the act calls for a plebiscite before the Minister of Agriculture introduces a bill to add or remove a grain from the monopoly provisions of the act. However, Parliament created the Canadian Wheat Board Act and Parliament is able to amend or repeal it. In fact, even the NDP member for Winnipeg Centre agrees with us on one thing, which is that he has said that the government has the right to change the legislation.

Some will say that farmers will be devastated by this change. In fact, farmers in western Canada are very well able to manage their own affairs and market to the buyer of their choice. We see that all the time in the non-board commodities. They have built growing canola and pulse industries without a monopoly marketer in place. Why should western farmers not enjoy the same marketing freedom as other farmers in Canada?

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As well, we have heard some critics say that we have a handful of grain multinationals controlling the world trade in wheat and other cereals and that Canadian farmers will simply be at the mercy of these huge companies. Our government does not buy into those scare tactics.

Farmers in western Canada deal with grain companies when they market their canola, pulses and non-board commodities, and they do so successfully. In fact, canola and pulses are actually up in numbers compared to wheat. Those industries are growing steadily and they are attracting investment in value-added activities such as canola crushing.

We trust farmers to make their marketing choices based on what is best for their own business needs. Farmers have the skills, the information and the tools to put themselves in the driver's seat, and we are here to help ensure they can achieve all of that potential.

Agriculture has played a major role in keeping Canada's economy on solid ground through some challenging times and when other economies are faltering. Ours is not a government that sits on its hands when the people it represents see new opportunities for themselves to succeed. We are a government that has consulted with farmers since the very beginning and we are continuing to consult with them on this matter.

The Minister of Agriculture has asked department officials to meet with the industry and stakeholders, including the Canadian Wheat Board itself, throughout the past summer in order to assist in developing a transitional plan for opening the market. Our government has always said that it is open to seeing the continuation of the Canadian Wheat Board as a voluntary marketing option for producers. That has been the campaign commitment and that is the campaign promise that will be kept.

The board has some very bright and effective employees and should be able to operate in this new environment. If farmers choose to support the new model, they will have every opportunity to succeed.

Peter Phillips, a public policy professor at the University of Saskatchewan, believes that the board can and should have a long-term future. He points out that 60% of the producers say that they like to use the board, so that is a pretty good client base to start with right there.

Our government is committed to creating an open market for western Canadian grain farmers that attracts investment, encourages innovation, creates value-added jobs and will build a stronger Canadian economy. Canadian farmers and processors are eager to compete in changing world markets and to meet the ever evolving demands of today's consumers.

Over the past five years, our government has worked hard with farmers to help grow their businesses, drive Canada's economy and leverage our natural advantages of land and resources. Our most precious resource is the ingenuity, commitment, dedication and hard work of our farmers.

Canada's economic action plan has invested in that natural advantage and delivered real benefits to agriculture across the country in creating jobs in our various communities. We are a

government that acts on facts and sound judgment and on the expressed will of Canadian farmers. The 21st century will be a challenging and exciting time for agriculture in Canada. Our farmers deserve the freedom to meet these challenges and opportunities as they see fit. It is a matter of economics, dignity and respect.

● (1630)

In fact, the C.D. Howe Institute released a report entitled, "Pulling the Plug on Monopoly Power: Reform for the Canadian Wheat Board", dated June 23, 2011. This report takes on the logic of monopoly supporters who argue that, by selling together, western Canadian farmers exert more market power in wheat markets and receive higher returns than if they competed against each other. However, the report underlines that the declining global market shares of Canadian wheat makes it increasingly unlikely that the Wheat Board is able to exert this market power. As a result, reform is needed. This reform includes reconsidering the CWB's monopoly.

I know my colleagues in the opposition are dying to hear the report, which explains the Herfindahl-Hirschman index, which measures market concentration. It illustrates how unlikely it is that the Canadian Wheat Board would exert pricing in the world wheat market. Canada's share of annual production has fallen from 8% in 1962 to less than 4% today. Likewise, Canada's share of the export market has fallen from over 25% to less than 14% in that same time period. Equally, Canadian market share in the world barley export markets has declined from 50% in the early 1980s to less than 10% today. In that sense, the Wheat Board is a price taker in so many of these markets.

The report also supports our government's position that, even without sole buying and selling authority, the Canadian Wheat Board's existing infrastructure, expertise and worldwide distribution of its trading staff would make it an attractive pool for farmers to voluntarily participate in and successfully sell their wheat in world markets. The option also remains available to farmers who prefer to specialize in producing wheat for domestic consumption, rather than trading it on the world markets. The economics are clear.

I invite my colleagues opposite to join us in this exciting new chapter for Canadian agriculture, rather than focusing on the negative rhetoric and all the things that we cannot do. We should focus on this opportunity for change. It is inevitable in all facets of life, and western Canadian wheat and barley farmers deserve the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other farmers, not only in Canada but around the world.

I encourage all members of the House to think this through and show their support for western Canadian farmers as they capitalize on this new opportunity.

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was in Regina for the announcement of the investment that Mr. Al-Katib is making in the durum pasta processing plant. My husband, who is a farmer, is very excited about it because he will be able to sell directly to that pasta plant.

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Because I could have a conflict of interest in drawing this conclusion myself, why does the member think that my husband would like to sell directly to that pasta plant?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I suppose in the law of extensions, my father is a farmer. I grew up on a farm and we grew grain. I do not know if I will be asked to recuse myself from the vote as well.

However, the reality is that it does not make any sense to me or to anybody else who holds any value in owning their own personal property. The principle that people can take all of the risk in investing in their crop, machinery and purchasing the land and, at the end of the day, if they happen to grow wheat or barley, they can be subjugated to when they can sell their wheat, to whom and for what price makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. What we are providing is an opportunity for those farmers who wish to collectively pool and try to negotiate a better price through that pool, using the talented people at the Wheat Board who wish to stay on in its new form, but we need to allow those individual farmers who want to make those marketing choices for themselves to do so.

I have constituents in my riding who went to jail over this issue. This is a ballot box question in the constituency of Wetaskiwin and I can assure members that I did not lose a single poll in the rural portion of the riding.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am listening carefully to this debate and to all the points made on both sides of the House. I listened to my colleague, and I would like him to explain why 62% of farmers voted to keep the single desk marketing for wheat and 51% voted to keep the single desk marketing for barley.

I am having difficulty reconciling this information with the fact that we often hear from the other side of the House, the government side, that farmers want markets that are fully open. They try to make us believe that western farmers are not worried about the big multinationals coming in to trample them. How can he explain the vote results?

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, if my colleague had actually listened to my speech, she would know that we do acknowledge that there are farmers out there who wish to use the Canadian Wheat Board. However, that does not change the fundamental principle that an individual goes through the risk of having that land, buying that equipment, owning that property and taking all the risk.

The critic for the NDP was a carpenter. If he went through all the risk of purchasing the material, buying his tools and equipment, buying the lumber that is available at market price, speculating on a home and then actually had some board come in and tell him the price he could sell the home for, that would be outrageous. He, honestly, would be outraged that he could not sell that house at the price he needed in order to be competitive and keep his business running.

The same principle applies here. For those farmers who think they can get value out of it, and there are some who will, this legislation

would provide for a viable Canadian wheat board to exist on a voluntary basis. If it is as good as everybody says that it is, then we should not fear ending the monopoly. If the folks who are working there have the contacts, have the marketplace already established, they have already got the competitive advantage over the individual farmers.

I have a question for the hon. member. Why are so many individual farmers telling me that they are not satisfied with the status quo?

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP) Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all my colleagues for their, at times, very impassioned speeches about the Canadian Wheat Board. There is no question that on both sides of the House there is a real delineation of thought as to what it is we believe that farmers want.

It is ironic that there are farmers among us on both sides of the House who have different viewpoints on it. That is fair from the perspective of having different viewpoints, but what I find amazing about this whole debate is the government's insistence that somehow the market is the direct benefit to all farmers at all times.

It reminds me of my younger days when I was first married and my wife and I decided to seek out a financial planner and talk about raising some money to buy a home and do all the things that young couples do. I interviewed a financial planner who talked to me about the market. I thought it was wonderful that he was telling me exactly how it works, except what he kept repeating was not to worry and that things always get better. What I am hearing the government tell farmers about wheat, durum and barley is not to worry, it will always get better and they will get better prices.

I have heard all about the risks that farmers take and they do. As the critic for agriculture, I understand the risks that farmers take when they put seed in the ground, buy equipment and decide on the rotation for the year. They make all of those decisions and then have to face the vagaries of the weather, whether it be the floods in southern Saskatchewan or southern Manitoba this year or frost.

Conservatives on this side never talk about the downside of the market. My friends on the other side constantly want to teach us about the markets, which is nice, but they should at least be honest and say that markets go up, yes indeed, and markets go down, absolutely. Folks who bought RRSPs in 2008 got a bit of recovery after that, but ask them how they are doing in 2011.

When people throw themselves to the markets, they do not have ultimate control. They are not the markets, they are just players. Depending on size, they are either big players or not so big. If they are not so big, they do not have the same clout as big players, which means that ultimately the big players make more than the smaller players or takes advantage of them.

My friends on the other side talk about value-added and this new pasta plant that is going to open in the Prairies, which is a wonderful thing. They insist that means that primary producers, the farmers, in the west would get a better price if they go on the open market. We have seen a stock circular put out by a particular company. If we happen to go through it, one line says its expectation of making additional profit is by paying lower prices for primary products.

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It reminds us of what happens when value is added. The value gets added in and the price gets taken at the other side, which is not the farmer but the consumer. The middle guy, who is the producer-processor, is not the farmer. The farmer is at the other end of that chain actually putting things in at the beginning where the first price comes. When the processor or producing-manufacturing group in the centre who has the power cannot get more money from the consumer end and wants to increase profits, because that is what the company's stockholders want, they squeeze it out in costs.

My friends on the other side constantly let us know how knowledgeable they are on these things. All business owners know that they wring out costs if they can and they wring it out at the bottom, at the front end, the farmer. When farmers do not have the ability to go somewhere else, they are told they can go where they want.

