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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, October 25, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 25, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act.

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

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 115 will be answered today.

[*Text*]

Question No. 115—**Ms. Françoise Boivin:**

With regard to the government's support of social partnerships, as outlined on page 132 of Budget 2011: (a) what actions will the government take to support social partnerships in Canada and to address local issues; (b) what federal departments and stakeholders will be engaged as part of the government's development of plans to support social partnerships; (c) what private sector stakeholders will be consulted as part of the process; and (d) how much money has been allocated for the work of the Task Force on Social Finance from April 1, 2011 through April 1, 2014?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), the June 3, 2011, budget recognized that social partners, such as businesses and charities, are working together to develop innovative ways to address local challenges such as homelessness and persistent unemployment.

Recognizing that often the “best solutions to tackling these difficult problems are found locally”, the Government of Canada committed in this budget to “take steps to complement community efforts by encouraging the development of government/community partnerships, enabling communities to tackle local challenges and testing new approaches to improve performance”.

Moving forward, the Government of Canada is exploring these new approaches and ways to foster more effective partnerships that would help to streamline the management of grants and contribu-

tions, reduce red tape for community organizations, support social innovation, and ensure a focus on results in addressing persistent social challenges. Examples of how Human Resources and Skills Development Canada programs support social partnerships include the following:

In January 2011, the Prime Minister announced the creation of the Prime Minister's Volunteer Awards to recognize the exceptional contributions of volunteers, local businesses and innovative not-for-profit organizations in improving the well-being of families and their communities.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada is providing support to partners Volunteer Canada and Manulife Financial to create a pan-Canadian web-based volunteer matching service that links volunteers with opportunities in their communities.

With regard to (b), Human Resources and Skills Development Canada is the lead on the social partnerships file. Consultations have begun within the federal government, and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada has met with officials from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Industry Canada, the Canada Revenue Agency, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Finance Canada, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and Public Safety Canada.

Provinces, measurement experts and literacy and essential skills experts will continue to be engaged by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to address literacy and essential skills challenges for Canadian adults.

With regard to (c), various social partnership projects are planning to undertake stakeholder consultation in addition to preparing to issue calls and requests for proposals.

With regard to (d), the government has not allocated money for the work of the Task Force on Social Finance.

[*English*]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Points of Order***POINTS OF ORDER**

BILL C-317—INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the point of order raised by the member for Windsor—Tecumseh regarding my private member's bill, Bill C-317. The thrust of the argument was that my bill would do something that only the government is allowed to do.

The history behind this is that, within our parliamentary system of democracy, only ministers of the day have the authority to propose new taxes. Before they are allowed to propose a tax, they must bring forward a ways and means motion to notify the House of Commons of their intention.

At page 900 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, it states:

The House must first adopt a ways and means motion before a bill which imposes a tax or other charge on the taxpayer can be introduced. Charges on the people, in this context, refer to new taxes, the continuation of an expiring tax, an increase in the rate of an existing tax, or an extension of a tax to a new class of taxpayers.

Thus, this has been a limitation on the use of private member's bills.

No one is suggesting that Bill C-317 proposes a new tax, or is the continuation of an expiring tax, or an increase in the rate of an existing tax. The member is only trying to object to my bill on the grounds that it is the repeal of an existing alleviation of taxation and an extension of a tax to persons who are not already taxpayers—in other words, a new class of taxpayer.

If that were the case, then he would be correct to suggest that the bill be discharged. However, my colleague has read more into my bill than actually exists. He is mistaken because he fails to recognize the limited purpose and effect of the bill, which is to simply require more complete and public disclosure of a union's finances on a regular basis.

First, his assertion that the bill “repeals the existing alleviation of tax” is incorrect. The bill does not remove any tax deduction. Bill C-317 maintains the status quo and does not grant the Canada Revenue Agency any powers, including any taxation powers, that it does not already have. The CRA is already empowered to compel financial disclosure. It can do so as a result of its mandate to ensure that organizations with tax exempt status do not engage in activities that would no longer justify that status. This power, the power it already has, is a simple function of its mandate to ensure compliance with the Income Tax Act. It is a mandate that the CRA exercises in respect of all classes of taxpayers who must comply with the act.

It is true that the bill would change things. The failure to comply with the additional disclosure proposed by the bill could also result in a union losing its tax exempt status. However, this loss of tax exempt status would result from the already existing enforcement provisions of the Income Tax Act and not from any provision contained in Bill C-317.

In other words, if a union violates the current requirement to disclose, the CRA can remove its tax exempt status. That is true whether my bill passes or not. All my bill would do is increase the

quantity and public nature of that disclosure with the same enforcement authority that the CRA already has.

My colleague also raised the issue of my bill creating a “new class of taxpayer”. According to the Income Tax Act, the term “taxpayer” is defined to include “any person whether or not liable to pay tax”. Even if an individual earns no income, he or she is still a taxpayer. However, the class contemplated in the member's unlikely example of a labour organization that chose to violate the Income Tax Act already exists. This existing class is the class of taxpayers who pay union dues. He is trying to pretend that the class is those who are in one tax bracket or another and who may change their tax bracket and tax payable as a result of a union losing its tax exempt status.

In the context of the loss of dues deductibility, differentiating on the basis of income tax brackets is irrelevant to identifying a class of taxpayer. In fact, those who are affected by the loss of the union's tax exempt status have only one thing in common: they are a single class of taxpayers under the Income Tax Act who pay union dues.

● (1010)

The legislation only has the potential to affect this already existing class of taxpayers. Their tax bracket does not matter. The point is their loss of dues deductibility. That is their class and it is an already existing class. Whether they pay more or less tax as a result of rulings by the CRA is a function of the CRA's normal day-to-day operations, not the result of this bill. In other words, this class of taxpayers is already subject to fluctuations in the level of taxation to which it may be subject under the current legislation and CRA 's interpretations and administration of the act.

I have one more point to make in response to my colleague's point of order. He claimed that the ruling in Bill C-470 from the 40th Parliament should be distinguished from this case because union members would be obligated to pay dues while charitable donations are discretionary. Even if it is accepted that the bill may have the effect claimed by my colleague, and I do not concede that it would, it must be pointed out that union members whose union has lost its tax exempt status for refusing to disclose have the right to exercise certain options. Those options include the option to be represented by another union, a union that has maintained its tax exempt status. This would serve to ensure that member dues continue to be eligible for a tax deduction. Therefore, the ruling in Bill C-470 is a relevant precedent to be relied upon on this particular point.

Those points conclude my response to the point of order raised by the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

The Speaker: I thank the member for his comments. I can assure the House that I will take this matter under advisement and will come back to the House in due course.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like the opportunity to consider the member's argument. I am not prepared to do that at this point. I am not likely to want to submit anything further since the argument that we heard from the member had so little merit. However, just in case, I would like to review it and I will get back to you, Mr. Speaker, within 24 hours.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1015)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, farmers have a democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards; and recognizing this right, the House calls on the government to set aside its legislation abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) single desk and to conduct a full and free vote by all current members of the CWB to determine their wishes, and calls on the government to agree to honour the outcome of that democratic process.

She said: It is an honour to stand here today and present our opposition day motion on the Canadian Wheat Board. I would like to point out that the motion is seconded by the member for Welland.

Every so often we have a chance to debate a defining issue. Today we have that chance. Today's motion that we are debating is about what Canadians want. It is about imagining a Canada, a Canada that we have had up to now which in some ways and in some sectors has been shaped by those at the very core of that same sector. Today we are also debating about a Canada that has been shaped by an ideological agenda which is at risk of being further shaped by that agenda against the interests of Canadians and those who are at the very core of that economy, of that sector, of that livelihood we are debating today.

Over the last number of days we have been debating the government's steadfast agenda to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. In doing so, we have talked about a contrast of visions, one that would take Canada back in time and one that would move us forward.

Many decades ago the Canadian Wheat Board was developed at the wish of farmers. Farmers saw the way in which private companies, often not based in western Canada, profited from their hard work and left them little in return. Farmers knew that during times of economic downturn survival meant pulling together. Moving forward meant working together. Together they developed one of the most successful marketing entities in our country.

The Wheat Board developed into far more than a marketing board. It became part of developing and selling the best wheat in the world, Canadian wheat. For decades the Canadian Wheat Board has worked with farmers and entities such as the Canadian Grain Commission to develop a top Canadian brand for export. That brand has belonged not to the Canadian Wheat Board; it has belonged to Canadian farmers. It has belonged to all of us.

I remember visiting the offices of the Canadian Wheat Board in Winnipeg on a few occasions. I saw the dozens of products that we as Canadians export to countries around the world, the products we contribute in terms of producing the final product, from pasta to rice to flour. The hard work of Canadian farmers has reached a level of reputation and is a guaranteed product from which we as Canadians have benefited. That top quality and that top brand has been a source of pride for all Canadians.

Business of Supply

The Wheat Board though is more than a single desk. It represents the idea that those who produce the final product ought to have a say in the production. They ought to have a say in the future of their livelihoods. While the running of the Wheat Board has been shaped essentially by farmers, since 1998, 10 out of the 15 directors on the board have been elected by farmers themselves. Farmers have been in the driver's seat of an institution that works on their behalf. We have all benefited as a result of farmers guiding the Wheat Board. As farmers have prioritized the development of the best product in the world, Canada has benefited. As farmers have sought to maximize efficiency and cost savings, transportation routes across the Prairies, including in my home region, such as the Hudson Bay Line, and hubs such as the port of Churchill in my constituency have been utilized. As farmers have sought to create a system whereby stability is sought in an economy of increased uncertainty, farming families have benefited. As the Wheat Board has maximized the returns to farmers, rural communities and urban centres across western Canada have seen results.

Today that reality and that vision are at risk of disappearing. What has taken farmers decades to develop is at risk of being destroyed in a few short weeks, not by big corporations, not by another country, but by our very own government. A government that has claimed to stand for rural and western Canada threatens to bring it down.

•(1020)

The government's agenda on the Wheat Board is profoundly undemocratic. It is ignoring farmers' voices every step of the way. Where is the respect toward the directors of the Wheat Board, those who were elected by farmers, eight out of ten of whom were elected on a pro single desk position? Where is the respect for the plebiscite which indicated that a majority of farmers support the single desk marketing of wheat and barley? Finally, where is the duty of the government to follow section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act, which states that any proposed changes to the Wheat Board's marketing structure ought to be put to farmers for a vote?

That is what we in the NDP are asking for today, that prairie farmers be the ones to have a say in their future and that the government respect farmers' democratic right to speak. As the current chair of the Wheat Board, farmer Allen Oberg, has said, the government's agenda is not about giving farmers choice, but ignoring the choices they have already made.

Members across in recent days have used the word "freedom". My question is, what about farmers having the freedom to decide their own destiny? What about the freedom to have their democratic vote, as seen through the plebiscite, be respected? What about the freedom to say that they are opposed to the government's agenda in dismantling the Wheat Board?

The irony is that the same government has not been up front or consistent in talking to farmers. Some might call it a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde approach.

Business of Supply

Recently, there was a federal election. We know for a fact that during the campaign many Conservative candidates did not speak about the Wheat Board. The subject was not in their material. If anything, they told a different story in person. There was a very vocal Conservative candidate in Churchill who mentioned a number of issues, but certainly did not mention the Wheat Board. That candidate certainly did not mention what the loss of the Wheat Board would mean to the community of Churchill, whose port depends 95% on the grain product that comes through the Canadian Wheat Board.

What kind of transparency was offered to people across the Prairies as they voted on May 2? Not only was it not made clear in the campaign what the government's agenda would be, but in some instances candidates actually served to hide their message. At a March agricultural forum in Minnedosa, Manitoba, hosted by the member of Parliament for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food told those gathered that the Conservatives “respected the vote of farmers”. He told the crowd, “Until farmers make that change, I'm not prepared to work arbitrarily.” He was also quoted as saying that the farmers “are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too.”

Just a few short months ago, this is what the very people who will be most impacted heard from the very Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food who today is turning his back on his commitment. Quite frankly, he is turning his back on democracy. How could the Conservatives possibly have one story during the election and a few short months later have a completely different story? This is also reason for concern in terms of what losing the Wheat Board will mean for the rest of our country, what it will mean for losing marketing structures, what it will mean for losing economic structures that put producers at the centre, and what it will mean not just for the west but for the whole country.

• (1025)

In my home region the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board is an important board that works hard on behalf of fishers in northern Manitoba and across western Canada. If this is the government's agenda on the Wheat Board, will it be the government's agenda when it comes to freshwater fish?

What about the kind of marketing structures on which people in other regions of Canada have been calling for protection?

[*Translation*]

I would like to underscore the message shared by a number of my colleagues from Quebec: supply management is an extremely important principle when it comes to developing the rural economy and Quebec's economy in general. Does this government also have an agenda for supply management? Even though today the government claims that it is not talking about abolishing it, it has been saying the same thing about the Canadian Wheat Board for months. It says that it will listen to what the farmers have to say. Does the same go for farmers in Quebec and Ontario? Is this only for prairie farmers? We would like to truly understand this government's logic.

[*English*]

If the government is not listening to farmers and is telling a different story on different occasions, then who is it listening to?

Many have said that those who stand to gain the most are the corporations, players such as Cargill, Viterra, Bunge and others that have been involved with agriculture all along. Profit is the bottom line of these corporations, not maximizing the return to farmers, the well-being of rural communities or ensuring that transportation networks across the Prairies are used in the most cost-effective way for farmers and the overall economy.