I wonder how that will look in five years when they do not get the producer cars that they rely on any more or the track time they need to get to the coast, port or wherever it happens to be they cannot get any more because there is a new potash mine and all of a sudden CN or CP is saying the mine pays more and the farmers can wait.

● (1640)

My friends on the other side have talked about pulses. There is no question that pulse farms have done very well. One of the biggest complaints from the group around the pulse organization is that the biggest impediment in their ability to pay farmers well is getting their crop to market. Which market? Not in this country. They literally take it 5,000, 8,000, 10,000 kilometres across the globe to a market in either India or Southeast Asia. The largest single impediment to getting their crop there on time or losing the market, because they can, is the railway.

They are paying costs because ships are lying at anchor in the Port of Vancouver waiting for their product to get there and they are being held up because CN decided to send something else that made it more money. When grain farmers end up in that queue, and they will, they cannot move their product to market and the premium that is suggested by this market free enterprise government will be lost because they cannot get it there on time. The pulse groups are saying today that they will lose the market, not the premium, but the market, period, if they cannot move their crop.

It begs the question, if indeed we have such difficulty on both sides of the House on whether we should do this or that, we have really come to an impasse. We think we are right and members opposite think they are right. Why do we not just ask the folks who actually do it? Why do we not just ask the farmer?

It has been said here many times that there are 8 out of 10 elected board members. The government changed the requirements on how to elect them. An individual had to grow so much wheat. They had to do it in consecutive years, otherwise they did not get a ballot.

I heard earlier from some colleagues who said the widow of a farmer got a ballot for her husband, and that is unfortunate. I would not like my mum to get a ballot for my dad who is deceased either, but that happens from time to time.

We have folks on election lists in this country who are no longer with us. Lists sometimes are not that good. In this House we know

lists are not always that good because we have our own lists of constituents. How many times have we sent things to constituents to have it returned to us because they do not live there or they are deceased?

However, if we were to hold a legitimate, government-held vote of the producers, agreed upon by the board, and asked them what they want, I think this House would be satisfied. On this side of the House we would be satisfied. If the producers told us what they want, we would say it is fair. Nothing more, nothing less. It is fair.

Now we are asking the folks we represent what they would like to do. Would they like this open market as has been described by members on the other side, market freedom, or would they want to continue down the road they have with the Wheat Board. If we asked them that question, and we could debate how we form the question, but if we asked them an honest, fair question from both sides, not a one-sided question, and let them decide, this House could then go about its business because they had made a decision.

Anecdotal stories are being told from one side or the other. My colleagues from Alberta say that in Alberta, this is what producers are saying. People call me from Alberta, and I am not from Alberta, who say they want to keep the Wheat Board. There is no question that there are some folks who want to keep it and there are some folks who do not. There is no question about that. Why do we not simply let them have the final say on all of this.

We should decide on the question we should put to them after debate, let them decide for themselves and accept their wishes, based on the fact that it is their ability and their democratic right to make a final decision on their lives. It is not necessarily mine. I do not farm wheat, and a lot of us do not, but at least farmers would be making a decision for themselves, not having it imposed on them by either side of the House, regardless of how the vote goes.

● (1645)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague from Welland, obviously speaking about something that he does not have a really good grasp of, and that is unfortunate.

I would have been happy to provide some of the information that I have tried to provide to some of the colleagues across the way that have not dealt with this lack of freedom. The member talked about who phoned him and who did not phone him.

There are farmers in western Canada who have been waiting for 35, 40 years for this, for the simple, same freedom that farmers in Ontario have had for a number of years. They have grown their business. They have been able to export wheat. Farmers in western Canada have not had that freedom.

I would ask that hon. member, why does he not think that I, as a farmer within the Wheat Board jurisdictional area, should be treated as any less of a citizen than his farmers in Ontario?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I would agree with the hon. member's comment at the front end.

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Nonetheless, as to the question not being the way we wanted it when it was asked at the plebiscite, 62% of western farmers said they wanted to keep the Wheat Board. If that was not a good question or a fair question, let us craft one and ask them.

I agree with my friend who says that coming from Alberta he understands the Wheat Board and wheat farmers. To say that just because we come from Ontario we do not understand wheat farmers or we have not learned to understand what it is about them, I do not think is necessarily a fair comment.

The bottom line is that if we ask farmers a fair question and the decision is to not have a wheat board, so be it. However, if the response is that the farmers want to keep it, then so be it also.

•(1650)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the previous discussion, surely the government would extend the same rights to western farmers as it did extend to those on the Ontario wheat marketing board who no longer market under that board. They were given the right to make a decision. Western farmers have not been given that right.

I have asked my NDP colleague about one of the arguments of the government that this would be great for processing and that there has been no processing since the board was in place. The facts are these: Canada processes three times more malting barley per capita than the United States; wheat milling capacity in western Canada has grown by 11.8% in the last decade compared to 9% in the northern tiers of the United States; and four new western Canadian mills have been built during that period while the number of mills in the northern United States has remained the same. That has been with a board of directors of farmers in place.

The act, under section 12, says:

Every person holding office as an elected director of the Canadian Wheat Board immediately before the day on which this Part comes into force ceases to hold office on that day.

Have those farmer elected directors not done a good job in increasing processing capacity and in maximizing returns to farmers?

Why does my colleague believe that the government wants to get rid of those farmer elected directors and take their right away to be a master of their own destiny through their own marketing institution, as others in Canada are allowed to do, like dairy and poultry?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I can only speak to what I believe is the decision not to allow farmer appointed or farmer elected board members.

The government has said that it will allow a voluntary Canadian wheat board. One would think that if it wants it to be voluntary and it believes that it is okay if folks want to join it, at the very least they should be allowed to decide if they want to vote for the folks who want a voluntarily association. One would think that is what the government would want.

One hates to have these thoughts that five folks who are appointed might just want to get rid of it, and that it might be made in such a way that is so draconian that those who actually want to

voluntarily be part of it will be driven away by the folks who make decisions in their best interest.

That is why we have democracy. That is why we elect folks. The other side talks about how many of its members were elected and the fact that it has a majority government. True fact. The members could point to the fact that the reason that happened is because folks voted for them. True fact.

If that is the case, why not extend it to those particular farmers, if indeed the government wants a voluntary association, and simply say that at the very least it will give people the right to vote for the folks to represent them on a voluntary association called the Canadian Wheat Board?

Then again, if the government really wants to do that, it should have a plebiscite vote and find out if Canadian farmers really want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board.

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been waiting for 35 years to deliver this speech. That is a long time.

I am a wheat farmer, I must confess. I farmed for over 30 years in Alberta. I stand to speak in favour of the marketing freedom for grain farmers act.

Anyone listening to this debate might wonder why we would have to do that. Do not all farmers have the right to market what they produce? That is partially correct, but only if a farmer lives east of the Manitoba-Ontario border or west of Creston, B.C. All farmers living in between, which is the wheat belt area of this country, have been under the control of a monopoly seller of wheat and barley for human consumption. That is the other thing a lot of people do not understand. It is durum wheat for pasta, bread wheats and barley for malt barley.

We would argue that the producers of those crops should have the same right to the freedom to market, to the same freedom of choice, as farmers who live in Ontario, Prince Edward Island, west of Creston B.C., and in fact all around the world. That is what this whole debate is about. Some members understand that because they have heard that term enough times in the House. Those producers should have the same freedom of choice.

This is the most draconian and outdated marketing system of any country in the world. No other industry would accept this situation. No other industry would have come to Canada. Let us picture the big three automakers coming to Canada to build cars if we had set up a monopoly that would tell the industry what colour of car it could build and what price it would get, and that the industry would get paid 18 months after the monopoly chose to sell that car. We would not have an auto industry, nor would we have a communications industry, if they were harnessed with the same binding regulations that those of us who produce grain in western Canada have.

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A new, voluntary Canadian wheat board will be set up once this legislation is passed. It will be an option. Just as I, as a producer of wheat in western Canada, should never have been forced to sell to a monopoly, so have we chosen not to force those who would choose to use a pooling mechanism to not be able to have a pooling option. The Minister of Agriculture has given this a great deal of thought, and he has put in place an option that will provide a pooling mechanism for those who are more comfortable with that approach. We are providing a transition period for this new board to develop a strategy, a five-year period to set this up. We hope that those people who enjoy the aspects of pooling will use this option. I as a wheat producer will not be forced to use it, as I have been through my 30-some years of growing wheat.

Many farmers in western Canada have moved away from this monopoly. As the Minister of Agriculture said in answer to a question the other day, farmers voted with their air seeders. A lot of people in this room do not understand what an air seeder is. It is a seeding mechanism for farms all across the world. Farmers chose not to grow wheat because they could not hedge their price. They knew what their costs were, but they had no way of knowing, through a monopoly, what their price was going to be.

I myself moved away from growing wheat. I only grow it now as a rotation for the health of my soil, for disease control on my farm. Otherwise I grow peas, lentils, chickpeas and canola, because I can market them in the middle of the night anywhere in the world when I see a price that I like.

• (1655)

I have a friend in Australia who grows wheat. When the prices went high in the spring of 2008, the highest we have ever seen, he was able to lock in a price for two years of production because there were companies out there that were willing to do that. He had his sale prices locked in for two years.

I do not know tomorrow what I would get for the wheat that I produce this year. However, I do know that for the wheat harvested on my farm barely two weeks ago, the return to me will not come until January 2013. What other business would accept that as a payment model? I have no idea what the price is going to be, but I know my costs. Why would I grow wheat?

A report came out today stating that our population is going to be 15 billion people in 2100. Who is going to feed those people? It would not be a country held back on production because the farmers could not afford to grow wheat. They would grow other crops—peas, lentils, chickpeas—but they would stop growing wheat if they were held under this monopoly, and we have seen it happen. Wheat acreage has fallen in this country dramatically. We have given up the advantage of some of the new varieties of wheat that could be grown because the Wheat Board is in such an archaic state of mind that we could not develop the new varieties of wheat that would actually help feed the world.

We have seen the yields of corn in the United States triple because of research. We have seen canola varieties producing double of what they were. Where is wheat? It is maybe 10% or 20% more. We have great opportunity for farmers in western Canada to realize the benefits available to them if we can get out from underneath this archaic system.

As I said, cash flow matters to farmers. They are very innovative, they understand their business costs and they need to know how to cover those costs. When they grow another crop that they can market themselves, they can pick a price and sell it. However, under the monopoly powers of the Wheat Board, they do not even know if the crop would actually be moved off their farm in a year.

It is an archaic system. The Wheat Board should never be allowed to decide whether I want to sell my crop, but they have been able to do that. As I say, it is a very archaic system.

I have met grain buyers in other countries. For example, when I was in Cairo, Egypt, food importer brokers asked me why I would not sell them my wheat. I said that they had to deal with the Canadian Wheat Board. They said they had tried, but it would not answer their phone calls.

We have no access to market. If I go back to peas and lentils, I choose whom I want to sell it to and I choose the price I want. I am a price taker, there is no doubt about it, but I can also hedge that price. I can sell it into the future. There are futures markets. There are a whole lot of simple arguments that are being neglected.

I will quote a good friend of mine from southwestern Saskatchewan, Cheryl Jolly-Nagel. I know her and her folks very well. She is a past president of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers. I quote:

I'm already planning to increase my durum acres next year. It's just the kind of investment that will help boost our economy, boost our profits and help boost the provincial economy.

She is speaking about the first new pasta plant in western Canada, which is being built just outside of Regina, and about the kinds of benefits we will see grow.

There should have been a malt plant in central Alberta. I see the barley going past my house down to Great Falls, Montana. Why is that? It is because the board stopped it from being built in Canada.

We need the freedom. We need the choice. It is that simple.

• (1700)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard my hon. colleague on the other side of the House say that all farmers should have the right to market what they produce and market it as they want. For milk, chicken, turkey and egg producers, who come under supply management, does he advocate exactly the same approach?

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question. They do have a choice, and they chose a supply management system. This western system was forced on farmers. They never had a plebiscite asking them if they want to sell grain under a monopoly. That was never an option. Supply management is a choice of those farmers, and they welcome that choice.

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However, we are missing the point of this whole debate. It is simply about the same choice, as I have said before, that farmers in western Canada do not have: the choice to market our products where and to whom we want, and to provide food for the world.

I go back to my earlier comment. It is very important for Canada, as one of the major food producers in this world, to be able to realize our potential to help feed the world. Our farmers are ready to do it; I wish the House were ready to support it.

• (1705)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the member was emphasizing that those who participate in supply management had a choice and have voted to participate in something that has restricted their marketing opportunities in some ways but expanded them in many others.

If the Conservatives are so convinced that western farmers do not want the Wheat Board, why do they not conduct a plebiscite at this point and give them the same right to choose that others have had? Why do they not let them vote to see whether western farmers really want to keep the Wheat Board?

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I realize that a number of members have not been in the House very long, but we have had many discussions about plebiscites. We have had a barley plebiscite. We have had all sorts of plebiscites, and every time a credible question has been asked, the outcome has been that farmers in western Canada want the same freedom as farmers in the rest of Canada. It is that simple.

We also had a plebiscite on May 2. I believe it was a resounding success. We campaigned on freedom. What better thing to campaign on than freedom? We won a majority based on allowing farmers the same freedoms as their friends and relatives in the rest of this country.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my father-in-law switched from grain to beef in the 1990s because he could not make a living on grain.

Once wheat is able to be marketed on the open system, does the member believe there will be an opportunity for families to hand the farms down? I have seen that some people just cannot afford to keep their farm, so they sell it because they are not able to hand it down. Is there an opportunity here for someone like the member to hand that farm down if he or she should choose to do so?

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague to the west, who is, by the way, still within the Wheat Board's jurisdiction. Just in case he might be thinking about growing wheat and selling it somewhere else before August 1 of next year, I would caution him about that.

In response, this would absolutely be a benefit to what we hear spoken about in this chamber many times, which is the small family farm. Many organic producers decided that was the way for their niche operations to survive. It is not growing broad acre crops on broad acre farms, but niche organic crops.

The Canadian Wheat Board soon stepped in and said it would have none of that. It started marketing the crops for the organic producers who had already set up their own markets. It charged them a premium to sell to the same buyers they were selling to before. The

middleman won; the small farmer lost, because of the monopoly powers of the board.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak against Bill C-18, which would dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. This bill is a direct attack on family farmers and is a direct affront to the very principle of democracy. On September 12, nearly 60% of Canadian farmers voted in favour of maintaining the Canadian Wheat Board. However, the Conservatives refuse to hold a plebiscite on dismantling the board. The government plans to destroy the single desk against the wishes of Canadian farmers. This would not be the first time that the Conservatives claimed to have received a strong mandate from Canadians with only 40% support.

The Canadian Wheat Board is not funded by Canadian taxpayers. So why are the Conservatives rushing to destroy this organization? The answer is simple. If the Canadian Wheat Board no longer holds the balance of power when negotiating with its economic partners, Canadian farmers will be left on their own, will no longer have any bargaining power and will be forced to sell their wheat and barley at lower prices. That will have disastrous effects.

First of all, Canadian producers will be forced to sell their products at lower prices. Lower selling prices also means lower profit margins. And God knows that during a recession and tough economic times, farmers who are already working in a sector that requires very large financial investments did not need another blow like this.

Furthermore, the Canadian Wheat Board's bargaining power has enabled Canada to maintain some independence for Canadian farmers and the Canadian agri-food industry with respect to the major world players. With the dismantling of the board, this independence will disappear and big American grain companies will be free to move their operations to Canada, which will gradually kill the economic independence of Canada's agri-food industry.

I have heard the Conservatives say that we are trying to scare farmers and that the expected effects are false. Well, I have a little surprise, my friends. By way of comparison, let us look at what happened in Australia after a board similar to the Canadian Wheat Board was dismantled.

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Before the Australian Wheat Board was dismantled, Australian wheat could command \$99 per tonne over American wheat. After the Australian Wheat Board was dismantled, things went awry. In fact, in December 2008, the price of Australian wheat dropped to \$27 per tonne below U.S. wheat. In just three years, the 40,000 farmers who were members of the Australian Wheat Board all became customers of Cargill, one of the world's largest agribusiness corporations, which is privately owned and based in the United States. Once again, it seems as though this government is clearing the way for large American corporations to the economic disadvantage of its own people and voters. Once again, the Conservatives are putting the interests of the private sector ahead of the public interest of Canadians.

Now, here is what we are proposing for Canadian farmers.

We believe in respecting democracy. As a result, we believe that any decision about the Wheat Board must be made by the farmers, since they are the ones who manage this organization. Since 62% of farmers voted against dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board, we believe that the government should respect that decision or, at the very least, hold an official government plebiscite on the issue and, as a result, withdraw its bill.

What do members of the Canadian Wheat Board think of the possible dismantling of their organization? While the Conservatives claim that farmers are overjoyed at this prospect, Allen Orberg, a farmer and chair of the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors, thinks that this government does not have a plan. In his opinion, the government has done no analysis and its approach is based solely on its blind commitment to marketing freedom. He added that the government's reckless approach will throw Canada's grain industry into disarray, jeopardize a \$5 billion a year export sector and shift money from the pockets of Canadian farmers into the hands of American corporations.

●(1710)

What economic impact will this dismantling have on the overall Canadian population? First, Canada risks losing the money brought in through board premiums, which can represent between \$200 million and \$500 million per year. Second, as I said earlier, being a farmer today means considerable investment, be it in machinery or basic farm upkeep. Dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board will have a domino effect. By selling their product at a lower price, the farmers' profit margin will decrease. Less profit also means less money to pack back loans. That means that, at the end of the day, it is the Canadian taxpayers who will pay because the government will have to increase subsidies for farmers so that they can survive and make a living.

Dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board means that farmers will see their revenues drop considerably. The government will then have to pick the pockets of Canadian taxpayers to fix the disaster it will have created.

To conclude, I implore the government to rethink its decision, to realize that it is going down the wrong path and to understand that it is putting farmers and the Canadian economy at risk. Therefore, it should withdraw Bill C-18.

●(1715)

[English]

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke about what corporations the United States will move into Canada but he missed the point about the new pasta plant that was just announced in Regina, Saskatchewan. It will be the first one in western Canada. The plant is owned by a very successful person from Saskatchewan who wants to create jobs in Saskatchewan. This business will be able to buy its grains directly from the farmer. The farmers are very excited about this new freedom to sell directly to the pasta plant.

How does that square up with why we in western Canada cannot have the same privilege as those in eastern Canada, not having to ship our grain down here to be processed, as before with pasta and many of the other grains that come down here and then we needed to have it shipped back to buy it as consumers? Why are we not afforded the same luxuries as eastern Canada?

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question.

We are not saying they are not entitled to the same rights as others. Since the beginning we have been asking the government to put it to a vote. It is very simple. The government is saying that the Wheat Board was created without anyone asking for opinions and that it will be dismantled without anyone asking for opinions. The government should not repeat past mistakes.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, spinning off the question from the minister, it is not as bad as the government member tries to make us believe. As I mentioned earlier, there is far greater processing capacity for malting barley per capita, which came into place in the last number of years, three times as many in Canada as in the United States, whose producers have the freedom to market wherever they want. Wheat milling capacity in western Canada has grown by 11.8% in the last decade, compared to 9% in the northern tiers in the United States. Therefore, is not as bad as the member makes us believe.

However, there is an important question here. The government is basically saying that producers should have the freedom to market when, where and how they want, which is what, I believe, the minister said it earlier.

Does the member not believe that if that is the policy that is approached, it would completely undermine the supply management system in this country?

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[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. We all know full well that with that type of market the Americans, who have the purchasing power, will come buy our grain and it is truly the Americans who will benefit, not our farmers here in Canada.