In a press release dated May 11, 2011, it is noted:

The Canadian government should give the grain industry at least six months to adjust before ending the Canadian Wheat Board's grain monopoly, the chief executive of Cargill's...Canadian subsidiary said on Wednesday.

A good time for the change, which would allow Western Canada's farmers to sell their wheat and barley to anyone they choose instead of just the Wheat Board, would be Aug. 1, 2012, which starts the 2012/13 marketing year—

That happens to be the same timeline the government has chosen. The exact message of Cargill Canada is the Conservative government's message to us as Canadians. Who is making those decisions and in whose interests are those decisions being made?

I would like to reference a letter to the editor wherein one prairie farmer talked about his concern with regard to the story that came out that the grain firm, Bunge, welcomes an end to the Wheat Board. Mr. Don Dutchak mentioned:

Among his egregious opinions, [the CEO] remarks that other countries have eliminated board trade because “it's not always well managed.”

The Auditor General of Canada and 14 international trade investigations of the Canadian Wheat Board would all beg to disagree. Report after report has spoken of the stellar management of the Canadian Wheat Board not only for the way in which it operates and prioritizes farmers but also for its transparency and accountability. However, that is not the story we are hearing from the corporations that are interested in what will be left when the Wheat Board is gone.

Economist Murray Fulton said that the loss of the CWB's single desk would make the Canadian system more like that in the U.S. where the grain company and railroad competition would fall, the current freight revenue cap would disappear and less value would be returned to farmers. He also said that the changes would be irreversible.

Mark Sandilands of the *Lethbridge Herald* pointed out that once the Wheat Board is gone, “We can imagine a modern feudal system with farmers at the mercy of multinational corporations who'll decide what to grow and how much to grow”.

The National Farmers Union stated:

Ending the single desk authority of the CWB...would transfer wealth created by Canadian farmers to big private, often foreign-owned grain companies instead of being returned to farmers and spent in their communities.

According to agricultural economist Richard Gray at the University of Saskatchewan, the winners are the big grain handlers. He states:

Business of Supply

...big grain handlers such as Cargill, Viterra and Bunge should end up better off. They will face a huge new supply of sellers competing to unload their product and make money off the marketing margin, or difference between the purchase and resale price.

The control these corporations will have will not only set farmers back but will also seek to destroy the reputation Canada has for growing the best quality wheat in the world.

As was pointed out, the Canadian system of seed registration to outward inspection of a vessel is an expensive system that farmers pay for. However, it is worth it because a higher percentage of the world market for both high quality and regular grain is captured because of that consistent quality. That means more money and more sales for western producers.

● (1030)

We cannot compete on volume or price because of our landlocked position and high transportation costs so quality is essential. Donna Welke, former assistant commissioner for Saskatchewan with the Canadian Grain Commission pointed out that producers know that and so do our competitors. She noted that it is in the interest of the United States to blend down our quality to get a competitive advantage for its corporations.

The question that remains is how the government, which has many members who were elected in western Canada and which claims to stand up for rural Canada, can in good conscience say that it is acting in the best interests of farmers when we know by looking at the case of the Australian Wheat Board that it is the corporations that will gain. The farmers will lose in an increasingly insecure economy. The brand we have invested in and have developed over decades will suffer. Our rural communities and regions like western Canada, as well as other regions where people are concerned about the potential risk it would pose to the marketing structures in other parts of the country, will suffer.

How can the government dismiss these facts? How can it stand in opposition to the idea that farmers should be deciding their destiny?

I would also make reference to the level of extreme arrogance we have seen from government members on this issue. As a western Canadian, I am profoundly disturbed by the way in which they claim to know what western Canadians think about and what their interests are with regard to the Wheat Board while all the time they ignore the result of the plebiscite. They make statements such as those made by the Prime Minister regarding the train barreling down on the Wheat Board or such as that made by the Minister of Agriculture about blowing out the candles.

We know that this kind of arrogance does not go over well in western Canada. We have seen it before with the Mulroney government where in the end it had no seats left in western Canada because people supported the idea of a democratic voice and the need for people at the grassroots level to be heard. It is the kind of arrogance that claims the government knows better with regard to our future.

In closing, as a young Canadian and someone who comes from the west what concerns me the most is what this means for our future. I would like to quote from a letter written to CBC's *As it Happens* by Sid Stevenson. He said:

As a 24 year old, 5th generation Manitoba wheat grower, I feel compelled to respond to your interview with...[the] Minister of Agriculture.

He went on to say:

Farmers are perfectly capable of determining the marketing system we want. The majority has decided in favour of the CWB, so why is the government not supporting our decision.

● (1035)

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps the hon. member can complete her comments during questions and comments.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member's speech. She spoke a lot about democracy and respecting democracy. However, she has unfortunately completely misrepresented the debates of the last election campaign.

The NDP made a promise during the last election campaign. It stated:

We will support the Canadian Wheat Board as the single desk marketer for Canadian wheat and barley.

That was the NDP's promise on page 16 of its platform.

The Conservative Party's promise on page 59 of its platform stated:

We will continue to work with Western Canadian grain farmers to ensure that the results of the barley plebiscite are respected and that they are given the freedom to choose whether to sell grain on the open market or through the Canadian Wheat Board.

These were very clear promises. Of the 56 members of Parliament who were elected in western Canada in the last election, 51 are Conservative, 3 are NDP and 2 are Liberal members.

I ask the hon. member why does she not respect the democratic results of the May 2 election?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, we are talking about the future of the Canadian Wheat Board and the plebiscite contained within the act which would allow farmers to be heard with regard to the future of the Wheat Board. As for the May 2 election, as has been pointed out by many people who were campaigning on the ground, that was not about the Wheat Board. In fact, the Minister of Agriculture is on record telling people in Minnedosa, Manitoba, a region that is now represented by a Conservative member, that he will respect the democratic right of farmers to vote.

Therefore, my question for the government members is what are they so afraid of? Why will they not follow the act? Why will they not allow farmers to vote on the future of the Canadian Wheat Board?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am interested in the question posed by the Conservative member. I think the operative words there are "work with".

The difference between the views of the Conservatives and the Liberals on this issue is that the Liberals respect the idea of holding a plebiscite whereas the Conservatives do not.

Business of Supply

If the Conservatives believed that the prairie wheat farmers would support what they are proposing in this bill I suspect they would have held a plebiscite. However, the government knows that the prairie wheat producers do not support what it is doing. That is the reason it will not hold a plebiscite. It realizes it would lose the vote.

Having said that, the evidence is clear that the bill is detrimental and would prove devastating for the prairie farmers as well as for many rural communities.

The following is a quote from *The Economist*:

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.

I ask the member to provide a comment on that.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's reference to such an esteemed publication as *The Economist* which clearly states the writing is on the wall, that dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board is not only bad for farmers but it is also bad for rural communities and western Canada. It is a vision based on ideology and corporate interests put forward by the Conservative government that seeks to silence farmers.

We are proposing a vision that would allow farmers to decide their destiny and would allow Canadians to talk about what would benefit our communities and regions, not corporate interests or other countries, and certainly not the friends of the government as we have heard mentioned throughout these last few weeks.

• (1040)

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech.

She spoke about structures in place for farmers. In Quebec, there are concerns that the government, which is going after the Canadian Wheat Board today, will go after supply management tomorrow. That would hurt Quebec's economy.

Could the member speak to these concerns?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, and also for the connection that he and a number of my colleagues from Quebec have made between what is happening with the Wheat Board and the potential threat to the supply management system in Quebec.

How can we believe a government that, just a few months ago, said that it would respect the farmers' vote and democracy and is now changing its mind? The same thing could happen with supply management. What Canadians across this country are seeing with the Wheat Board could happen to them soon enough if we consider this government's agenda and its complete lack of respect for what Canadians want and for the decisions we want to make for our economy and our future.

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake: Madam Speaker, during the campaign there was a clear discussion with very clear positions set out on the issue. The

NDP advocated for a single desk. The Conservative Party advocated for freedom of choice for western Canadian farmers.

The result of that is the member is the only rural member of Parliament in western Canada for any of the opposition parties in the Prairies. I ask the hon. member, is that why she chose to have the motion on this very important issue that affects western Canadian farmers seconded by a member of Parliament from Ontario?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, the idea of what was or was not said in the election is quite comical to hear being referenced here today.

In March, at an agricultural forum in Minnedosa in my own province, the Minister of Agriculture, whose agenda is to dismantle the Wheat Board, said that he would “respect the vote of farmers”. He said, “Until farmers make that change, I’m not prepared to work arbitrarily. They are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too”.

I do not think that the farmers in Minnedosa, the people of Manitoba, or the people of western Canada are simple enough to think that was a reference to May 2. In fact, it was a reference to the Canadian Wheat Board, which is important to every single one of us, not just in western Canada but across Canada.

I would urge the government to be transparent and tell us who it is really working on behalf of. It is working against farmers and for the corporations.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for this opportunity to put a question to my colleague across the way, who comes from the same home town as I do. There is the suggestion that the Port of Churchill would be impacted by this change. The member has referenced this often. However, would farmers not continue to ship their grain through Churchill if it was economically viable to do so? Basically, can we find another way to support that line and not make the farmers support it?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I would certainly hope that the member across would know quite well, given our common geographic background and the fact that he has visited Churchill, the reality is that once the Canadian Wheat Board is gone, 95% of what goes through the Port of Churchill would be gone. These are the facts.

If the government does not want to debate fact, which is clearly the case, then it will keep telling a story that simply is not true. However, if the Wheat Board is gone, then a massive base, not just in terms of products but employment and livelihood, would be gone in Churchill. We welcome investment, but to think that anything could substitute for the loss of the Wheat Board as we know it is absolutely ludicrous.

We are talking about listening to farmers and the people who want the Wheat Board to exist because it does provide benefit to communities like Churchill, communities like Winnipeg and across western Canada.

Business of Supply

●(1045)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to put on the record that this government cannot support this motion. We will not set aside Bill C-18, the marketing freedom for grain farmers act, as called for by this motion.

Having said that, I read over the motion and there were two words that jumped out at me, “democracy” and, of course, “supply management”, which the opposition is trying to hook into this argument as well.

In repeated surveys by the Canadian Wheat Board, a majority of farmers have asked for choice, and that number keeps going up. As late as last spring, 76% of young and beginning farmers were saying they want a choice, they want an option. That is exactly what this bill would do, and the marketing freedom for grain farmers act would deliver that choice. That is democracy at work.

With regard to supply management, which the opposition is trying to hook in here, unlike the members opposite, this government has actually taken concrete action to support supply management. During the last election, we were the only party to state unequivocally our support for supply management directly in our platform. In addition, we reiterated that commitment to supply management in the throne speech in the spring, something I cannot remember, in my 15 years here, happening on the other side at any given time. We have consistently defended our supply management system on the world stage, most recently at the Cairns Group meetings that I hosted in Saskatoon last month.

Please allow me to quote directly from Wally Smith, the newly elected president of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, who was with us in Saskatoon. He said:

We welcome [the minister] underscoring that Canada remains steadfast in its support for what works here in Canada, namely our supply management system.

He went on to say:

[The minister] took advantage of the Cairns Group discussions to promote the Government's support for our diverse agricultural sectors by broadening the focus to include other agricultural trade issues such as the role science and innovation can play for farmers, the environment and food security objectives.

I would go on with a whole list of favourable comments from industry on our steadfast support of supply management, but I will do that at another time.

The fact is the opposition is doing contortion acts to make a false connection back to this bill for marketing freedom. The two issues are further apart than apples and oranges. It is actually apples and walnuts. There is no link. Producers in the five supply managed industries, dairy, chicken, turkey, egg and boiler-hatching eggs, worked long and hard to establish these systems 40 years ago next year and we will celebrate that with them. The supply management industry is national in scope and that is one of the major differences between it and the Wheat Board.

There was strong support for the implementation of a supply management system before federal and provincial governments put it in place and it is a joint offering, similar to the Canadian Wheat Board in the Canadian Wheat Board area where four of the provinces

are involved and three are on-side with us in making these timely and called for changes.

The producers who now participate in the supply managed system are supportive of that system, unlike farmers in the Wheat Board area who want options. Canada's supply management system, unlike the Canadian Wheat Board, does not draw from the public purse to backstop its expenditures where the Canadian Wheat Board, in the last years, has taken \$1.3 billion from the public purse to backstop some mistakes that it made. Supply management is a proven system that enables our farmers to produce top quality poultry and dairy products enjoyed by Canadian farmers and, of course, the genetics from those great industries are world-renowned and in demand around the world.

On the other side of the coin is the Canadian Wheat Board, probably not even on the same coin. The Canadian Wheat Board is a regional monopoly. Supply management is national in scope, as I said. As it stands now, if we grow wheat, durum or barley, in western Canada only, and we want to sell it for export or for food use in Canada, then we have to sell it through the Canadian Wheat Board by law. If we wanted to sell our own wheat when the Liberals were in power, they would put us in shackles and leg irons, and throw us in jail. That was a terrible blight and I know that will be celebrated later today, in the movement forward on this act, by the farmers that were jailed.

Far from being universally supported, as is the case with the supply management system, a growing percentage of producers forced into the Canadian Wheat Board Act are demanding an option and we would deliver that. Our long-standing and continuing support for supply management and our commitment to marketing choice for western grain producers reflect this government's understanding of what Canadian farmers need to run their farm businesses effectively and be economically viable.

Motions like these are desperate scare tactics that the opposition, if it really understood agriculture, should be ashamed of. The opposition's fearmongering will not stop marketing freedom from coming, but it would and could destabilize a multi billion dollar western grain industry. It could undermine the livelihoods of thousands of grain farmers of all sizes.

●(1050)

It would be helpful at this time to cut through the rhetoric and review the basic goals of this dynamic piece of legislation. The main goal behind this change is to provide western Canadian farmers with more ways to achieve economic success.

Farmers who want access to a pooling system will continue to have that option through a new voluntary wheat board, while those who believe they can achieve greater success by dealing directly in the marketplace will also have that opportunity.

Business of Supply

Canadian goods and foodstuffs are in growing demand around the world. Canadian producers in mining, forestry, energy and food are working hard to be the most competitive and successful producers on the globe. Re-organizing the role of a 68-year-old government monopoly with a transition of up to five years is hardly a radical idea.

The opposition loves to use the word “ideologue”, perhaps because it has been a while since its members put forward an idea with any kind of substance. One does not have to be an ideologue to realize the marketing conditions of 2011 are not similar to those of 1943, when the Wheat Board became mandatory. Canada is simply joining the ranks of major advanced industrialized countries that have abandoned these types of marketing systems.

Refusing to adapt and evolve is not a recipe for success but a guarantee of long-term stagnation. This change has been the subject of debate for many years and is now our responsibility to act on the commitment we have made in every election campaign.

Our objective now is to ensure that there is predictability and certainty to allow grain sellers and buyers to plan effectively for the coming season. This legislation has garnered overwhelming support from farmers, farm groups and industry as a whole.

The government has heard from a great number of entrepreneurial farmers who believe that their own operations will be more successful if they have the marketing choices this bill would provide.

A broadly based working group concluded in a report just last month that this would be the case. The fact is, today's entrepreneurial farmers are proving over and over that they can and will help drive our economy if they have control over their farm businesses and ultimately over their own bottom line.

For the grain industry this means a choice in how they market their grain, a choice in when they sell their crop, a choice in who they sell their crop to, a choice in what price they sell their own commodity for, and ultimately a choice in whether they sell their crop to a new voluntary wheat board or on the open market.

Our comprehensive plan brings certainty and clarity to farmers, industry and the market overall. The government has always maintained that farmers must have a choice in how they market their grain, whether that is individually or in an open market through a voluntary Canadian wheat board.

The act enables the government to provide the Canadian Wheat Board with the initial support required to operate as a voluntary marketing organization, allowing it time to transition to full private ownership. We will work with the board to ensure this transition happens, as soon and as smoothly as possible.

Once passed, the act will also allow farmers and grain companies to immediately enter into forward contracts with the purchase or sale of wheat, barley and durum for execution after the beginning of the crop year, August 1, 2012. This will allow farmers and the entire value chain to plan accordingly and transition in an orderly fashion.

This new freedom also has many economic benefits for communities across the Prairies. There has been a lot of doom and gloom speculated on here, but processors will now be able to open

their doors for business, unfettered by the current requirement to buy wheat and barley only from the Canadian Wheat Board.

Canada's grain industry is a powerhouse that brings \$16 billion to the farm gate and makes up almost half of our agricultural exports, but what once was Canada's signature crop is lagging behind. Wheat and barley innovation have become stagnant. Competition for acres has weakened, and new crops, such as canola, have surpassed wheat in value on the Prairies.

A C.D. Howe report released this spring confirmed that Canada's share of annual worldwide wheat production has fallen by 50%. Equally, Canadian market share of world barley exports has declined by 40%. With that reduced market share, the Canadian Wheat Board has far less influence on the world stage, and as a result, has become a price taker.

We have seen tremendous growth in value-added opportunities across the Prairies over the last 20 years for crops that do not have a monopoly market, including oats, pulses and canola. We will see these same opportunities open up for wheat and barley as we implement this marketing freedom act.

We will work with farmers and industry to attract investment, encourage innovation, create value-added jobs and build a stronger economy. We know that the potential for wheat durum and barley is high, but the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board as it is, is standing in the way.

Look what happened to oats when it came out from under the monopoly. In Manitoba alone the acreage of oats has increased by 175,000 acres since its removal from the Wheat Board's control in 1989. Within weeks of that decision, two new processing plants were announced. Several more plants have been built in the late eighties and early nineties, significantly changing the oat market. This includes Can-Oat in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, which today employs 125 people. Manitoba now processes a half a million tonnes of oats annually.

● (1055)

Just over the border in North Dakota, there are many new pasta plants that have sprung up creating jobs that could have been created in Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Alberta for that matter.

We can expect more processors to start up new businesses in Canada. Private marketers of wheat and barley will expand their work forces. Milling firms will be able to purchase directly from the farmer of their choice at a price and time they negotiate. Entrepreneurs will have the option of starting up their own small specialty flour mills and malting and pasta plants.

Business of Supply

In fact, just lately we had the honour of turning the sod on a new pasta plant in Regina, Saskatchewan. The company does manufacture pasta worldwide now but has stayed out of Canada because of the monopoly and all the red tape involved in dealing directly with durum producers. The new plant slated to open next year will create 60 permanent jobs and up to 150 temporary jobs. The stage is set. Market forces can come to bear.

Forward-thinking processors like Alliance Grain Traders will be able to deal directly with farmers for the quality and consistency of supply that has gone missing in the ridiculous buy-back program that the Wheat Board has implemented. The business model in Regina is based on more than just that, but at the end of the day, certainly this makes it easier to move forward.

Murad Al-Katib, a young, dynamic businessman from Davidson, Saskatchewan, was unequivocal in stating the removal of the single desk makes this new pasta plant in Regina all that much more possible.

Alliance Grain Traders has built a world-class pulse handling system for lentils, peas and so forth, doing it right here where they are grown not at point of sale, as the Wheat Board claims must be done. It sees that same opportunity for durum pasta and I look forward to celebrating its future successes, successes that would not be possible without this government's important legislation.

As one Saskatchewan farmer told *The Globe and Mail* recently, "I'm looking forward to selling to them" and I am sure he speaks for other durum growers in his province as well.

All this is great news for Saskatchewan and I know there is more to come. It is simple logic, but it seems to be lost on a lot of the naysayers. More buyers mean more competition and a better price for a farmer's grain. We are already seeing two commodity exchanges on both sides of the border start to compete for farmers' wheat.

For the first time ever, the Minneapolis Grain Exchange will be accepting futures of Canadian grain. For the first time ever, the Minneapolis Grain Exchange will be allowing Canadian grain to be used to settle futures contracts.

The Intercontinental Exchange Futures Canada in Winnipeg has announced that its own spring wheat futures contract based in western Canada will be ready for trading as soon as the bill receives royal assent. This is tremendous news, which means that farmers will have an important risk management tool for the day when they begin to market their grain themselves.

We are hearing a lot of fearmongering about big corporations, but the fact is that there are strong Canadian companies in the business who are eager to make marketing freedom work, of course, including a number of farmer-owned terminals across western Canada now who also own their own port terminal in Vancouver.

Mayo Schmidt, the president and CEO of Viterra, again a top-quality Canadian company headquartered in Regina, was quoted this past Friday saying he is eager to work with the voluntary board to move the industry forward. He will handle their grain. This is his quote:

If the Wheat Board chooses to engage with industry to frame out a relationship and access to the (grain-handling) system, which will be provided, I think their prospects will be greater if they do it sooner than if they do it later.

Let us stop holding them up and let the market work. He also said: "The opportunity is now to take advantage of the openness and willingness of all players to welcome them as a participant". He added that competition for farmers' grain will be fierce, adding that it is bound to increase dramatically as it has since the end of the Australian Wheat Board's grain monopoly three years ago.

As we all know, nothing good ever comes easily. As is evident by our comprehensive plan, our government is working diligently with industry to make the road to an open market as smooth as possible. We are taking every precaution to ensure that the transition period is as smooth as possible for farmers and industry overall.

Canada's farmers grow world-class food in a global marketplace that is ripe with opportunity. We are seeking to put wheat and barley farmers back in the driver's seat so they can seize these opportunities. Our government will free our farmers so they can continue to drive the economy and feed Canada and the world.

The motion from the member for Churchill is counterproductive and will only hurt the overall grain industry in western Canada. It is not surprising the opposition seems out of touch with western farmers, as it has no rural seats in the Wheat Board affected area. What is surprising is that opposition members continue to put their own self-interests ahead of ensuring stability and marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers.

I urge all members of the House to work for farmers, not against them. Let us show western Canadian grain farmers that their voices have been heard, that marketing freedom is a right they deserve, and vote against this reckless motion.

• (1100)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, first, I would like to challenge the statement that none of us is elected from a Wheat Board affected area. In representing Churchill, I cannot think of a community that stands to be, along with so many others, as affected by the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board.

I heard the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food talk a lot about the well-being of farmers. Obviously in line with what we are debating here today, my question for the minister is: What is wrong with allowing farmers to vote on the future of the Wheat Board? If we are talking about the potential benefit for farmers, why are he and his government not allowing farmers to vote when it comes to deciding their own future? What is he afraid of? What is his government afraid of? Is it because the plebiscite showed that a majority of farmers support the single desk?

My question is: If we are talking about their benefit, why do we not let farmers decide?

Business of Supply

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, in that vein, I am hopeful that the member who represents Churchill will actually let Churchill help her decide that this is a good piece of work.

The incentive we put forward for Churchill maintains the incentive, the dollar incentive. It would provide \$5 million a year for five years, to ensure farmers are incented to bring product through Churchill.

We have gone one step further than just Board grains. We have allowed that incentive to now cover non-Board grains, canolas, pulses. There were a couple of ships of pulses shipped through Churchill last year. This is a great incentive to ensure they can diversify and continue to move forward.

There is also a \$4 million investment from Transport Canada to upgrade some of the docking facilities to make sure that, when those ships come in, they do it safely and efficiently.

Also, some money that was allocated from western diversification a few years ago will be extended so they have time to actually make use of that money.

Of course, that all builds on the \$30-some million that was put into Churchill in budget 2008, I think, which of course she voted against.

So, I am hoping that she stands on behalf of Churchill and votes with them. She should call the mayor, call Mike, and find out from him that this is a great initiative. He wants it. She should support it.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have said in this House many times before, through you, that while we may not live in the prairie provinces, we do know where our food comes from and we know it does not come from the grocery stores. We know it comes from the hard work of western Canadian farmers.

That being said, the minister speaks of the choice of farmers. In Minnedosa, he did say to them that he would not act arbitrarily. He did say to them that he would conduct a vote.

I would ask the minister, through you, Madam Speaker, what exactly he meant when he said to those farmers in Minnedosa, "You will be allowed a vote. I will not act arbitrarily". What exactly did he mean?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, words that were said in Minnedosa are taken out of context on this point. We were discussing the election of the directors at that time. I said, "I'm not going to speak out against what farmers have elected".

We were also talking about a barley plebiscite that we did in 2008 that the Wheat Board overruled through court action. That was against what farmers wished for at that time.

Having said that, I do agree with the member opposite that farmers in Canada do produce top-quality foodstuffs. However, they do need a direction to move forward.

I am not moving arbitrarily. This government is not moving arbitrarily. We now have, and have always had, the support of three of the provinces involved in this Canadian Wheat Board area. They are on our side moving forward. British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, which produce 85% to 90% of the Wheat Board commodities, are on side with us. The major farm groups, the Grain

Growers of Canada, western wheat growers and western barley growers, are on side. Farmers who have their boots on the ground in western Canada want this to happen and need this to happen. So there are no arbitrary moves here. The member for Guelph should actually talk to the farmers who want this to happen.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I find this debate somewhat interesting. It might be confusing for Canadians watching the debate. We have this motion put forward by the NDP. It is seconded by the member for Welland. And the most prominent spokesperson in the Liberal Party is my good friend from Guelph.

I would like the minister to clarify. What impact does the Canadian Wheat Board have on farmers from Welland or the Guelph area?

• (1105)

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, actually, the farmers of Ontario are privileged to have an optional Ontario wheat board, run by Barry Senft. It is doing an excellent job. I was reminded by the chair of the Grain Farmers of Ontario, Don Kenny, of the change that was made in 2003. We used his farm as a backdrop to make this announcement the other day. And of course, Barry Senft was there as well. They talked about the changes made in 2003, how farmers in Ontario have embraced that. They are now growing 50% more coarse grains; whereas, as I outlined, in western Canada we have lost 50% of our wheat production and 40% of our barley production. So Ontario at this point is literally eating our lunch. That is not a bad thing because it drives processing here in Ontario. The member for Welland and the member for Guelph will tell us that there is a tremendous amount of processing going on here at point of production.

We want to see that happen in western Canada. It is not allowed under the Wheat Board Act. We are going to change that.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry for mentioning Welland on more than one occasion in the House. It is always a great joy when other members recognize my riding without my having to do it myself.

Let me be clear about why I would second it or not and why folks in Ontario are or are not in support of the Wheat Board. What I said in the House yesterday and what I am saying today is that in Ontario, as the minister has pointed out, there was a difference in 2003 because farmers chose that. It was not an act of government; the farmers chose it in Ontario. All we in the NDP are asking for is that western farmers make the choice.