• (1720)

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, should we have a referendum on same sex marriage or a referendum on whether postal workers should be allowed to form a union?

[English]

Should we have a referendum on the privatization of the CBC and on what kind of programming should be allowed on TV, or should individuals choose for themselves what not to watch on TV, who to marry and how to market their grain?

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, that is a very odd question because I do not believe that in all those things the hon. member listed, there is a law saying that before the Wheat Board is dismantled or before we do anything with regard to same sex marriage, there should be a referendum. However, in the rules that governed the creation of the Canadian Wheat Board, it clearly states that a referendum has to be held before it can be dismantled.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is the economy, in which the agriculture industry plays a vital role. Canadian farmers feed the world and they deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions. We believe that all Canadian farmers should be able to position their businesses to capture the marketing opportunities that are open to them.

Nine years ago, almost to this very day, Noel Hyslip was hauled off to jail wearing leg irons and handcuffs in front of his wife, three kids and parents. He and 12 other Alberta farmers were sentenced to 45 days in the Lethbridge jail. Their crime was driving trucks full of their own wheat over the border into the United States. These farmers were detained, fined and jailed for selling their own wheat outside the Canadian Wheat Board. Yes, this is Canada. I know it is hard to imagine that kind of thing could happen here. However, these pioneers have no regrets about the actions they took and the sacrifices they made.

Mr. Hyslip was recently quoted as saying:

I'm proud of that day and the sacrifice we all made.

Going to jail to free western farmers was definitely worth it. It frustrates me that almost one decade has passed since then. It's hard to believe such a law still exists in Canada.

These farmers are all looking forward to the day when all farmers in western Canada have the legal right to market their wheat and barley wherever and however they wish. This bill would enshrine that right by allowing western farmers to market their own wheat and barley on their own or through a voluntary pool.

The 68-year-old Canadian Wheat Board monopoly is yesterday's solution to yesterday's problem. Farmers like Noel Hyslip and thousands of others across the Prairies are focused on tomorrow, not

yesterday. They are ambitious, entrepreneurial, successfully market their other crops and they need new solutions, not the status quo. More than that, our economy needs it. As we recently saw with the launching of the pasta plant in Regina, marketing freedom will unlock new value-added investment, new jobs and new growth for Canada's economy.

Business people, the economic drivers of our economy, agree on the need for an end to the single desk marketing system. At its annual meeting last year, the membership of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, a network representing some 192,000 businesses of all sizes, in all sectors of the economy and in all regions of the country, approved a resolution that reiterated its support for a voluntary Canadian wheat board. It was not the first time it had done so. This most recent resolution was an update of the group's position from 2007.

These are businessmen and women from across Canada, job creators, who have the interest of a strong national economy at heart. What are they calling for? They are calling for the same thing wanted by western farmers, who are small and medium-sized businesses in their own right. They want a release from under the thumb of a monopoly and the freedom to shop their product to the highest bidder for the best price. This is what the Chamber of Commerce resolution had to say about the Wheat Board:

—[it] restricts (value-added) investment in wheat and barley, significantly diminishing the ability of farmers and industry to respond to market demands and earn a premium return in recognition of the innovation provided, including innovation in value-added processing.

It is pretty clear that top business people, the job creators that all members' constituents rely on for employment, think that the CWB is anti-business. It went on to say:

Removal of the single desk in other countries...“has led to new investment and growth in value-added activities, benefiting all members of wheat and barley value chains from consumers to processors to farmers.”

Western Canadian grain farmers want the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other farmers in Canada and around the world. They want the freedom to make their own business decisions, whether it is to market individually or through a voluntary pooling entity. Disappointingly, opponents to change are taking an all-or-nothing approach: single desk or death.

• (1725)

If opposition members will not listen to western grain farmers, will they at least listen to the businesspeople from their own communities who, through the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, are saying that their insistence on robbing farmers of marketing choice is an anti-business, anti-prosperity attitude?

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The year of the entrepreneur is 2011. I hope the opposition members will get with the times and support marketing choice and freedom and opportunity for all Canadian entrepreneurs, including western grain farmers.

Farmers have told the CWB and us that there is a better way to give entrepreneurial farmers like Noel Hyslip the boost their business needs to compete and a better way for those farmers who prefer to market their wheat through a voluntary pool. Our government is offering an inclusive and progressive way forward that would offer western Canadian wheat and barley farmers both opportunity and security.

There is no doubt that co-operatives helped to build agriculture across Canada and that they continue to play a role today in a very tough and competitive global marketplace. However, these organizations are where farmers commit their production investment because they choose to, not because they are forced to. Co-operative and compulsion cannot go together. Competition and choice will breathe new life into Canada's grain industry.

Canada's grain industry has already achieved outstanding results, but we know it can do every better.

Over the past 25 years, the share of area seeded by CWB grains in western Canada decreased from about three-quarters to one-half and the Canadian market share in the world barley export markets has declined by more than 65%. Meanwhile the share of area seeded to canola almost tripled, oats acreage in Manitoba grew by over one-third and the pulse industry grew to \$2 billion in export sales.

We know that there is room for growth in our wheat and barley industry. The time is right for action. Canada's farmers grow world-class food in a global marketplace that is ripe with opportunity. We need to unfetter our farmers so they can continue to drive our economy and feed the world.

Everyday Canadians also see the injustice of making western farmers beholden to a Wheat Board monopoly.

In a recent letter, Henry and Erna Goerzen, constituents of mine from Didsbury, wrote, "We heartily support you and our Conservative Government in the legislation that will give choice for Western grain farmers to market their grain themselves or to sell through the Wheat Board. It is a choice that has been denied to our farmers for far too long. We wish the legislation may be approved very soon".

However, the last word goes to farmers themselves.

Dan Jorsvick, a farmer near Olds, sent me a letter that said, "I would like to clearly express my support for the initiative to remove the CWB. Like many farmers, we had registered our vote regarding the CWB years ago, with our decision to not apply for their "permit book" and to not "market" our grain through their organization. We have developed the skills to market our grain to domestic feed users and I hope we have the opportunity to apply these skills to explore markets beyond our borders".

David and Ann Smith made a similar point, when they wrote, "We urge you and your colleagues and our Majority Conservative Government, to make every effort to bring about the much needed changes in order to provide a more equitable grain marketing system

for Western Canada. It must be realized that the younger generation of farmers are very proficient businessmen and women, with many options available to them, plus all the modern technology at hand to carry out their own marketing choices".

I will end with an inspiring letter from Amy Hewson, a young farmer who farms with her husband southeast of Saskatchewan, "My husband and I are expecting a baby in January and we're both very excited to know that this child will grow up in a country where it's not a crime for his parents to sell their own wheat and barley".

We need to ensure that the freedom fighters did not go to prison in vain and we owe it to the next generation of farmers who will put food on our tables to get this job done.

Our government is committed to giving every western Canadian grain farmer the marketing freedom they want and deserve. When passed, this legislation will do just that.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is all very interesting. I would like to ask the following question: what about the 38,261 farmers who participated in the vote organized by the Canadian Wheat Board? I guess their votes do not count.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question in return. The voices of all the farmers throughout western Canada who voted for our Conservative majority government to be in place to do just this, to give them the freedom of choice to market their own wheat and their own barley, do those voices not count? Because they certainly should.

This is a democratic country and people have a right to make their own choices about how they market their products and the fruits of their labour. All the bill asks us to do is to give farmers the choice that all other businesses in our country have, the choice to take the products that they have created with their hands and from their innovation and to sell it however and to whomever they choose. That is all the legislation seeks to do. What we are asking for our western grain farmers is a very basic right that all businesses should have.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member for Wild Rose believes what he said in his comment then let us put it to the test. Is there anyone in the country who actually believes that the only reason anybody voted for the Conservative Party in western Canada was because of the Canadian Wheat Board? Is that what he is trying to imply in the House?

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I ask the member to put it to the test. Section 47.1 under the legislation says we ought to that. The Wheat Board says that it has 62% support on its plebiscite. Why will the Conservatives not put it to the test? Why are they taking the voice of western farmers, which was granted to them by law, away from them and not allowing them the choice to tell us their view? If they voted for doing away with the Wheat Board single desk, we would support it.

Second, does the member really believe that if thousands of trucks roll across the U.S. border, the 49th parallel, that the U.S. is not going to respond? People broke the law, they went across the international—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. We need some time for the hon. member to respond.

The hon. member for Wild Rose.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, the member wanted to know if I felt that the only reason western Canadians voted for our party was to eliminate the Wheat Board monopoly and have marketing choice. Certainly not. They voted for us for many reasons because of a lot of the positions that we hold they hold dear. They chose to reject his party because its ideas were not what western Canadians wanted to see.

Western farmers, particularly, want the choice to make their own decisions about the marketing of their wheat and barley. That is what we are trying to do with the legislation. They have made that very clear many times in the past, and they continue to make it very clear now. I have a number of constituents who have written me, emailed me and phoned me, about this very issue. They are very eager to see the Wheat Board monopoly ended and to see marketing choice brought in. I can certainly assure the hon. member that western farmers do in fact want to see this choice to market their own products.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is kind of entertaining. I guess the Liberal Party holds its nominations just like the CWB does its directors elections as it sees fit.

I know the member is a forward looking person. Based on the things that I see happening in the future, they say that this co-operative cannot exist in this new environment, yet I look at Federated Co-op, which is a good example in Saskatchewan. There is a Wal-Mart in Prince Albert and where does Co-op build its store? Right across from Wal-Mart. They compete head-on.

Could the member tell us how he feels the CWB in this new entity will survive in this new marketplace?

• (1735)

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question. It certainly is nice to hear a question about someone looking forward and trying to figure out how we can make the best for farmers, so we can give them the choices they need to make the decision whether they want to market through a co-operative or whether they want to be able to sell it on their own through other means that they have at their disposal. Certainly there are many opportunities available to our farmers now.

It is nice to hear those kinds of questions, rather than what we hear from the Liberals and the NDP on the other side, which are simply

trying to look at yesterday's solutions instead of looking at tomorrow and coming up with ways we can go forward.