I absolutely agree that there is a divergent viewpoint among farmers themselves, not just among members in the House. Certain prairie farmers want to do it one way, and other farmers want to continue the single desk. The simple question to the minister is: Why not allow them to have a choice? Why do we not debate the question we should ask and make it a fair question? I understand it may not be this or that; there may be another option. We should make it a fair question and let the farmers decide.

Business of Supply

Ultimately, an election is not necessarily about farmers deciding, especially, as was pointed out by some members, if they live in downtown Toronto. Do people who live in downtown Edmonton really know about prairie farmers any more than downtown Torontonians do? It begs the question on that.

I would ask the minister to respond as to why we do not give farmers the choice to decide for themselves.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, the main difference about the Ontario wheat board prior to 2003 is that there was not a federally legislated law that said farmers had to sell to it. It was not mandated by federal legislation. That is the situation we face in western Canada.

I am more than happy to allow farmers the freedom. Right now they are voting with their air seeders and their trucks. As I said, they have grown other crops. It has given rise to a dramatic special crops industry led by pulses; it has given rise to a world-class canola industry, and that is what has happened. Farmers have voted with their air seeders and their trucks. They are not taking out permit books; they are not growing rotational crops like wheat, durum and barley, and that is unfortunate because now we are running into some disease problems in canola. Barley is needed in that rotation in order to clean the clubroot out of the soil.

We are going to get back to that by giving farmers the opportunity to vote with their air seeders, continue to vote on their own and do what is in the best interests of their own farm enterprises.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to make a comment about the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food's statement that he supports supply management in other parts of the country.

I was looking at the video on the website of the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, the talking Eskimo video, and in it there is a young farmer who is making the argument that he wants to be able to sell his wheat to his brother to make bread. I am wondering about farmers in my own riding who might consider selling raw milk to a cheese maker down the road without having to get a quota.

I am wondering if the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is prepared to take the time to explain to farmers that, no, it is in their best interests to have quotas and supply management for milk, and if he would be willing to defend that in negotiations with other countries.

• (1110)

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, I am a little concerned with the direction in which the member for Kingston and the Islands is going. He is actually saying he does not support supply management. That is unfortunate.

This government has never been shy. As I said, there are quotes from Wally Smith, the new president of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, at the Cairns Group, which includes Australia and New Zealand who have been most vociferous against our supply-managed sector. We go right after them. We are not shy about saying the quality, consistency and high calibre that our supply-managed sector delivers in Canada is second to none. There have been no government bailouts, as we have seen in the U.S. and the European

Union, for dairy farmers in Canada. They draw their money from the marketplace by delivering a top-quality, consistent supply.

International processors, such as Danone, the latest one in Quebec, are moving in to make use of our yoghurt. There is another one coming into Ontario very soon. They are world class and deserve our support. They deserve his.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am certainly grateful for another opportunity to rise and speak to the wrong-headed, ideological attack the Conservative government has perpetrated on western grain farmers and the family farm across Canada.

I am grateful for this opportunity because, sadly, it was not one the government was willing to afford the producers most meaningfully impacted by its reckless decision to kill the single desk marketing and sales arm of the Canadian Wheat Board.

More than the disenfranchisement of western wheat and barley growers, this is about the disenfranchisement of Canadians. The government demonstrated in the last Parliament that it was not about to listen to any voice that opposed its singular branded message. It fired Paul Kennedy, head of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP. It fired Linda Keen, chair of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

Now every time a Conservative MP talks about his or her mandate, the subtext is subtly "resistance is futile". Western Canadian grain growers will not be silenced. Neither will we on this side of the House.

Predictably, as it has done with the bill meant to address human smuggling, its omnibus crime bill and its budget bill, the Conservative government gave notice of motion for time allocation after only an hour and a half of debate.

While I understand that listening to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food can be tiring even for a Conservative partisan, standing up for western farmers who may disagree with the minister—even Conservative farmers whom the government refuses to listen to—is no reason to cut off debate.

Clearly the Conservative government acknowledged my assertion that we should not be having this debate, since the bill is very obviously in contravention of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. Its response, however, instead of holding a plebiscite, was to bury its head in the sand to a wave of criticism levelled at its illegal actions.

I will remind hon. members that section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act states:

The minister shall not cause to be introduced in Parliament a bill that would exclude any kind, type, class or grade of wheat or barley, or wheat or barley produced in any area in Canada...unless (a) the Minister has consulted with the board about the exclusion or extension; and (b) the producers of the grain have voted in favour of the exclusion or extension, the voting process having been determined by the Minister.

Business of Supply

The government is missing a key element in its ideological pursuit of the death of the single desk sales and marketing system: the will of the majority of western Canadian grain farmers. Consequently, the legislation before us over the past week exceeds the authority of the government, based on its neglect in fulfilling all of its obligations.

The institution of the Canadian Wheat Board is considered so sacrosanct that codified in the statute is a mechanism designed to protect farmers from a government arbitrarily removing the strength and clout of an agency that sells wheat and barley at the best possible prices on behalf of all western Canadian grain farmers. Section 47.1 was enshrined in the Canadian Wheat Board Act to prevent the very abuse that is being perpetrated by the minister and the government.

Repeatedly throughout the past few days of debate, Conservative members have lamented the plebiscite and argued its imperfections. On this side, we have never insisted that the government take the word of 62% of wheat farmers and 51% of barley farmers for granted. Instead, like true democrats we have argued that the government, if not satisfied with the plebiscite held by farmers themselves, should hold its own plebiscite, as mandated by the act, and determine the will of farmers.

The Liberal Party is not one to stand in the way should a majority of farmers in the Prairies decide to cut out their marketing and sales arm. They know best. They must decide for themselves, as they have a right to decide for themselves.

We have been clear from the start: let farmers decide. The government will not even allow that to happen. Despite its lamentations on Ontario's ability to market its own grain, the government conveniently forgets that Ontario wheat farmers made their own decision to stop marketing grain through a single desk.

Canadians must know that the marketing of wheat in Ontario and the marketing of wheat in the Prairies are two very different situations. Ontario produces soft wheat used for pastry, cookies and doughnuts, while the red spring wheat from the west goes to making durum and pasta. Ontario flour mills rely on prairie wheat for bread flour.

• (1115)

Moreover, the Prairies produce 80% of Canada's wheat, ten times more wheat than eastern Canada. Ninety percent of Ontario wheat is consumed in Ontario or the northeast United States; meanwhile, 68% of Prairie wheat is exported. It is destined to other countries at greater transportation costs, costs that are kept low by the clout of the Wheat Board. Transportation is certainly less a factor in Ontario, given its close location to its markets.

Why is it, then, that Conservative MPs from the Prairies trust western grain farmers when relying on their votes, but less so to make their own decisions on marketing and selling their grain? Despite their Reform Party ideology, this Conservative Party seems to have forgotten, once having come to power, that western Canadian grain producers deserve the same right to self-determination as that exercised by Ontario farmers decades ago.

Neither the Prime Minister nor the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has ever made much of a secret of their single-minded desire for the death of the single desk system, but their reluctance to hear from the Canadian public on the issue is disturbing. Indeed, I

have received messages from western producers that their own Conservative MPs are refusing to take their calls or answer their emails in their plight to be heard. So blinded are these western Conservative MPs, so zealous are they in their pursuit, that they have abandoned their responsibilities to their constituents.

Interestingly, heading into an election, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food was more than willing to listen to farmers. He assured western Canadian grain producers in Minnedosa, as recited in the *Manitoba Co-operator* in March, that farmers would have their say on the fate of the single desk system, that he would not act arbitrarily and that a Conservative government would not undertake any action without hearing first from farmers, yet once elected, neither the minister nor the Prime Minister was willing to hear the voice of the majority of farmers.

I hearken to a comment made many years ago by the Prime Minister that he would change the face of Canadian politics. He has done more than change the face: he has disfigured it. Instead, the minister, the Prime Minister and other members of the Conservatives' string puppet orchestra harp on about a mandate.

In August 68,000 ballots were mailed out to farmers. Over the course of that month, meetings were held across the Prairies. Hundreds of farmers came in off the fields for meetings as harvest began, simply to ensure their voices were heard. I and other members of my party were there. We saw the many hundreds for ourselves and we heard their voices, their dismay and anger at the government. Farmers from both sides attended these meetings, listened respectfully and made their points as to why they believed the single desk should go or stay.

There is no mandate to proceed illegally with a bill to jeopardize the livelihood of western Canadian grain farmers. Not even receiving 24% support from eligible voters would give a mandate to tear the marketing sales arm away from Canadian farmers.

In Colonsay, Saskatchewan, in the riding of the minister of western economic diversification, farmers do not believe there is a mandate to kill the single desk system. They gathered there together on Friday in protest and said so. Nor do they believe that in Brandon-Souris, where again farmers gathered to say so, yet apparently their members of Parliament are deaf to the voices of their constituents. Even after three days of debate, not one single Conservative prairie MP has had the courage to stand up and defend the rights of their constituents to hold a government-conducted plebiscite as mandated by section 47.1 of the act.

Business of Supply

Later this week, farmers will gather in Winnipeg. While we can only hope that the government will take the time to take notice, we should not hold our breath, because the government does not notice anything or anyone who is not in total agreement with it.

The results of the plebiscite were unambiguous. There was a 56% response rate, a number similar to the turnout in many recent general elections and byelections, including in the minister's own riding. Sixty-two per cent of wheat producers and 51% of barley producers voted to retain their single desk marketing and sales arm under the Canadian Wheat Board. Regrettably, the minister dismissed the results as an expensive survey.

Unfortunately, Canadians do not have the same opportunity to dismiss their muzzled Prairie MPs' own election results similarly.

● (1120)

Strangely, just yesterday Conservative MPs were willing to cite other Canadian Wheat Board surveys only so long as they were in compliance with their own viewpoints. Again I ask the members opposite to remember where they hid their courage before walking into this chamber, and if they are so confident in the will of western Canadian grain farmers, to hold a plebiscite.

Instead the government, through its misguided legislation, has sought to silence farmers in every way possible. Not only does it blatantly ignore the right of western Canadian grain farmers to self-determination through a plebiscite, but it is eliminating the democratic will of farmers through their elected farm directors. Clause 12 of Bill C-18 states that:

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.

These are farmers chosen by farmers to be on the board and represent their interests, and now there shall be none. Instead of 10 elected directors, the Canadian Wheat Board will consist of five Conservative-appointed directors.

Consistently, eight of the 10 elected directors have consistently supported the single desk system. By reducing the number of directors from 10 elected and five appointed to simply five government-appointed directors on the five-year interim voluntary wheat board, the Conservative government would have it that only its own people, dictated to from the Prime Minister's Office, would speak for the multitude of farmers, thus suppressing any sort of democratic expression. The government places a higher value on ideology than on the experience of farmers.

Many, including the otherwise conservative magazine *The Economist*, argue that in the fragile state of the world economy, dismantling this single desk system will mean that:

Smaller producers, faced with mounting marketing costs, will inevitably have to sell their farms to bigger rivals or agribusiness companies...devastating small prairie towns, whose economies depend on individual farmers with disposable income.

What is to stop the market freedom government from going further? Janis Joplin once sang that "freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose". There is more to lose. Once the government dismantles the single desk for Canadian wheat, the only thing left to lose will be the supply management system for poultry, dairy and

eggs. I suppose that farmers at that point will not be "nothin' if they ain't free".

The United States has unilaterally thickened the border in an effort to "stimulate their economy". The number one trade asked by Americans has always been to get rid of the Wheat Board. Why? It is because it gives our farmers a competitive advantage. Now the Conservative government is kowtowing to our neighbours to the south by not only rolling over on protectionism but also offering up our competitive advantage as an appetizer. This comes from a Prime Minister who criticized our former Liberal government for not deregulating our banking system as the Americans had, and as they wished, wishing instead to walk in lockstep with our neighbours on every issue and getting nothing in return.

There have been 14 challenges to the World Trade Organization from the United States demanding we get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board. In every instance, the WTO has ruled in our favour and allowed western grain producers to maintain their valuable resource. Let us make no mistake: once it is gone, the provisions of our trade agreement say that it can never be brought back.

Just yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food was caught unable to answer why the government feels our future key grain decisions are just as well made in Minneapolis, Chicago or Kansas City, where they will be. There have been no assurances made by the government regarding Canadian food sovereignty. It is one thing that these small family farms will be bought up by massive agribusinesses; it is entirely another to see Canadian farms expropriated by foreign interests, not unlike the purchasing of our mineral-rich lands out west. These interests are concerned with their own national food security and not at all with Canadian food sovereignty.

Last week I asserted that the Prime Minister has become the head chef and bottle-washer to the U.S. trade administration, but I was wrong: to be the head chef, the U.S. would have to come to us. Instead, we will shortly become the all-too-willing caterer to the perpetual buffet of trade concessions.

● (1125)

Regardless of the assertions of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture made yesterday respecting supply management, the government could not even make good on its promise to western Canadian grain producers to listen to their voice. What assurances can the remaining five supply managed industries glean? We would be foolish and naive to think that our supply managed industries, poultry, dairy and eggs, are not already now being lined up in the sights of the government for their demise.