I do see the opportunity for a voluntary wheat board to thrive in that kind of market. I think some farmers will choose that route and some will choose to market on their own. Farmers deserve and need that choice to be able to make those decisions for themselves.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate today, even though I am sure that my Conservative colleagues will not be as pleased. Every time that a Quebecker rises—as I often have—to speak about the Canadian Wheat Board, they tell us that we have no business talking about this issue because it has nothing to do with us. But it is perfectly fine for them to interfere in Quebec's business. One thing is for sure: no one can deny that I have experience from my six years as vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food. It is no secret that the topic of dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board was often on this committee's agenda.

What the majority Conservative government wants to do with the Canadian Wheat Board comes as no surprise. In 2002, when he was a member of Parliament for the Canadian Alliance, the current Prime Minister moved a motion to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. The day that the current Prime Minister became leader of the Conservative Party, when there was a merger of the Canadian Alliance and the Reform Party, or that party and the Conservatives, the dismantling of the board became part of the new party's platform. The party tried all kinds of things, but fortunately it was a minority government at the time.

I remember that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, before being appointed minister, introduced Bill C-300 to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board, the collective marketing tool. A section of the act specifies that a plebiscite must be held. The Conservatives did that, but they excluded some voters. Not all farmers had the right to vote. They fiddled with democracy to obtain the desired result. People, mainly wheat producers, were excluded from the plebiscite in order to obtain the desired result. But the Canadian Wheat Board, not to be out-manoeuvred, recently conducted its own plebiscite: 62% of western producers want to keep this collective marketing tool—the Canadian Wheat Board. All of a sudden the Conservative government refused to acknowledge these results because it was not the one that organized the referendum to its liking.

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I also remember what happened with the bulk mailings, the ten percenters, that members can send to their ridings. Members of the Conservative Party flooded their ridings and others—we were allowed to do so at the time—with ten percenters on the referendum. The use of these ten percenters to campaign against the Canadian Wheat Board was rather questionable. Today, it is not surprising that the majority government is finally attaining its goal, that is deciding the fate of the Canadian Wheat Board as we know it today. That is what tonight's vote will prove unfortunately. The Conservatives have the right to do it. They are fixated on it; it is their ideology. They believe that there will be a mixed market, including the voluntary use of a new board.

I am pleased to be able to speak and give examples. Voluntary collective marketing was tested in Quebec in the 1990s. It did not work. Today, not all producers agree that collective marketing agencies are the best option for various sectors, particularly wheat and maple syrup in Quebec. However, they have decided to make use of collective marketing agencies. The majority of them are satisfied and feel that it is the best way for them to make a living from agriculture.

It is important that the House is aware of an important section of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. Section 47.1 clearly states that farmers, the western producers of wheat and barley, must decide their own future. And I believe they did so during the referendum organized by the Canadian Wheat Board. Sixty-two per cent said they want to keep the single desk. But the government is not listening to them. It is even saying that since the majority of people in western Canada voted for Conservative members, it shows their desire to see the Canadian Wheat Board dismantled. We all know that democracy goes further than that.

● (1740)

The member who spoke before me mentioned it: people did not vote on just that one issue. A real plebiscite must be held in order to ensure that it is the people who decide whether or not to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board.

I rise as well today because members of the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec came to see us this week. They have been very clear about this from the outset. They continue to support western producers who want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board.

According to the UPA, the Canadian Wheat Board ensures that producers have a better and more equitable market return and that the supply of wheat to the agri-food industry is more predictable and stable. The UPA is also of the view that we cannot allow the Conservative government to destroy such an influential tool, one that creates more than 14,700 direct and indirect jobs, with spinoffs worth almost \$1 billion.

I, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, am not the one saying so, but rather the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec, which is in constant contact with producers in other provinces, especially wheat and barley producers in western Canada.

I have been told that this issue does not affect us. However, I must say that the Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec also supports the board. These people really do the same

work. These grain producers support producers who want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk system.

In the past, perhaps this issue did not really affect Quebec producers. However, the planned dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board has become problematic for us with the implementation, by the Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec, of its own marketing agency for wheat for human consumption in Quebec. With this agency, the Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec is the only agent authorized to market all wheat for human consumption in Quebec. Its role is similar to that of the Canadian Wheat Board. This type of agency can exist because of the authority granted to producers' groups by the Quebec Act respecting the marketing of agricultural, food and fish products.

The Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec and the UPA are of course worried about what the Conservative government has in store for the Canadian Wheat Board, especially when other countries are constantly attacking our collective marketing tools such as the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management. I know the Conservative government does not like it when we draw a parallel between supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board, but they are both collective marketing tools that are constantly being attacked by other countries at the World Trade Organization. This is because those people want to negotiate their way into our market in order to sell their own products without any obstacles.

In light of what the Conservative government wants to do to the Canadian Wheat Board, there are also concerns in Quebec about the fate of supply management, which, I repeat, represents 40% of Quebec's farming economy. It is not insignificant.

Advisors to the current Prime Minister always said that if the Conservatives had a majority, they would attack the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management and implement a free market system.

In closing, we have to respect the true will of the farmers, wherever they are. I rise today on behalf of the farmers in Quebec who have told me they want western Canadian farmers to be respected and to be allowed to keep the Canadian Wheat Board.

● (1745)

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given that the hon. member has been the vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food for six years, can he explain to the House the advantages of a supply management system and collective marketing? That will help us understand the issues related to this bill a little bit better.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question.

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I was saying that there is some concern, because losing the supply management system in Quebec is a big deal. Producers themselves decided that they wanted to set the prices and prevent certain imports, although a percentage of products can still cross our border, whether it be dairy products, poultry products or eggs.

However, the supply management system makes it possible to guarantee that producers will get a decent price and that there will be no unjustified fluctuations in price for consumers. This is a clear advantage over other countries that have abandoned the supply management system. I am thinking in particular of New Zealand, where there are huge fluctuations in prices and where everyone loses.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is going out of its way to claim that this bill is all about freedom.

My colleague made reference to how critical the supply management system is, much in the same way as the Canadian Wheat Board is. It protects industries in many different ways. It ensures a fair market price. It protects tens of thousands of jobs across the country.

This bill is not about freedom. This is about the impact the bill will have on the prairie farmer. Ultimately it is going to destroy family farms on the Prairies. It is going to hurt communities that rely on those small farms.

Does the member believe that this bill has anything to do with freedom as Conservative member after Conservative member claims?

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. He is well positioned to know the ins and outs of this issue concerning the Canadian Wheat Board because, if I am not mistaken, he is a member from the Winnipeg area, and the Canadian Wheat Board has its head office in Winnipeg.

One thing must be said about freedom: the one true freedom that western farmers should have in this is the freedom to choose what they want.

Section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act is very clear: producers must have the last word, not the government, not the Prime Minister, not the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. The farmers must be the ones to choose. If they decide they no longer want the Canadian Wheat Board, we, the Parliamentarians—including government members—must acquiesce.

But that is not the case. The only time the government wanted to organize a referendum, it did not allow farmers to vote. When the Canadian Wheat Board organized a referendum, the numbers were quite telling—and I someday hope to see these numbers in favour of Quebec sovereignty. Sixty-two per cent of western farmers decided that they want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. That is their freedom of choice, their freedom of speech. That is what they want, and we must respect that.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the bill because it is opening up

new opportunities for western Canadian wheat and barley farmers. That is good news, because there is a growing demand worldwide for the high quality grain they grow. As part of our commitment to help farmers make their money from the marketplace, we plan to deliver on our promise to provide marketing freedom to western Canadian grain farmers.

It is a matter of freedom, even if the opposition's numbers are used. If we have 40% of farmers not being able to sell their grain on the open market but are compelled to sell it to a board, it certainly curtails their freedom and right to do business as they see fit.

That is what the bill is all about. We are giving western Canadian wheat, durum and barley growers the same right to market their grain as enjoyed by farmers in other parts of Canada and around the world. It is remarkable that farmers only in western Canada would be compelled to sell to the Canadian Wheat Board when other farmers around the world and in this country are able to sell directly.

The fact is western Canadian grain farmers deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions, just as others do, including the right to market their own grain at the time of their choosing and to the buyer of their choice. Western Canadian farmers want this and so do three of four western provincial governments that produce almost 80% of the wheat and 90% of the barley that the Canadian Wheat Board markets.

As the Saskatchewan minister of agriculture has said, "Saskatchewan farmers spend their own hard-earned money on land, machinery and inputs to grow their own crops, so why should they not have the marketing freedom to decide how, when and to whom they sell their grain?" They invest thousands of dollars in machinery and equipment, hundreds of thousands of dollars in land, and they take all kinds of risks. They sell other commodities directly in the market, yet they are prevented from selling the grain they grow, except through the Wheat Board.

This legislation will open up a wealth of opportunity for western Canadian grain farmers for the future.

In my constituency there are a number of farmers who have written to me, and I will refer to a number of letters to make the point. They make the point for us as to why we should proceed with this legislation.

One farmer, Steve Blackmore of Ceylon, wrote:

I am pleased to see that the federal government continues with its move to introduce legislation to open up the marketing of grain and barley. My brother and I operate a farm in SE Sask [southeast Saskatchewan] with 5500 acres of cultivated land. We have limited our seeding of Durum and Barley in the past due to the involvement of the CWB [Canadian Wheat Board] and the intrusive nature of that relationship and the impact on farm cash flows by having to wait for pool returns to be calculated etc.

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Indeed, it is even a disservice to the Wheat Board to prohibit farmers from selling elsewhere. As this individual has indicated, he has cut back on the seeding of durum and barley and many have. Instead of seeded acres increasing for durum and barley, they have been regressing. Yet in other countries like Australia, we find that those acres have been improving after the farmers have been given the opportunity to market their own grain.

Mr. Blackmore went on to say, in referring to the durum crop:

As an example the Durum we grew in the fall of 2010 was all hauled in the fall of 2010 as it was great quality and provided blending opportunities for the grain company.