Business of Supply

Farmers will also be free to be railroaded by CN and CP Rail. Representatives of other agricultural industries have approached me concerned that Canada is regarded as an unreliable supplier of agricultural commodities by virtue of the fact that it cannot get its supplies to port along the railway. In large part, this is a direct result of the ongoing disputes between suppliers and CN-CP Rail.

The agricultural industries anticipated that these concerns would be addressed in the rail service review tabled in March. Meanwhile, seven months later, we are talking about stripping prairie farmers of transportation infrastructure while the government shelves yet another report.

Where is the facilitator for the rail industry? I have spoken to pulse producers and they have asked where the rail service level agreements are for them and other producers across the agricultural industry. Where are the mechanisms to protect farmers and prevent abuse by unresponsive rail companies?

The Minister of State for Transport has been remarkably silent on this issue. Shortline Railway owners are rightfully worried that they will no longer be able to maintain their railways without the support of the Canadian Wheat Board once it has gone. Western grain farmers have turned to the shortlines in response to the closing of sidings and unresponsive railway companies.

Farmers understand the virtue of saving \$1,400 per producer car on transportation costs through the CWB's unique bargaining position, a savings that will be lost almost immediately. Presently, it is in a position to negotiate with CN and CP Rail to ensure the adequate supply of producer cars. With the loss of the clout of the Canada Wheat Board, this, too, will be lost.

In my conversations with western Canadian grain farmers, all too often I have heard tragic stories about the treatment of producers at the hands of the railways. The railway companies have such disregard for wheat farmers that often they will send railway cars with holes in them, without any consideration for what grain will be lost along the way. Farmers individually are up against the behemoth where once their collective clout enabled them recourse in the face of such poor treatment.

The government seems intent on spending a conservatively estimated \$500 million, in a time when it claims that we are still in a fragile economic state, to demobilize an organization that has yet to require any federal funding. It has been farmer funded for farmer profits and yet the so-called Conservatives are ready to forsake billions of dollars in revenue for farmers while spending hundreds of millions to dismantle it.

Clearly, the protection of the family farm in the prairie provinces is not a priority under a Conservative government. The Conservatives might have done anything else to accommodate the popular will of a majority of wheat and barley farmers and yet decided against it for their own ideological needs.

The legislation is endemic of the government's mean-spiritedness. It is ill-conceived. Just yesterday, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board was forced to take down a video on his website that was not only blatantly inaccurate, but contained repeated bigoted racist slurs.

Such is the arrogance of the government that it feels it is no longer responsible to ordinary Canadians for its actions. The legislation made it clear and the will of western Canadian farmers confirmed that the Canadian Wheat Board is an essential institution on the prairies.

Having only passed second reading, the government still has the opportunity to withdraw its legislation and hold a plebiscite to finally determine the will of Canadian farmers. I implore the government to conduct such a plebiscite in the interests of our farmers and in the interests of democracy.

• (1130)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Madam Speaker, for my constituents, this is more about food security than it is about marketing or competition.

Increasingly, we are tied to a system of food production and distribution that leaves us vulnerable to other countries when we produce less of what we need ourselves. Our farmlands near cities have turned into suburban housing and our food travels farther and farther in the name of maximizing profit. Most cities do not even have a few weeks worth of food in them and our vulnerability gets worse in the winter months. We are at the mercy of climate change and rising energy prices, which also create big challenges for the global food market.

This is the time when we should be developing plans to reduce our reliance on an overly complex food distribution system and using our energy to create better local networks to feed ourselves. It is not a time for the government to let the whims of international markets leave us further exposed, which is what this bill would do. I wonder if the member would like to elaborate on that.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, *The Economist*, to which I referred in my remarks, addresses that very issue. Small farms out west will cease to exist. This was confirmed by conversations I have had with farmers who are in favour of scrapping the Wheat Board. The average age of farmers is 58 years old. Many farmers out west exceed that age and will be unable to make the transition. When their farms close, they will be sold, and not just to large agri-business. They will be sold to international corporations, perhaps even other countries, which I have said, have interests of their own, and their interests are not consistent with Canada's need for food security and food sovereignty.

The member's question was very insightful. This is a concern that farmers have out west and that consumers and Canadians have right across the country.

Business of Supply

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Madam Speaker, I say that we should let the people decide. We should have a plebiscite. Many of my neighbours have told me that they think the Conservative Party should be the only political party in the country and that the Conservative Party should hold a monopoly on politics in the country. We should have a plebiscite on whether the Conservative Party should form a monopoly in the country.

Do the members opposite honestly believe that it would be proper to have a vote on something like that? The Wheat Board issue is a rights issue as well. Farmers produce their grain. They put all the money and effort into it. It is their property and no one has the right to limit the way they market their commodity.

However, that is what the opposition is trying to do. It is suggesting that should continue. The Wheat Board started as a voluntary group, with voluntary participation. The monopoly was only put in place during the war effort and should have been removed right after the war but it was not. I do not know why but we are doing the job now.

Do the members opposite and that member honestly believe that it is okay to have a vote on removing people's rights?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his comments that we should have a plebiscite.

The difference is that there is no legislation surrounding the election of the Conservatives throughout Canada as he suggests. There is legislation. Section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act does require a plebiscite. Section 47.1 says that before the government can act and change the terms and conditions of the Canadian Wheat Board and its very existence, it must ask the farmers. So sacrosanct is this institution and so helpful to the western Canadian farmers that its very existence is enshrined in legislation. To remove its existence requires their vote. It is called self-determination. That is what I would direct my friend to, section 47.1.

This is an organization that sells to a hundred different—

• (1135)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. There were many people rising for questions, so I would like to give members the opportunity to ask further questions.

The hon. member for Sydney-Victoria.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for all the hard work he has been doing on the agriculture file, going across the country, working on committee and fighting for farmers and for reliable food production.

It is very clear what the Conservatives are doing by dismantling the Wheat Board. However, what is also being exposed here is what they are planning on doing with the other marketing boards across the country, with the SM5. I think it will be blatantly clear what the United States, with its subsidized grains, will be doing with those SM5 marketing boards.

My hon. colleague lives in Guelph, which is the centre of a very large agriculture area. What will happen when the government dismantles the other marketing boards? What will happen in southern Ontario when the flood of eggs, milk and chicken start coming across the border when the marketing board is dismantled?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, our deepest concern is that at every trade negotiation the government will be asked to compromise and sacrifice the sanctity of supply management for the same reasons that it has been asked to dismantle the Wheat Board. It is only a matter of time before the supply managed poultry, eggs and dairy will be under the scalpel. There is no question of that.

It is no surprise that there are so many agricultural publications out there now. I have seen them and I am sure members must have seen them in western newspapers and other publications talking about the threat that supply management poses to Canadian consumers. This is just the beginning of the chat so that the government can set up its next target.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was shocked as I sat here listening to the member for Vegreville—Wainwright calling for a plebiscite. I was absolutely enthused to hear that maybe he is actually echoing the people who voted for him to be here, people from Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta who want to be heard and who want a plebiscite.

If we have members of the governing side actually calling for this, it is a game changer. Why do the Conservatives not actually listen to the people who voted for them to be here?

I would like to ask my hon. colleague for his thoughts on letting the people who voted for him speak in this House?

Mr. Leon Benoit: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member knows full well that I was calling for a plebiscite, tongue in cheek, on whether the Conservative Party should be the only party allowed in Canada. I did—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. That is a matter of debate and not a point of order.

The hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, I, too, am pleased that the member for Vegreville—Wainwright has now conceded that a plebiscite is necessary. I have already explained that the plebiscite that we are talking about is enshrined in legislation, whereas a plebiscite to make the Conservative Party of Canada the only party in Canada is not enshrined in legislation, although I am certain the member would like it to be. There is no question of that.

However, what is important is that the conduct of the government is disenfranchising 70,000 farmers in western Canada. It is ignoring their rights of self-determination, and I cannot stress that point enough.

• (1140)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was able to contrast positions earlier between the NDP and the Conservatives. I could not do that with the Liberals because I searched the word “wheat” in their 2011 platform and it was not there. However, I did articulate the Conservative position. The member referenced two ridings, Blackstrap and Brandon—Souris. I would just point out for the member that, after the clear question during the election campaign, in Blackstrap 54% voted Conservative, almost 70% in the rural area, and—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must give the hon. member for Guelph 30 seconds to respond.

Business of Supply

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, interestingly, the Conservatives only received 24% of all eligible voters support in the last election. I can tell my friend from Edmonton, having been out west four times now this year talking about this issue, that a lot of Conservative farmers approached me and said that they may have voted Conservative but that they did not vote Conservative for the purpose of dismantling the Wheat Board.

I would remind the member that the word “wheat” did not show up in the Conservatives' platform during the election either.

Mr. Mike Lake: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would just point out that on page 59 of the Conservative platform we reference the Canadian Wheat Board.

The Deputy Speaker: Those are questions of debate. I think the hon. members realize that these are not points of order.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of our party's opposition motion on the Canadian Wheat Board. I am pleased to split my time with my colleague, the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

I am very happy to hear there may be some movement on the other side in that members are asking for a plebiscite, which is at the heart of the opposition day motion.

Our motion, as so eloquently introduced by the member for Churchill, calls on the government to set aside its legislation abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board and to conduct a full and free vote by all current members of the Canadian Wheat Board to determine their wishes. My speech today will speak directly to this motion, which is a direct reaction to Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts. I support our motion not only because I believe that maintaining the Canadian Wheat Board is important for Canadians, but I also feel Bill C-18 undermines Canadian democracy and is another example of how the Conservatives are using their majority power in an irresponsible manner.

There are two critical aspects of Canadian democracy. One of them is with regard to outcomes and the other is with regard to process. With respect to outcomes, those who often judge the health of a democracy examine the extent to which the preferences of minority groups are respected when elected governments make decisions. In terms of process, the extent to which a democracy can be considered healthy rests on the extent to which governments include citizens in both electoral and non-electoral decision making. Our motion speaks to how Bill C-18 undermines Canadian democracy with regard to both outcomes and process, and I hope all members of the House will support it.

Before discussing how Bill C-18 undermines both the outcome and process of democracy, it is worth stepping back to look at the institution which we support with our motion.

The Canadian Wheat Board is the prairie farmers' marketing organization for wheat, durum and barley. It is the largest and most successful grain marketing company in the world. It is a very impressive institution, proud to be called Canadian and recognized around the world.

The Canadian Wheat Board's roots date back to the 1920s when western farmers began pooling their grain in order to obtain better prices. It was a collective effort supported right across the country. In 1943 the single desk was created, mandating all prairie farmers to market their wheat through the Canadian Wheat Board. The single desk structure provided financial stability, prudent risk management and certainty of grain supply, all important during the war years but also after the war ended.

The Canadian Wheat Board is controlled, directed and funded by farmers. It is not a government organization; it is a farmers organization. The Canadian Wheat Board sells all around the world and arranges for transportation from thousands of farms to customers in 70 countries. About 21 million tonnes of wheat and barley are marketed by the Canadian Wheat Board every year.

Eighty per cent of the wheat grown in western Canada each year is exported overseas. It is not only an important Canadian institution but it is an important organization worldwide. Overseas exports are the Canadian Wheat Board's core business, but it also supplies Canadian millers and maltsters. The Canadian Wheat Board does not set grain prices, which again is an important component of the Canadian Wheat Board, but prices are established by global supply and demand factors. However, its size and market power are used to help maximize grain prices.

The benefit to farmers is clear in the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board and its practice. It helps farmers worldwide. It helps Canadian farmers, but it still operates within the confines of the market. The prices are established by global supply and demand. However, it provides farmers certainty.

The Canadian Wheat Board does not buy wheat and barley from farmers. Instead, it acts as their marketing agent. There is such a big fuss for an institution that is really a marketing agent. We hear the other side talk about monopolies and trampling on minority rights. It is a marketing board that is doing good work for farmers and, in fact, allowing them to survive.

The Canadian Wheat Board negotiates international sales and passes the return back to farmers. The Canadian Wheat Board retains no earnings aside from what is needed to cover the costs and financial risk management.

• (1145)

The Canadian Wheat Board supports its marketing program through a variety of other activities, including market development, strategy, research and analysis, and policy advocacy. Again, this is an organization that is built by farmers, helping farmers to get the best prices possible but still operating within the market. There is nothing insidious here. It only helps. In fact, it is the only way in which a number of small farms survive.

The Canadian Wheat Board also administers assistance for grain delivery and farmer payments, including innovative pricing programs that help producers manage cash flow and risk.

Business of Supply

I did not grow up on the Prairies; I grew up in rural Nova Scotia where I was surrounded by farms. Lots of farms cannot make it, especially small farms. They collapse because the risk is so great. The Canadian Wheat Board helps these small farms survive. If we abolish it, these small farms will undoubtedly collapse.

The Canadian Wheat Board mitigates risk for farmers, including when and if they will get paid on time, whether they are willing to sell their grain to the right buyer on the right day and how to get the grain to the buyer.

It is not a government agency or crown corporation. It is not funded by taxpayers. Farmers pay for its operation from their grain revenue. Again, it is not a government agency nor a crown corporation. Here again is an example of an arrogant majority government interfering in an organization that is operated outside the confines of government.

I will return to my two main points about outcomes and process being ways that we can evaluate the health of our Canadian democracy.

In terms of outcomes, Bill C-18 proposes to dismantle the farmer-controlled and funded Canadian Wheat Board by eliminating the single desk marketing of wheat and barley.

It establishes a voluntary Canadian wheat board, but no one here believes that this effort is genuine. It is just because the government is afraid to say it is going to abolish the whole thing. It wants to make it seem like it is in steps. The voluntary aspect of the Canadian Wheat Board is merely a way for the government to say it is not completely abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board in one fell swoop.

The Canadian Wheat Board is good for Canada and it is also good for small farmers. This is what we would evaluate in terms of outcomes. If the government manages to pass Bill C-18, how many small farmers will be left in five years? I think that is the important thing to measure.

We need to look at whether the majority government is running roughshod over the will of local farmers. In five years when we look at this and we see all these family farms that have collapsed, we will have to ask if this was the right thing to do.

Our opposition day motion states that we should let farmers have a voice as is mandated in the act. That is what I will speak to here in terms of process.

Probably the most egregious part of Bill C-18 is the process by which the government is attempting to abolish the Canadian Wheat Board. It is worth looking at the Canadian Wheat Board Act to see what the process is supposed to be and then contrast it with what the government is actually doing.

Section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act states:

The Minister shall not cause to be introduced in Parliament a bill that would exclude any kind, type, class or grade of wheat or barley, or wheat or barley produced in any area in Canada, from the provisions of Part IV, either in whole or in part, or generally, or for any period, or that would extend the application—

There are lots of subsections and lots of things the minister has to pay attention to. The government cannot introduce any changes without consulting with the Wheat Board.

Second and most important:

(b) the producers of the grain have voted in favour of the exclusion or extension, the voting process having been determined by the Minister.

What this section outlines is there has to be a plebiscite. This is enshrined in law. In fact the Conservatives themselves used this under a former government.

This is an act by which the government will be judged. It is going to destroy local farms. In five years we are going to see a lot fewer family farms on the Prairies.

The government is showing Canadians how it approaches democracy in this country. Even though it is mandated to have a plebiscite, the government ignores this requirement. This goes against the traditions of the Conservative Party itself.

The Reform Party and the Alliance Party that make up the Conservative Party fought in this House to increase Canadian democracy. I applaud them for that. In fact, Randy White brought in private members' bills to bring in a recall initiative. This goes against that tradition. I am very upset about that and I think Canadians will be, too.

• (1150)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Madam Speaker, in regard to the member's point on the clear question, I point to the platform promises. The NDP was clear in the election campaign that it would support the Canadian Wheat Board as a single desk marketer for Canadian wheat and barley. The Conservative Party platform in the entire paragraph under the Canadian Wheat Board said that we will continue to work with western Canadian grain farmers to ensure that the results of the barley plebiscite are respected and that they are given the freedom to choose whether to sell grain on the open market or through the Canadian Wheat Board.

That was the complete promise in the election platform of the Conservative Party. That is exactly what we are doing now. Based on that promise and the clarity of that promise, and based on the overwhelming support in western Canada for the Conservative Party which won 51 of the 56 seats in the prairie provinces, why does the member not support democracy? While he is on his feet maybe he could tell us how many farmers in Burnaby—Douglas are affected by the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, 32,000 farmers participated in an ad hoc plebiscite which the Canadian Wheat Board hosted. Almost 23,000 voted to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. This shows at the very least that the government should respect the Canadian Wheat Board Act and hold a plebiscite. Today one of the member's colleagues supported that notion and I would hope he would too.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Madam Speaker, we have trends in farming that worry many of the producers in my constituency. Since 1988, Canada's farm debt has tripled. We lost 80,000 farms and saw a dramatic drop in the number of young farmers. My colleague spoke about that a few minutes ago.

Farmers tell me these phenomena are the product of an agricultural policy that only values the big corporate interests and lacks appropriate incentives to help young people see the family farm as a viable way of life. They ask me, why is the government siding with big agriculture to the detriment of the family farm? Could my colleague speak again to that element of this debate which he spoke to eloquently a while ago?

I want to commend him for filling the shoes of the previous NDP member for Burnaby—Douglas. He is doing a great job.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her kind words.

We have heard there are 70,000 western farmers currently, but I wonder how many there will be in five years. I wonder if in five years the Conservatives will say that this was a mistake. When the number of farms goes from 70,000 to 60,000 to 50,000 down to 20,000 or 10,000 and they are giant agribusiness companies which are owned outside Canada, I wonder if the Conservatives will say that this was a mistake.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas for his speech.

Bill C-18, as proposed by the government, should be scrapped, simply because it jeopardizes the financial stability of western wheat farmers and of all families associated with the sector.

Can the member tell us what the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board will mean for farmers?

[English]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, it is similar to losing any business. I think that many families on the Prairies are going to be devastated by the bill and the rather rash action by the government. All the time we hear the Conservatives talk about a strong and stable majority government. I do not understand why the Conservatives are afraid of abiding by the act and having a plebiscite.

Farmers should have a say in this. We will see fewer and fewer farmers if the bill is passed.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak in favour of our motion today.

This is an opportunity for the Conservative government to restore faith with the Canadian public and save an institution that has served farmers so well. Although it is seen as a success story around the world, the Canadian Wheat Board is being attacked by Conservatives with an ideologically driven agenda that favours wealthy middlemen at the expense of Canadian farmers.

The Canadian Wheat Board helps to ensure that farmers can sell their grain to the right buyer and that it can be transported effectively to that buyer. We live in a big country and a co-operative approach to accessing markets is a hallmark of our Canadian experience. Now is the time for us to once again commit ourselves to that co-operative approach and uphold our values in the face of corporate greed. In Canada, co-operation has allowed this country to survive and our co-operative approach is not only demonstrated by the wish of our farmers, it is also, frankly, sound economics.

Allen Oberg, a farmer and Canadian Wheat Board chair of the board of directors, stated recently that dismantling the Wheat Board single desk will “jeopardize a \$5 billion export sector. It will shift money from the pockets of Canadian farmers into the hands of American corporations”.

Enriching foreign corporations at the expense of our farmers does not seem like good, sound economic management to me. It sounds like the Conservative government is deliberately risking the impoverishment of our farmers in order to benefit foreign corporations that do not need our help.

Results of a recent Canadian Wheat Board ad hoc plebiscite indicated that 62% of farmers voted in favour of retaining the single desk for wheat. The majority voted to retain it for barley also. With over 38,000 farmers participating, this plebiscite is clearly indicative of the popular vote.

As a gesture of good faith, before any changes are made to the Canadian Wheat Board, the government should study the impact that dismantling the single desk would have on our farmers and economy. The Conservative government should stop its single-minded approach and hear the objections of our farmers and their families. Farm families deserve the government's support far more than a bunch of wealthy agri-business middlemen.

However, the Conservative government seems to lack the will to reflect on its actions. Single-mindedness has led to a complete lack of openness to hearing the other points of view. It certainly has no intention of allowing debate to slow the Conservative express train's transfer of our grain to big city corporate interests.

For example, we had only been debating the bill on eliminating the Canadian Wheat Board single desk for a single day when the government decided to invoke closure and stifle debate. This has to be some sort of a record. The Conservatives are prepared to stifle debate and silence opposition, but to what end? These Conservative Party members used to tell us that they would do things differently and would encourage healthy debate. They seem to have changed their tune.

I will repeat what I said in this House only a few days ago. On March 31, 2004, the leader of the Conservative Party, then in opposition, stated, “The government invoked closure in the House after only six days”.

The leader of the Conservative Party was clearly incensed that a government would be so callous as to invoke closure after only six days of debate that he was willing to call the governing party on it. I completely agree, but the Prime Minister should heed his own advice and reopen the debate on this undemocratic move.

Business of Supply

What is the point in forcing an end to debate when the fundamental issue of farmers' rights to decide for themselves has clearly not been heard? The Conservative government seems to have a tin ear when it comes to regional needs. What was its slogan in the last election?

• (1200)

[Translation]

“Our region in power.” It seems to me that the real region in power, at least in the eyes of the Conservative government, is the one between the minister and the boards of multinationals.

The Conservatives seem focused on attacking our regions and everything that affects the families of small and medium-sized producers. In my riding, fishers are the biggest producers of food products. Yet, the government has eliminated the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, which was created in partnership with our fishers. This council was created in 1993, after the cod moratorium was announced, in order to determine exactly what the situation was with fish stocks. Each year, the council took a stock inventory, and fishing quotas were based on that data. It was a wonderful example of co-operation between the government and fishers. It was an independent body that generated reliable data. It was because of this partnership with fishers that the council was so successful at helping us manage a crucial resource for eastern Canada's fishers. The council has a proven track record, yet the government shut it down without any warning.

If we do not support the single desk system that is the Canadian Wheat Board, small producers, fishers and fish plant workers, as well as western farmers and their families, will be the ones who suffer the consequences.

The effect that this will have on grain farmers is not our only concern. We must also think about the spinoffs generated by the Canadian Wheat Board. One example of many is access to railway services. The construction of the railway to Churchill, Manitoba, was completed in 1929. Today, the Canadian Wheat Board is by far the largest user of the Port of Churchill, with its shipments accounting for 95% of the port's cargo. Grain is transported by railway in producer cars at an affordable price.

Without a single desk system, it is doubtful that the Wheat Board's competitors will want to use the Port of Churchill as much as the board does since they have their own port facilities on the west coast and in Thunder Bay. The Port of Churchill does not interest them. We believe that they will even want to favour their own facilities elsewhere. The Port of Churchill and the railway will be at risk if we do not protect the single desk system.

The railway in my riding is also at risk. Most of the forestry companies have shut down, and we find ourselves with a railway whose only reliable customers are passengers. Given the privatization of our railway by CN, like the privatization of the railway leading to Churchill in favour of Omnitrax, the railway must be profitable to be attractive to private companies.

We are not questioning the fact that the main routes must be profitable. They are subsidized without too many questions being asked but, to date, it does not seem as though this government is terribly concerned about the railways.

The people in my riding have been reflecting on our railway. Similarly, the people of northern Manitoba should consider how viable their railway will be if the Canadian Wheat Board single desk system is not supported.

The Wheat Board has a much greater role than simply managing the transportation and sale of grain. The Wheat Board supports the economy and infrastructure of a number of communities.

• (1205)

[English]

Canada's northern infrastructure is at risk. Our northern railways and the Port of Churchill have taken years to develop and communities have been built around them. Yet, the Conservative government is telling people who depend upon them and their largest client to just go and let the port shove off.

Removing the single desk will risk lower grain prices for producers, which means that farmers will suffer. Farmers may leave the industry. The lower prices will certainly not be passed on to consumers. No. Experience tells us that middlemen, the large corporate agri-business interests, will profit from lower prices and they will not pass on their savings.

The Conservative members are so fixated on their ideologically-driven agenda, they have become deaf to the voices of the farmers, the very people they claim to be helping. Clearly, it is not the needs of the farmers that are being addressed here. It is the desire of large foreign-owned corporations to have cheap access to our grain. It does not need to be this way.

In taking away farmers' rights without real debate, the Conservative government has proven that it has become too self-righteous for its own good. Against such opposition, how can the Conservatives remain deaf to the needs of farmers? We need a plebiscite, the law requires it, and it is only right.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sensing a pattern here. All day long we are going to hear NDP member after NDP member from non-prairie provinces stand up and make arguments as to why prairie farmers should be forced to sell their grain through the Canadian Wheat Board.

There is some kind of vague talk of democracy over there, but the reality is that during the election campaign this Conservative government made a clear promise and that promise was that we would work to ensure that western Canadian grain farmers “are given the freedom to choose whether to sell grain on the open market or through the Canadian Wheat Board”. We hear NDP member after NDP member asserting that they understand that this is an important issue to western Canadian farmers.

Given the facts that we made a clear promise and that the issue is important to western Canadian farmers, I would ask why NDP members do not respect the results of the election? If we look at, for example, the margin of victory in the rural ridings in Manitoba we will see: Provencher, 70.56% Conservative; Brandon—Souris, 63.77% Conservative; Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, 63% Conservative; Selkirk—Interlake, 65% Conservative; and Portage—Lisgar, 76% Conservative.

Business of Supply

Why does the NDP not respect the results of the last election?

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, we certainly do want to respect the results of the last election. It is clear that the government has the right to introduce bills. However, the government should also respect the rights of democracy in Canada and allow those bills to be debated in a timely fashion.

Over 38,000 farmers participated in an ad hoc plebiscite. Well over a majority spoke and made their intentions clear. They want to save the single desk. The Conservative government's proposal in Bill C-18 is right off the mark and the government needs to listen to the farmers who it claims to so well represent. The government needs to bring those farmers' ideas forward and it needs to protect farmers' rights to continue to farm on their family farms.

Bill C-18 would not help farmers whatsoever. It would challenge farmers' families in the future. We expect that people will have to leave their family farms if we allow Bill C-18 to pass. It is not a democratic move. It is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I would like to give the member more time, but I am sure there are other hon. members who may have questions.

The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I received an email a while back from a farmer from Manitoulin Island, Ross Joyce of Spring Bay. He wants to transition his farm to certified organic and is concerned that GMO canola has started to grow on his land. He is worried about his operation and also about the impending battle he might have with Monsanto.

He wrote, "Monsanto has the rights to their technology and achieving financial compensation if those rights are infringed upon". He is seeking similar rights. He is basically saying that if its technology shows up in areas where it is not supposed to, similarly, if its technology infringes on his income, then he should have the right to compensation.