It is something that they could have got a premium for. He wrote:

We will not see our final return on that grain until December 2011 or January 2012.

Simply put, this is not acceptable. It is far too long to wait for the cash flow. It is far too long to wait for the price they ought to get.

He talked about the voting process. We have heard a lot in the House about the voting process and whether one should pay attention to that or not, but this is what he said:

I know you will have heard all the arguments on both sides of the debate and there is a lot of passion behind both sides however the voting process held by the CWB was a joke. Our operation received 4 votes, but really only one should be considered given that 90% of the volume would have gone through one permit book. I can only imagine that this is the case for lots of farmers. The argument about letting the farmers decide is the wrong debate, this is an open market debate and as a business owner...we need to have the ability to choose who we market our product through.

● (1750)

Whether a farmer runs a big or small operation, that farmer has had the opportunity to operate in the open market with respect to other commodities. As someone said here earlier, the sky is not falling in. Farmers have been able to do that successfully.

Mr. Blackmore wrote that he has been doing it already for years with canola, flax, lentils, peas, oats, fall rye, canary seed, and three varieties of mustard. It is something that farmers are accustomed to.

I grew up on a farm. My parents farmed four quarters and rented two for a total of six quarters. There were many small farmers around. Initially all they grew was wheat, barley and oats perhaps. It was only later in the process they experimented with new commodities like canola. They found they could market the canola and that they could get a cash price and sell it when they wanted to. They could wait for the price to go up if they wanted to wait. Some did better and others did not do as well, but they had the opportunity to do that.

Canola caught on and more of it was grown. Peas, lentils and other kinds of commodities that farmers have taken to have been sold and farmers have done very well with respect to those commodities. They would watch the markets and they would watch the price. They could decide what they wanted to plant.

Mr. Blackmore said that the value of changing to an open market solution will provide benefits for him and his farm operation. He said he would have the ability to contract price against a global benchmark and meet his cashflow needs. He would have the ability to negotiate based on quality and quantity at the grain companies. He would also be able to break down the barrier to cross-border shipping and provide new marketing opportunities.

Some of the best durum in the country, perhaps in the world, is grown in the southeast part of Saskatchewan in my riding. When we look at what the world price is compared to what farmers get, they cannot sell it all even at the price they can get. There is a significant difference so they have to take a loss.

The other thing Mr. Blackmore mentioned, as have other farmers, is the need for some certainty. That is why the opposition should get behind us and get this bill passed. He said:

As we look at the 2012 growing season we hope that the legislation is passed expeditiously this fall in order to allow for effective planning in terms of cropping options, implications of the change from the CWB, response by the market to a new offering, etc.

Farmers want to know what they are dealing with. They plan early for what they are going to put into their land for the next year. They want to see this legislation passed. I would urge all members to get behind the legislation to ensure it goes forward expeditiously.

Another person in my constituency wrote to the editor of *Lifestyles* on October 6, 2011. Amy Hewson from Langbank, Saskatchewan in my riding wrote:

I grew up on an 80 acre farm in central AB [Alberta]. ...I moved to my husband's 8000 acre farm in south east Saskatchewan....

My husband is a full time farmer; it's his business and his life. My Dad is an electrician and a farmer on the side who raises cattle and rents out his crop land, entitling him to vote.

That means her father's vote has the same weight as her husband's. The obvious point she is making is that it should not be so.

She said:

My husband and I are expecting a baby in January and we're both very excited to know that this child will grow up in a country where it's not a crime for his parents to sell their own wheat and barley as of August 1, 2012.

It is interesting to note that the member for Malpeque said farmers should be put in jail because they are crossing an international border. Imagine putting them in jail for selling their own produce, produce they have produced from their hard work, from their investment, their risk. It is incredible that we would even be having that debate in today's society.

Ms. Hewson said that it is not about getting rid of the CWB, it is about having a choice. That is an important point.

Marc Giraudier, another constituent, wrote to me saying that this is about choice and not about a vote. He wrote, "Regarding the plebiscite vote, take the outcome with a grain of salt, not all our farmers received a plebiscite vote and if a third option, dual market system had been a choice, the outcome would have been very different".

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That is the truth. It is interesting that the opportunity to vote for a dual market system was not put forward by the Canadian Wheat Board.

Another interesting point is that one group of farmers, no matter the percentage, even if it was 62%, ought not to have the authority to ban or the power to prevent other individual producers from having the right to market their grain as they see fit.

• (1755)

If others want to sell through the Wheat Board, they can do so by simply uniting and pooling their resources together and going forward. They should proceed to do that.

• (1800)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservative MP after Conservative MP talks about the reduction in average acres and they try to blame the Canadian Wheat Board. As in many other things, they have absolutely no evidence, not a shred, to demonstrate that is the case. If anything, the CWB, and of course our good farmers, but the brand of CWB is one of the reasons that we sell the amount of wheat that we do, that we have the market we currently have.

I take exception to member after member quoting what individual farmers are saying. I want to refer to the broader picture. There were over 20,000 prairie grain producers and farmers who participated in the plebiscite. The government goes out of its way to discredit the plebiscite. Why does the government not have the political courage to have a plebiscite, if it is so critical of the one the CWB held? After all, there is an obligation in law to do so. Why does the member not support farmers having a legitimate plebiscite that they would actually abide by? We on this side would abide by the results. Why will the government not do the same?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member was not listening when I read from the email from the farmer in Ceylon, Saskatchewan. He wrote:

We have limited our seeding of Durum and Barley in the past due to the involvement of the CWB and the intrusive nature of that relationship...

He went on to say what that was. The seeding acres have gone down, so they are doing themselves a disservice.

The Australian model shows that the seeding acreages have gone up and it is now producing 30% more wheat on average than it was before. It is marketing in 41 countries rather than 17 countries. That is what happens when farmers are given the option to go through the Canadian Wheat Board or otherwise.

With respect to the plebiscite itself, ballots were sent to more than 68,000 farmers when in fact there are about 20,000 commercial grain farmers. I do not know what that is about, but it says something about that process.

The Canadian Wheat Board was imposed on farmers to be compulsory whether they wanted to trade through it or not. There is a great percentage of farmers who did not want to belong to that system and they had no opportunity to do that because they would be jailed or fined. That is simply wrong. We do not need a plebiscite to see that. We do not need a plebiscite to say that we ought to give producers the ability to sell their product without having to pay a fine or go to jail for it. It was something that was imposed by a

government when it should not have been. It is time to get that wrapped up and changed once and for all.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend I was at a function with real farmers who asked me when the government was going to change the Wheat Board so that they could sell their wheat and barley and not go to jail.

How does the member feel about farmers having to go to jail for selling the grain that they planted and harvested? One of my constituents did that and it was very difficult for him and his family.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, obviously I feel compassion for many of our farmers who grow wheat and durum and look at the world prices. They produce some of the best durum in the world, certainly in the country. They see the price and they are not able to sell it. There have been some who have taken matters into their own hands and have decided to cross the border, but as the member for Malpeque referred to that action, they were stopped and fined. They had to go through provincial court and the court of appeal. They spent a lot of dollars, but at the end of the day, they were not able to sell what they had produced themselves. It is remarkable that people in this country cannot do that.

Obviously I feel there is nothing wrong for those who would want to band together voluntarily to form a co-op, a corporation or association to market their grain together, but it is wrong to force people into that association when they do not want to be part of it. That is not the way to run a country. That is not the way to run a democracy and we need to change it now.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that we rise in this House on a regular basis to discuss bills and, more often than not, we do so following gag orders imposed by the government. This time, at issue is Bill C-18, which proposes that the Canadian Wheat Board be dismantled and that the single desk marketing of barley and wheat in Canada be eliminated. It was not that long ago that the government was trying to force Canada Post employees back to work. One might say that there is a fear of debate in this House. This is particularly unfortunate because we learn a lot by listening to what others have to say and we also learn a lot when we are able to thoroughly examine the provisions of bills, whether they are proposed by the government or by our colleagues here in the House.

However, people are being silenced rather quickly, not only in the House, but also in committee. Take, for example, Bill C-10, the government's omnibus bill on law and order. Witnesses might have plenty to say about this extremely long bill, but they are given only five minutes in which to do so and then they are cut off, once again, in mid-sentence. It does not seem as though democracy is being taken very seriously.

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Nor does it seem as though the legislative provision calling for a plebiscite is being taken very seriously either. In other words, only the producers, the farmers, have the right to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board and it cannot be dismantled by us, here in the House, the very people who are supposed to uphold the law and ensure that things are done correctly. A vote was held. When I listen to the speeches given by members of all the parties, whether on the government side or this side of the House—with a few exceptions to my right—there are clearly huge differences in opinion.

From what I understand about this issue so far, we know very well that we have a Prime Minister who, since 2002, has been promising to dismantle the Wheat Board and, now that his party is in power, he has been quick to do so. I have often heard it said and I will say it again, since the Conservatives do not have very strong math skills: 39% of the population is not a strong mandate. In the current electoral system, it constitutes a majority, but it certainly does not constitute a strong mandate.

The government has to be careful about using such support to boast and say that the farmers it talks to or the farmers who talk to it all say it is doing the right thing. In actual fact, the Canadian Wheat Board held a plebiscite for which a total of 38,261 farmers mailed in their ballots. That is a participation rate of 56%, which is on par with federal elections, unfortunately, in my opinion. As I was saying at the beginning of my speech, 62% of the farmers voted for keeping a single desk marketing system for wheat and 51% for barley. I think 62% is a very good percentage. That is the rate with which I won my own election, so you can see why I like that very solid percentage so much.

That being said, it is not up to us in this House to decide on this. The act was drafted in such a way that it is the primary stakeholders who have a say. It is their Canadian Wheat Board. It is up to them to decide what to do with it.

Every speech I keep hearing about how the Wheat Board is not being eliminated, that it will be voluntary for a number of years, and that if people want to continue with it they will—it is all hogwash. It is a slow death, so as not to cause too much unrest. However, somehow, on the government side, no one is able to convince us in this House why this is necessary, other than for ideological reasons.

I have read up on the Canadian Wheat Board and I see how it succeeded—in regulating, perhaps. As a businessperson, I do find that regulations can be quite restrictive at times. In Quebec, we are used to having quite a lot of regulations and red tape. However, sometimes, to make systems work and ensure that everything is on the up and up, without losing control of an industry, that is what it takes and this is an industry that has been tried and tested.

●(1810)

This method has been proven over many years. The board should not be dismantled strictly on the basis of a poorly explained, unjustified ideology, without any figures to support the decision other than a few figures from emails here and there. I respect the fact that in a democracy, there will always be people who agree and people who do not agree. The members opposite may very well wonder who we are to talk, when agriculture is not the lifeblood of the riding of Gatineau, but the fact remains that this market affects every one of us.

The decisions we make here about how the market runs will affect everyone. If for no other reason, I think that that certainly gives us the right to speak to this issue.

I heard questions from some Conservative colleagues. They said to some colleagues from Ontario that their province had dismantled its board. Why should western farmers be treated differently than Ontario farmers? That could be a good question, but the fact is that Ontario farmers decided themselves, after a vote, to dismantle their board. I respect that. If western farmers tell us that they no longer want things to run like this, that is a different story. This board was created during wartime to provide wheat to Europe, among other places. Perhaps the board has no reason to exist in 2011. I do not know. The arguments that have been made by the minister and the Conservatives who have spoken on this issue have not convinced me, as the member for Gatineau, that there is a logical reason behind this that has nothing to do with ideology. Ideology is sometimes a bad adviser in a context like this.

I believe that the government would have our approval and the support of the entire House if it acted appropriately, that is, according to the terms of the act, which provides for a vote. Following a vote, we could decide whether or not the board would remain. No one would object. It would be the voice of democracy.

In this context, as the member for Gatineau, I personally find this problematic and it is for that reason that I will be voting against the bill. The Conservative government's actions are anti-democratic. It is no longer surprising. It is unfortunate. The government was only formed on May 2, 2011, and I am already forced to conclude that any type of organization, whether it is a union or the Canadian Wheat Board, is automatically on the Conservatives' chopping block. My concern is that we are selling our assets piecemeal to the Americans.

Matters such as those dealt with by Bill C-18 are very important because of the number of people affected directly or indirectly: consumers, producers, farmers, those involved in transportation, and all those who have anything to do with the wheat and barley industry. I believe we are entitled to expect a more responsible approach from parliamentarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to order made Thursday, October 20, 2011, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

●(1815)

[English]

The question is on the subamendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the subamendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the subamendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

• (1845)
[Translation]

(The House divided on the amendment to the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 42)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brousseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeman
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Latendresse	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Liu
MacAulay	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Pécllet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibeault

Toone
Trudeau
Valeriote— 117

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Tremblay
Turmel

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Amler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fast	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	James
Jean	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukivski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Oliver	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashue	Poilievre
Preston	Raitt
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Vancouver South)

Government Orders

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PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to the amendment lost.

The next question is on the amendment.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I believe that you will find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with Conservatives voting no.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, NDP members will be voting yes.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting in favour, including the member for Ottawa—Vanier.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: The Bloc Québécois is in favour of the amendment.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I will be voting yes.

[Translation]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 43)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélanger	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brousseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeman	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Gnest-Jourdain	Godin
Goodale	Govelle
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Karygiannis
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)

Liu	MacAulay
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
Michaud	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagog)
Murray	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffler	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Trudeau
Turnel	Valeriote — 118

NAYS

Members

Adams
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Bateman
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Gallant
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Hoepfner
James
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
Oda
Opitz
Payne
Poillievre
Raitt
Reid

Government Orders

Rempel
Richardson
Saxton
Seeback
Shiple
Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trost
Truppe
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Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
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Weston (Saint John)
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
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Richards
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trottier
Tweed
Valcourt
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson

Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Vancouver South)

Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fast
Flaherty
Galipeau
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Holder
Jean
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
O'Connor
Obhrai
Oliver
Paradis
Penashue
Preston
Rathgeber
Rempel
Richardson
Saxton
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Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Gallant
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Hoepfner
James
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
Oda
Opitz
Payne
Poiilievre
Raitt
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trottier
Tweed
Valcourt
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson

Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Vancouver South)

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

[English]

The question is on the main motion.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you will find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with Conservatives voting yes.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, NDP members will be voting no.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, Liberal members will be voting no.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: The Bloc Québécois will be voting no.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): I will be voting no.

[English]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 44)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Benoit
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu

Adams
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Bateman
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong

Members

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Aubin
Bélanger
Bennett
Bevington
Boivin
Boulerice
Brahmi
Byrne
Casey
Charlton
Chisholm
Chow
Cleary
Comartin
Crowder
Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)
Donnelly

NAYS

Members

Andrews
Atamanenko
Ayala
Bellavance
Benskin
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Caron
Cash
Chicoine
Choquette
Christopherson
Coderre
Côté
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Doré Lefebvre

Adjournment Proceedings

Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Footé	Fortin
Freeman	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Karygiannis
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu	MacAulay
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
Michaud	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Trudeau
Tumel	Valerioté — 118

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to a legislative committee.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee.)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1850)

[English]

SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 19 I raised a question in the House with regard to processing EI claims. On that occasion, and subsequent occasions, the minister had indicated that the changes in the number of people processing EI claims was in part because there was a temporary spike in EI claims.

I want to refer to an article from October 20 in the *Vancouver Sun* that said the number of Canadians receiving EI surged in August according to Stats Canada. Across the country, the number of beneficiaries increased by 35,200 in August, up from 533,330 the month before. That is a 6.6% increase month over month.

The article went on to say that the number of initial and renewal claims rose by 4.4% across Canada, up 10,700 claims, for a total of 255,600 in August. That is the second consecutive monthly increase.

From Stats Canada's own numbers, it appears that it was not just a temporary spike that the EI claims processing folks were dealing with. In fact, what we are seeing is increasing numbers of claims.

In addition, I want to refer to how the department is spending some of its resources. Not only do we have these claims increasing but the department is spending resources on cases that have already been decided.

I specifically want to refer to the case of Jennifer McCrea, who was diagnosed with breast cancer while on maternity leave and was denied sickness benefits earlier this year. The Calgary mother applied for six weeks of benefits to recover from her double mastectomy, but she was turned down because she was not available for work. There was already a precedent setting case that had been decided by Justice J.R. Marin, who had ruled that legislative changes made nearly a decade ago were intended to give women access to sickness benefits regardless of whether it is before, during, or after the maternity leave. He said that a more liberal interpretation of the available for work regulation was required of the government, or the government had to update the legislation.

The article went on to say that the human resources minister had done neither. That means that each woman who is denied either walks away from the benefits she is entitled to or has to find a lawyer and re-fight a battle that has already been won.

It went on in the article, and this is the resource issue, to say that this ruling affects so few people, it is estimated between 3,000 and 4,000 a year, that it would probably cost the government more to fight the cases than if would to pay up. In his ruling, Judge Marin said that fixing the mess would not open the floodgates but would offer minimum comfort and solace to a small, hard hit sector of society.

The *Vancouver Sun* article said that the minister should immediately direct employment insurance officers to follow Marin's ruling and fix the legislation to ensure the changes stick.

What we have here is a case of increasing claims, the department spending resources fighting a case that has already been decided by the umpire, and one wonders whether that should be a priority. Therefore, I want to come back to my original question. Will the minister explain to out-of-work Canadians why the Conservatives are making it harder to access a program that Canadians have paid into?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan and her concerns about providing services to out-of-work Canadians.

Canadians gave the government a strong mandate to complete Canada's economic recovery and to return to balanced budgets. That is what we are doing. Our Conservative government is committed to delivering the highest quality service in a way that is effective, efficient and focused on the needs of Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

The hon. member raises concerns about dealing with backlogs in employment insurance. That is precisely why we are taking steps to improve processes and modernize the delivery of EI to Canadians.

First, it is important to note that no Service Canada centres are closing as a result of these measures. In-person services will not be affected. We are introducing a new service delivery model over the next three years that will include the processing of EI claims at 22 sites across the country. Through technological advancements, Service Canada is modernizing the delivery of one of the federal government's cornerstone social services.

Historically, the EI claims process was designed and administered as an entirely paper based program. By increasing automation, we are making it easier for Canadians to receive information and services from government when and how they need them.

The Service Canada office in my area of Collingwood benefits tremendously from these reforms that our government is moving forward on. The hard-working employees at our office work with the constituents and are utilizing Collingwood's Service Canada office to ensure that there are faster and more efficient services provided to our citizens in Simcoe Grey.

Canadians expect their hard-earned tax dollars to be used as effectively and efficiently as possible. The Government of Canada is working hard, on behalf of Canadians, to eliminate the deficit while improving services we deliver.

● (1900)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, those words are cold comfort to Canadians waiting to receive payment for their EI claims.

I want to reiterate that according to Statistics Canada, in August we actually saw a surge in claims. In fact, when we are talking about renewal claims, that was the second month in a row that the claims increased. In addition, I mentioned the sickness benefit appeal, which was to supposedly spur an EI legislative review; instead, what we have is another claimant who has once again been denied sickness benefits.

I come back to the question that we still do not have an answer to: when will the Conservative government explain to Canadians why it is making it harder to access a program that Canadians paid into?

We have the case of maternity and sickness benefits. We have the case of Canadians who are applying and waiting inordinate amounts of time to receive payment. I am sure Canadians would be very interested in that answer.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, we have already achieved administrative savings of almost 30% through the modernization of the delivery of EI. Additional savings of up to 15% are possible through more efficient processing of EI claims. Our goal is to expand the automated processing of claims from the current 44% to 70% over the next three years.

A workforce management strategy is in effect to assist with planned personnel changes. This will include attrition, reassignments, and training. All changes will occur within the parameters of the collective agreements.

These are challenging times. Our government is working on behalf of Canadians to eliminate the deficit while improving service delivery to Canadians.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is growing concern about the government's lack of interest in protecting the environment. Bold claims should be matched by bold actions. Instead, we are seeing cuts that will cripple important environmental monitoring capabilities.