He is looking for a reciprocal law if big agriculture can take action against a farmer to protect its interests he feels he should have the same protection available to him. To me, this is just another example of how the deck has been stacked against the family farm, and how our agricultural policy is fully and completely on the big side of agriculture companies.

I am wondering if the hon. member would agree with that.

• (1210)

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, it is certainly true that the challenge of family farms in this country is massive. We need to support them in any way, shape or form we can.

Agri-business already has a leg up. It does not need more support from the government. We need to have policies that are clearly designed to help the people of this country weather the storms that are ahead of them and give them all the tools that they need. That means supporting the single desk.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I generally do not thank opposition parties for all they do, but I have to thank them for continuing to bring the debate on the Canadian

Wheat Board to the floor of the House of Commons. This is an issue which is fairly dear to my heart and as I get into my speech everyone will understand why. It is also an issue I am very familiar with.

Before I get into my speech, I need to say a couple of things.

I need to thank the translators who are going to translate my speech. I have a habit of not handing in proper speaking notes and therefore I am a bit more of a challenge for them than most members.

I also want to thank the Prime Minister. Many people have noted he has a particular passion on this issue, and yet he is not from a rural background. To use a term that is used back home, he is a city boy. However, he understands that this is a fundamental issue. It is an issue about freedom and one that goes to the essence and core of who people are in western Canada and the Prairies. I want to extend a special thanks to the Prime Minister, much more than the general thanks members often give to their party leaders. For someone who has represented Calgary in the House of Commons and who originally comes from Etobicoke, he has taken true leadership on this issue.

As I was saying when I began my speech, this is an issue which I understand personally. It is an issue that relates to the history of my family. I come from a prairie riding. The constituency of Saskatoon—Humboldt is now one-third rural and about two-thirds urban, representing the city of Saskatoon, but it is still very deeply tied to the agriculture industry. It is very much about the people I represent, but it is so much more than that for me because this is the story of my family and how they came to Canada.

On my mother's side, my great-grandpa first settled in what was then the Northwest Territories, coming from Manitoba to take up a homestead in the year 1900 in the Hague district of Saskatchewan. That was a time when people looked forward to the great opportunities the Prairies offered. It was before Saskatchewan was a province. Canada was still in its early formation. He settled there because it was about having his own property and freedom. He was born in the Ukraine, Russia and came to a place where he could actually make his own living.

On my father's side of the family tree, my great-grandfather, my grandfather and my dad also farmed in the eastern section of Saskatchewan. I farmed with my dad for a short time. They originally came from Yevpatoriya, Russia via Germany to settle in that area. Coincidentally, and this is interesting, one of the first pieces of land they bought had been owned by Charles Dunning, who later became the premier of Saskatchewan. I guess I am not the first farmer who did not succeed in farming and went into politics. There is a bit of a history.

That is the story. They began to farm, not as opposition members have talked about as big or grand farmers. My dad, my Uncle Ronnie and Uncle Bernie never were big farmers. They were small farmers. My great-grandfather and grandfather were very much the poorest of the poor farmers having come from a prisoner-of-war misplaced persons camp in Germany after the first world war. This is their story. This is a story of prairie people.

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Many people from eastern and northern Europe who came to Canada never had the right or ability to own their own land, to own what was theirs. It was either collectivized in later years by the communist socialist governments of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union or by the more futile enterprises of the Austro-Hungarian czarist empire. It was very important to people to own their own land and control their own produce in order to make a living and a future for themselves.

● (1215)

Other provinces were created on the Prairies, but my family farms in the province of Saskatchewan. Farmers began to work together to increase their ability to market their grain to get a better livelihood for themselves.

Although my hon. colleagues across the way have noted the various co-operatives, the pools and various things like that, they failed to mention the institutions like UGG, United Grain Growers, the various pools, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Alberta Wheat Pool and Manitoba Pool Elevators. These were voluntary institutions. The various agrarian and farm organizations got together voluntarily to pool their efforts. That history is often forgotten when we talk about the Canadian Wheat Board.

The legislation the government is proposing, which the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food introduced and the Conservative members of the House are supporting, is not a bill to eliminate the Canadian Wheat Board. It is a bill to eliminate the monopoly provisions contained in the act so that farmers will have the freedom to market their own grain and to return the Wheat Board to a more voluntary institution.

As time goes on, we will see what that voluntary institution is. It possibly will be another co-operative, a re-creation in the same spirit of UGG and the wheat pools from which the original Wheat Board itself was created. We are not quite sure at this point, but it is a possibility.

It needs to be remembered that when the original Wheat Board was created and modified in various forms it did not originally have these monopoly provisions. The Wheat Board began to acquire its monopoly provisions in the 1940s and its ability to control the price of grains, and currently it is for wheat, malt and barley, but it included other commodities during World War II. Corn, sunflower and various other crops come to mind. In 1941 the government of the day gave the Canadian Wheat Board the ability to cap prices and to control the prices. The monopoly provision came to be during the second world war. In 1943, the War Measures Act made selling through the Canadian Wheat Board compulsory.

Members of the House need to understand the co-operative nature of original prairie agrarian institutions, the wheat pools, the UGGs, the original Wheat Board, was very different from the monopoly provisions that were brought in in the 1940s. Those monopoly provisions were put in under the War Measures Act to assist in the Canadian war effort during World War II. They were not put in for the good of farmers.

As the war ended and the provisions in the act came up for review every five years, they would be renewed by the House until 1965, when they were made permanent.

The crops and various other aspects of the Wheat Board have changed over the years. Oats were removed from the purview of the Wheat Board, as were some of the other crops that I mentioned earlier. Since Charlie Mayer, a former minister responsible for the Wheat Board removed oats from it, we have seen how that market has succeeded and grown in western Canada.

Something that needs to be fundamentally understood and grasped is that originally, the Canadian Wheat Board was not a monopoly organization. It was not compulsory. That is fundamentally what we are trying for today.

To bring some present day reality to this debate, I phoned one of my relatives who is still farming, my cousin Dwight in the Yorkton area, and talked with him about the value of it. He was pretty matter of fact. Like a lot of younger farmers, he has moved on from wheat being the dominant crop for making his living. He has gone to canola and flax. Dwight has always been more inventive and a lot more active on various things than either my dad or his dad was. I asked him about grain prices, because I am not as in touch with grain prices as I was when I hauled grain for my dad a few years ago. He said it cost him about \$1.50 a bushel right now for losses between what he could market his grain for to the Ontario and Minneapolis markets as to what he would be getting from the Wheat Board. That does not sound like a whole lot, but when the overall price is in the neighbourhood of \$6 or \$7 a bushel, getting an extra \$1.50 means quite a lot.

● (1220)

When they look at the final profit margin, this is very important. That is the economic argument many farmers have been making.

It is not purely the economic argument I am making today in the House. There are broader issues for my family members and for constituents to be more prosperous. There is a broader fundamental issue that needs to be addressed which actually extends it beyond the farmers and agriculture industry to all Canadians.

Most Canadians, myself among them, understand that parties are not perfect ideological or philosophical creatures. However, they do fall into general broad categories.

The opposition New Democratic Party likes to call itself a social democratic party for the particular brand of socialism that it espouses. If we listen to its members' underlying rhetoric, they tend to talk a lot about fairness, which is often a fairly subjective criterion. However, it tends to be in their discourse and that of their supporters.

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As with all socialist movements, they tend to be concerned not so much about the creation of wealth but the redistribution of it. They view that the role of the government, an entity set up by the state, is to level the playing field with respect to economic fairness and redistribution. That is why a monopolistic single desk Canadian Wheat Board that would send people to jail for selling their own wheat in their own way fits so clearly with their political philosophy. It is something that meshes with the purpose of the state not being to protect any basic rights but being to collectivize, to spread out and to redistribute wealth.

Parties that tend to be more attuned to free enterprise and at least espouse that, understandably not always perfectly, tend toward the more classical liberal tradition of parliamentary discourse. They believe that the whole purpose of the state is to protect life, liberty and property. We see this in our government's approach to how we are dealing with the Canadian Wheat Board.

People who grew up on a family farm understand very clearly that farming is not just another business. It is not a trade that someone goes into. My dad and my grandpa started farming with their dads. I was driving a tractor, doing summer fallow and hauling grain well before I was legally able to drive vehicles on the bigger roadways. That was part of who I was. When I was six or seven years old, I remember working with my father on the farm. While I might not have been all that helpful, from my perspective it was a total part of my life.

For farmers, this is a fundamental element of who they are as individuals. It is about their liberty. It is about their property. We need to understand that many of the eastern and northern European farmers settled in western Canada because they wanted to have that very bit of property they had been denied. To them it meant freedom. Yet in the Canadian Wheat Board we see this contradiction that the government can effectively collectivize and take away their property, their wheat. They grew their wheat. They produced their wheat. Why can they not market their wheat? If they want to voluntarily join with another group in a co-operative, as was done with the UGG, the wheat pools, the original wheat board, that should be their choice.

That is the fundamental issue we come to. That is why our party, with that broad perception of life, liberty and property, is very interested in defending the rights of farmers to protect their right to market.

There are a couple of issues which my hon. colleagues across the aisle have dealt with. Their main talking point today seems to be the Wheat Board survey that showed a majority of respondents supporting a single desk. I would like to note a couple of things for people who are not familiar with this.

Most people who are engaged in politics know it is much easier to win a vote if the electoral pool can be defined, the question can be chosen and no one campaigns against them. That is effectively what happened with the Wheat Board survey.

● (1225)

On the barley question, a mere 51% said "yes", which, considering how the vote was done, is effectively an admission of full defeat, because the question was, "Do you want to abolish the Wheat Board or do you want to keep the Wheat Board?"

That is not the question the government is offering in this legislation. It is asking farmers whether they want to keep a Wheat Board through which they can work together with other farmers on a voluntary basis or whether they want the freedom to do what they want with their own personal property. We are taking away the punishment of imprisonment and fines for farmers selling their own wheat.

The second thing I want to deal with is the argument on the other side that this is all about big business, big farms and eliminating the small producer.

My dad was a very small producer. He did other things to make ends meet. He worked as a janitor, did church work and even taught for a few years, because he has his education degree from the University of Saskatchewan. All my uncles who farmed were small farmers too. They all chafed under the oppression of the Wheat Board. They never had that freedom or ability to do it.

As younger farmers, people like my cousin Dwight, grew up, they began to deal with the Wheat Board in a very practical way. They began to grow other crops and look for ways to get around it.

It is not about defending the rights of the large corporations. When we look at what is done there, large corporations did not have to get out there and deal competitively for farmers' wheat, but companies actually have to get out there and create incentives for farmers to grow the other crops they want the farmers to grow. This is something that is not always understood. Maltsters dealing only with malting barley only ever had to deal with the Wheat Board. Companies never had to go out there and give farmers incentives for dealing with them rather than a competitor, because they knew the Wheat Board would offer one basic price and one basic deal to all the brewers of Canada.

We see this in western Canada. There is not one grain company that dominates. We have Viterra, descendant of the wheat pools; we have Parrish and Heimbecker; we have Great Northern Grain Terminals, and we have Pioneer. These companies have flourished over the years; now it is time for these companies to actually compete and go after farmers' wheat.

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Some members of the opposition have been stating that with the loss of the Wheat Board there would be major negative effects on the railway system, on the transportation system and on producer cars. I would like to state clearly that producers would continue to have access to producer cars, to elevators and to ports and terminals. It is important to know that these producer cars would continue to be allocated by the Canadian Grain Commission and access to them would continue to be protected by the Canadian Grain Act. Short-line railways and in-land terminals, noted in one of the earlier speeches, would continue to play an important role in getting western Canadian wheat and barley to both domestic and international markets. The Canadian Grain Commission would also continue to protect the quality of Canadian wheat and barley. These things would not go away. We would continue to have short-line railways, producer cars, the Canadian Grain Commission and other aspects of the Canadian grain system that we have come to know.

The one and only thing we would remove in this legislation is the monopoly provisions. This is something that I support because it is about fundamental freedom and because at the end of the day it would improve the farmers' bottom line. It would force grain companies to compete for their wheat. It would provide for more innovation and more diversity. It would support the growth of value added, which would also continue to add to the farmers' bottom line.

As a son, grandson and great-grandson of a small prairie farmer, I am very pleased today to support my Minister of Agriculture, my party and my Prime Minister in the removal of the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1230)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand to remind the hon. member that the principles of this country are not life, liberty and property, but peace, order and good government. I believe that the Canadian Wheat Board fits under the principles of that last element of the founding principles of our country, good government.

I appreciate that the member shared with us a story of his past and of his family. It adds a human touch to the laws that we debate in the House, but I would ask why his party chose to abort the debate somewhat early.

I would also remind him that we often take what we have for granted until it is gone. What was the motivation for the original co-operatives that were formed? Was it not to give farmers the powers to be competitive against strong private monopolies that existed at the turn of the century? These private monopolies that we are going to be exchanging for might have the effect of eroding prices and the market security of western farmers.

Could the member address those questions?

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, I will start with my colleague's remark about good government. I think the Conservative Party and the NDP have very different perspectives on what good government is. Good government has been defined quite differently. Since I come from a family that tended to vote Social Credit, my definition of good government tended to be what E.C. Manning did in Alberta for many years, while I am sure the hon. member has more kind words to say about Premier Douglas of Saskatchewan.