On September 15, I first implored the environment minister to reconsider planned cuts to ozone research. Since then, opposition members have repeatedly asked questions during question period, to which the environment minister and his parliamentary secretary have often responded by changing the subject. On Friday, questions about greenhouse gas emissions were met with a diatribe about shipbuilding, Supreme Court justices and the Wheat Board.

We can and should be doing better in addressing the legitimate concerns of Canadians regarding environmental monitoring programs needed to protect health and safety.

The known facts are that the scientists responsible for the ozonesonde network and the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre have received letters saying their jobs are in danger. Even the assistant deputy minister has told reporters that budget cuts being implemented will mean that the ozone monitoring network will be reduced.

Claims in the House that there will be no cuts to ozone monitoring do not stand up to these truths.

When will the government rescind the letters to these scientists so that they can continue work we all agree is valuable and necessary?

My party has now undertaken an online petition to stop the cuts to ozone research. It has over 3,000 signatures from concerned citizens across Canada and is growing in number by the day.

I must now ask again, on behalf of those thousands of Canadians: when will the government rescind the letters to these scientists?

In a week, I will be hosting leading experts in atmospheric research here on Parliament Hill to talk to members of Parliament and senators about ozone depletion and Canada's leadership role in ozone research. I implore members of the government to attend, listen, and ask questions. Sound policy on the environment is informed by science.

Adjournment Proceedings

After word leaked of the cuts to ozone research, Conservatives started a campaign to track down the source of the leak and muzzle scientists. Since October 3, I have been asking that the government unmuzzle Dr. Tarasick, a senior scientist at Environment Canada, and allow him to speak of the discovery of the 2,000,000-square-kilometre ozone hole published in the prestigious journal *Nature*.

For 19 days, the government prevented Dr. Tarasick from talking about his own work to the media. We can and should be doing better at giving Canadians timely access to the science they have paid for.

Dr. Tarasick was finally allowed to speak on October 21. However, before the interview started, Environment Canada tried to limit the interview topics, telling Postmedia News that Dr. Tarasick would not answer questions about the impact of potential cuts to the ozone monitoring network. Although Dr. Tarasick was allowed to speak, it was clear he was not doing so freely. The public has a right to know the impact of cuts on the ozone monitoring program. There is no need to hide from the truth.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can be proud of the contributions that Environment Canada scientists make to independent studies and policy development and to protecting Canada's environment.

Contrary to what the opposition would like to have this House believe, Environment Canada is more than committed to ensuring the continued engagement of stakeholders in international regulatory policy processes. We are strongly committed to protecting Canada's natural heritage, even in difficult economic times.

We are also committed to ensuring hard-earned taxpayer dollars are spent wisely, which is in stark contrast to how the opposition would have us proceed. That is why we are reviewing government spending commitments on a regular cycle to ensure they are effective and efficient, respond to the core priorities of the Canadian government and are in line with our federal responsibilities.

With regard to ozone, our government is strongly committed to protecting Canada's environment, as I have said. That is why our plan is to ensure that Canada's strong track record in the area of atmospheric ozone measurement continues to deliver sound science within budget.

As we have said repeatedly in this House, we will continue to both effectively and efficiently monitor ozone. The World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre, which is considered to be world class, will continue to operate.

As well, we will continue to effectively and efficiently make best use of taxpayer dollars.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the government is cutting ozone science and has muzzled scientists. Dr. Tarasick explained during the interview that the monitoring network already has limited resources for maintaining the existing quality of data collected and used in the recent *Nature* study. He also said, "If the taxpayer in his infinite wisdom were to give 10 times the budget I have now, I think I could use all that money quite usefully and do good science with it. I don't think we're wasting a penny".

Moreover, he indicated that the warning about his job was not rescinded.

Dr. Tarasick also said, "Well, I'm available when media relations says I'm available. I have to go through them".

The Prime Minister's government introduced new rules to control interviews with journalists by Environment Canada scientists in 2007, resulting in an 80% drop in media coverage of climate change science.

• (1905)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, since there were so many things in that question, I will stick to the question asked about ozone science. I want to make this crystal clear. Repeating what we have said over and over again, Canada has banned ozone-depleting chemicals. We will continue to monitor the ozone, and the ozone data centre will continue to operate.

I would like to ask the member opposite to support our plan to continue to monitor ozone. It is focused on ensuring Canada's excellent track record in this area is maintained in a cost-effective and efficient way.

VETERANS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs for being here this evening for what will no doubt be a completely non-partisan and transparent response to my question.

The issue brought to the House this evening for debate relates to the glaring disparity in support for our veterans when it comes to their funeral costs. For the record, a veteran receives about \$3,600 to help cover the cost of a funeral, while a member of the Canadian Forces receives about \$13,000, a very significant gap. I have written to the minister about this issue and have asked questions in the House in both official languages. The minister has not responded to my letter. The response from the minister in question period has, unfortunately, been evasive and dismissive and I, perhaps naively, hope for a more direct response this evening.

The government likes to talk about patriotism and wrap itself in the flag, and it loves to attend ceremonies honouring veterans, but consider this. I would ask the parliamentary secretary to reflect on this: her government spent millions of dollars last year on communications, photo ops, backdrops and the like, all the while contemplating massive cuts of about \$226 million for the department. There are millions for the spin machine and propaganda, yet the Conservatives refuse to commit to fixing the funeral cost inequity between our veterans and the Canadian Forces.

Adjournment Proceedings

Last Friday, late Friday afternoon in fact, the government announced that there would be \$226 million in cuts to Veterans Affairs. Upon receiving that news, I immediately gave a 48-hour notice of motion to the Veterans Affairs committee that it suspend its work on commemorating veterans and immediately begin an examination of the impact of the cuts on veterans and those who provide those services.

That notice of motion was provided to the committee. When I arrived at the committee meeting, I found that the notice of motion had been pushed to the bottom of the agenda without me knowing about it and was scheduled to be in camera. I advised the chair upfront that was not acceptable. At my first opportunity in the meeting, I presented the motion and it passed. Unfortunately the story has been that the motion passed because some Conservatives came late. The story should be that the Conservatives tried to defeat a motion that called for transparency with respect to veterans' benefits and failed.

My question for the parliamentary secretary is fairly straightforward. It is the same one I asked, in both languages, of the minister. Will the department commit to treat veterans fairly and on level ground with members of the Canadian Forces? Given that the question will simply require a yes or no answer, perhaps she could take the time to address the other questions arising out of the motion before the committee. Will the minister show up, will the committee neuter the effects of the motion, will it limit the study and does the government believe in transparency within the Department of Veterans Affairs?

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to point out to the hon. members present that this government takes the dignity of Canadian veterans very seriously.

[*English*]

As the minister mentioned in his response to the member, the Department of Veterans Affairs works closely with the last post fund, which delivers the program on its behalf. It works hard to ensure funeral and burial assistance is offered to veterans who have died from injuries related to their service, regardless of their rank or the medals they have received. Help is also available to ensure veterans without the financial resources for a dignified burial and funeral are provided with one. We will continue working with the last post fund and exploring other ways to provide quality services to our veterans.

[*Translation*]

This, and many other matters, is highly important to the government. The significant improvements made to the new veterans charter that came into effect recently will help the thousands of soldiers who, because of the severity of their injuries or other problems, need more financial assistance.

[*English*]

We have established a minimum pre-tax income of \$40,000 a year for ill or injured veterans while they are in rehabilitation or until the age of 65 years if they are not able to be suitably and gainfully employed.

We have also enhanced access to the monthly allowances available under the Pension Act and the new veterans charter to seriously injured or ill veterans. By the way, these monthly allowances are up to \$1,631 a month, payable for life.

We have also added a new \$1,000 monthly supplement to the permanent impairment allowance to help our most seriously injured or ill veterans who are unable to be suitably or gainfully employed. This supplement is payable for life and, when combined with other enhancements that I have mentioned, ensures that our most seriously injured men and women receive a minimum income of \$58,000 each year.

Also, we have created flexible payment options for veterans and Canadian Forces members who are receiving a disability award. The disability award recognizes and compensates for the pain and suffering of an injury or illness. With these new enhancements, recipients can choose to receive the disability award in a lump sum payment, in annual instalments or some combination thereof. We are giving our veterans the right to choose.

These actions prove that our government cares for the health and well-being of our veterans.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, that was an excellent speech outlining the programs that the government has set out but there is still no answer to my question.

It is a fairly simple question. Will the government equalize the amount that is afforded for funerals of veterans with Canadian Forces members? The parliamentary secretary indicated that they work with the last post fund. What she did not indicate is that the government provides \$3,600 to the last post fund as compared to the \$13,000 for Canadian Forces members.

Could I please have an answer to my question? I have now asked the minister twice. The parliamentary secretary had four minutes and did not give me a yes or no answer.

The other three questions remain unanswered, as well. Will the minister show up to the committee? Will the committee obstruct the motion that has been passed? Does the government believe in transparency with respect to the cuts to the Veterans Affairs' budget?

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to veterans' benefits, we have been very clear in this chamber. In fact, last Friday, I took two questions. I believe the House leader took a question. We could not have been more crystal clear. We will sustain benefits to our veterans. Clearly, quite simply.

There were some other questions about funeral and burial assistance. Just to reiterate, those assistance programs are provided to veterans with service-related injuries who need it the most, regardless of their military rank or any decorations they have received.

Adjournment Proceedings

We will continue to work with our stakeholders to respond to their priorities and their concerns. Our government is committed to meeting the needs of our veterans and their families by giving them the care, the services and the financial support they deserve.

I do not think we could be any clearer that, over the last 60 years, no government has done more for our veterans than our Conservative government.

• (1915)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we finish up, I just want to convey to hon. members that, during the adjournment

proceedings, members are welcome to take a seat anywhere in the chamber that suits them. I realize it is a habit that they speak from their appointed seat but during adjournment proceedings members are welcome to sit where they please.

[*Translation*]

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 7:15 p.m.)

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