The member's remarks about prairie co-operatives were very instructive, but that is the point that I was making. Farmers put themselves together voluntarily to do what they needed to do. My dad delivered to the wheat pool for many years, but he also delivered to Pioneer and to Parrish and Heimbecker as well. That was his voluntary choice. Both the private companies, Pioneer and P and H, gave him good service, as did the co-operative. Having all these players together in the grain system is what made his farming operation more successful and provided greater return for him and his neighbours.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the New Democrats at the transport committee yesterday thought that Saskatoon was a small Saskatchewan town. Not only did the member not understand what small-town rural Saskatchewan looks like, but those members clearly do not understand this issue from the perspective of the western farmer.

In Ontario we have marketing choice. I want to welcome my colleague and his constituents, who are on the verge now of entering that era of marketing choice. Could he talk about some of the restrictions that will now be gone for western farmers and the benefits they will enjoy like Ontario farmers?

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, this is one thing that people outside the industry do not particularly understand. Farmers can go to prison for marketing their own wheat. When this legislation has passed, one of the benefits will be that farmers who live in southern Saskatchewan and produce durum, a type of wheat that is used predominantly for pasta, will be able to market their grain across the border into the United States. They will be able to sell it not at the depressed cheap prices that the Wheat Board would use to dump the grain, but at the highest possible market price.

Farmers will have the choice. They will have grain brokers and terminals in North Dakota, Minnesota and Montana. They can compete and have those people bidding for their grain. That is one tangible benefit. If any group of farmers has taken major financial hits over the years, it is the durum growers.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt for his speech. I learned a lot about his family and I know him a little better, which is very interesting.

According to the results of the plebiscite conducted by the Canadian Wheat Board, 62% of those who participated voted to maintain the board. If the board had not existed when the member's father was a small farmer, would his father have been able to succeed and would the member even have had the opportunity to come here to the House?

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[English]

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, that is the exact point I was making. One of the things that held back the prosperity of my father and my uncles and that was one of the reasons I decided not to go into the industry after farming a couple of years with my father was the lack of diversity that the Canadian Wheat Board caused.

Having to sell into the monopoly system of the Canadian Wheat Board held back processing of our grain into various flours and pastas in value-added plants on the Prairies. That diminished the return to farmers at the farm gate.

If we have to ship our product all the way overseas or to Ontario or to somewhere else—to wherever the Wheat Board has its contracts—and do not have local competitors able to buy directly from the farm gate, it is more difficult to make a living. It lowers the value of our crop and therefore lowers the value of our land and the ability for people like me to take over the farm from our parents.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot from across the floor about how this is going to be a disaster for the small farm and the farmers in western Canada.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague, who obviously has the background, why the opposition places so little faith in the ability of farmers in western Canada to compete and prosper. What is the member's view on farmers' ability to do just that?

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, I can only speculate as to the reasoning. Probably the number one reason is a lack of intimate familiarity with the issues and culture. While there are many good members across the way, they do not quite have the nuanced knowledge that is sometimes helpful when it comes to debates like this.

The other thing I will note is that unfortunately we are probably going to see the number of farmers dropping off as the years go on. That is because the demographics show that farmers are considerably older than the general workplace population.

Starting in roughly the mid-1980s and extending for about 20 years, agriculture prices in prairie commodities were very poor, with the exception of a few open market commodities like canola. That has caused younger farmers, such as I once was, to drop out of the industry, and the age of the agriculture producer to rise dramatically.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt for allowing us to share some of his experiences with farm life. It is important to share that in this House for those who have not had the opportunity to have farm life.

I know that Saskatoon is indeed a city, and a substantial one. Since I actually represent a rural piece of southern Ontario with a lot of small communities, I understand that.

When we talk about marketing freedom, the other side talks in glowing terms about the upside. Perhaps the member could explain to us in real terms, because he has those experiences, that the market does not always go up. Every market, regardless of what it is for or whatever commodity it happens to be, goes up and goes down.

Perhaps the member could enlighten us on what he sees as the potential of the shortfalls we could see, similar to what happened in

Australia. We see that premiums for Australian wheat growers under the Australian Wheat Board diminished from almost \$99 to less than \$27 below the American price per ton. They have actually taken a hit in an open market. They have not always gone forward in an open market.

It is said that markets are self-correcting, so there is not always an upward trajectory; there is indeed a downward portion. Perhaps the member could enlighten us on that aspect.

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, the member gets directly to what I was stating in response to an earlier question.

For 20 years, most of the crops on the Prairies have not been financially successful for most farmers. The Canadian Wheat Board, over the last 20 years, when I would have been of an age to take over the farm from my father, did not protect farmers from the market. It did absolutely nothing. It just pooled the losses to make them lower. It made sure everyone lost money.

The government has taken ways to protect farmers from losses and to smooth out the market in its agri suite of programs, such as AgriStability, AgriRecovery, and programs like that.

All the Wheat Board did was smooth out all the losses. It did not protect, in any way, shape or form, farmers from the downside of the market in wheat, barley and other crops over the years.

● (1240)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in the debate. I will be sharing my time with the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

This is a critical issue for farmers. I do not think we should make any mistake or have any illusions about this. Clearly, we are talking about the future of the farm family in western Canada. It is within our power to make a decision on their behalf as to the direction in which they ultimately go forward, whether it is under the single desk, as is presently the case, or under a market deregulation, as my friends on the other side have constantly talked about.

The one group that we seem to be missing in the middle of all this is the group that will be directly affected. Some of our colleagues will be directly affected because they are farmers on the Prairies and they grow grain. They will understand that impact as far as how they want to decide to move forward or to move in a different direction without the Wheat Board.

However, for all those folks who are farmers on the Prairies and who are not here, they deserve that we take the time to listen to them because, ultimately, it is their livelihoods and their farms that we are talking about. We are not doing it necessarily in a vacuum.

I know some friends and colleagues on the other side have farmers in their communities and in their ridings who are saying what direction they want us to go in. However, on the flip side of that coin, there are also farmers within their own ridings who are saying that they do not want to go in that direction.

How does one balance the competing interests between those farmers who are legitimately saying, and there is no question that they are, that they do not want to be a member of the Wheat Board any more?

I have heard the minister and others say it, and some have voted with their air sprayers, their air seeders. However, one can debate whether they decided to get out of wheat and go to canola or go to another crop based on the Wheat Board or based on the fact that, regardless, it was an open market and there might have been more money in canola anyway. It is not really a false argument. It just does not overlap and take into consideration everything that happens.

There is no doubt that the rotation of crops, new crops, how folks decide to do things and how they make the decision on the ground is their right. However, ultimately, why do we not engage them? Some will say that May 2 was our engagement process. The government has been fond of asking myself and my colleagues on a number of occasions what the member for Welland has in common with prairie wheat farmers, or what a member from Vancouver or a member from another large city has in common.

I would suggest to my friends on the other side that members from Calgary, Edmonton or any other major city would have a similar interest, like I, with Canadian wheat farmers. It is no different. Whether folks selected one particular party over another in a particular area was not specific to that question necessarily, as to how people voted because there were more than farmers voting.

It is a little spurious and a bit of a reach to suggest that the Conservatives have a mandate based on one question, on a large platform that talked about many things, that engaged all kinds of folks beyond just farmers but yet we can take the opportunity to ask them. What I would suggest to my friends is that we figure out what question we want to ask them. I have heard from the other side that they want a third option. We need to debate the question that we put to farmers in western Canada who are directly affected and ask them what they want.

In Ontario, my friend from Essex said that there is market freedom in Ontario because farmers decided that. He said that it was not a move by the federal government because it had no jurisdiction. The minister pointed out earlier that the federal government had no jurisdiction over Ontario farmers. The province did but it was the farmers who chose. The province did not tell them what they had to do in that jurisdiction. It allowed Ontario farmers to make a choice. They made a choice and went forward with that choice. It was their right to do so.

• (1245)

We on this side of the House are not standing in the way of western farmers. In fact, it is the opposite. We are standing with them in saying that the government should allow them to make the choice. Surely we all understand that it is the farmers' right to have the choice because at the end of the day it has a direct impact on them.

My colleague for Saskatoon—Humboldt talked earlier about his farming family, his great-grandfather, grandfather, father and uncles who have farmed. He gave us that nuanced piece in order for us to understand what it is like. There is no question that there are grievances. Folks did go to jail and people did feel they were treated

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unfairly, which should never have happened to them. However, now that we know all of those things, there are ways to ensure we fix it and part of our responsibility is to find a way to do that.

We can only use the plebiscite because the government refuses to actually put a question to farmers. The plebiscite is not quite the only tool but it is one of the tools we have. We can see that 62% of farmers want to keep the single desk. We have a smaller group that did not vote, and we are assuming that it did not want to. However, if we assume that is the case, then we have a majority of folks saying one thing and a minority saying the other. How do we engage the majority of folks? We simply apply what the minority wants against the majority situation and say that it is democracy. It is strange that I do not remember learning that in political science class but maybe that is how it is supposed to work in the government's perspective. However, I always assumed that when we looked at a vote, we took democracy in hand and took the majority vote, but that is yet to be seen.

When we look at this democratic process, the amazing thing is that the Conservatives are using words like “tyranny” and “oppression”. Tyranny happened in Libya until we saw the end of Gadhafi. Tyranny and oppression happens in Iran. To suggest that there is something tyrannical or oppressive about the Canadian Wheat Board in the same sentence seems to be a bit of a dichotomy in how we use the language. “Unfair” may be a reasonable word to use about the Canadian Wheat Board for those who do not believe in the single desk. However, to escalate the language to “tyrannical” or “the tyranny of the Canadian Wheat Board”, my goodness, one would think, if that were the case, that people were actually being removed from their land, such as what happened in the Ukraine under Stalin. That is not happening.

What is happening is that folks are asking to be given a choice. We see folks on the Prairies who are clearly upset with the direction of the government. They are making their voices heard and are asking for the opportunity to vote. On this side of the House, we are saying that if the government conducts the vote, we will abide by the farmers' wishes. What could be more democratic than that?

Many of my friends on the other side came here at one point with the old Reform Party and actually used to say things like, “I’ll ask my constituents”. In fact, they even went so far as to suggest that maybe the constituents should have a recall provision because that is democratic. I do not know what happened to their roots but they clearly lost them along the way in becoming Conservatives. They do not want to go back and talk to their constituents, the folks who are directly affected, the farmers who produce wheat on the Prairies of this country, and ask them directly what they want and then respect their wishes. On this side, we would do that.

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We reach out to members on the other side and ask them to join us in the quest of finding out what farmers want so that we can respect their wishes one way or the other. It does not need to be what we are asking for. Indeed, it could be that the Conservatives are right, but let us find out. If they are right, then we will stop, but perhaps they are not. If that is the case, then they should respect the wishes of farmers, just as we would if they are right. That is how the democratic process works and that is what we fight for. It is why we ask the brave men and women of this country to go overseas, as the government has pointed out to us on numerous occasions, to help them protect themselves and eventually garner democracy.

I implore the government to simply allow western farmers to have that voice and allow them to vote on their future because it is their future.

• (1250)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has gone on and on about whether we know the real wishes of western Canadian farmers. For everyone listening to this debate and for everyone in the House, we have taken countless measures to ensure the aspirations of western Canadian farmers are not subject to a monopoly for the marketing of their grain. They want to be treated the way farmers are treated in the rest of the country. We saw that on May 2 with the clear expression in our platform of our intention to move ahead with this. We have seen it by countless other measures.

What the hon. member and no other member on that side of the House has answered is why they persist in thinking that these farmers should face the handicap of a monopoly. Throughout Europe, even in Ukraine and Russia, the places where the planned economy, especially in agriculture, flourished for most the 20th century, monopoly no longer exists. It does not exist in Australia and it does not exist in the United States. Could the hon. member tell us why it should exist in western Canada?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, we are not insisting that it continue either. We are saying that farmers should choose whether it exists or not. We are asking the government to let them have a chance to vote. It is not on our insistence that the Canadian Wheat Board stay on for perpetuity. We are asking the government to have an honest question that we can agree upon in the House, allow the farmers to have an honest vote and let them decide. Farmers will decide, not us on this side and not members on that side, but farmers. Canadian wheat producing farmers on the Prairies will make the decision on an honest question.

It is not my party that is saying that the Wheat Board must continue. We are simply saying that farmers should be given the opportunity to make a decision. If it is their choice to continue, then that is fine, but, if it is not, that is also fine.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard, on a few occasions, government members describing Canadian values as life, liberty and property, which are more in tune with the founding values of the nation to our south. As the hon. member knows, the founding principles and values of our nation are peace, order and good government, or conversely, peace, welfare and good government. They were used interchangeably in the 19th century. Welfare here refers to the common good.

How would preserving the Canadian Wheat Board fit with the values and principles that our country holds to be true? How would a private monopoly, which would probably take place once we scrap the Wheat Board, be even harder to get out of than the Wheat Board that we have now?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right about life, liberty and private property ownership.

Our sense of working together collectively and in harmony and unison for the better good of our communities is something we hold near and dear to our hearts. It is emulated with the folks who are part of the Wheat Board because they can get out.

As the Minister of Agriculture said, farmers can vote with their air seeders and do something else. No one is making them grow wheat. There is no one on the Prairies who said thou shall grow wheat always. No one makes them do that. There is no oppression from the Wheat Board on that aspect. If they all want to grow canola tomorrow, they can do that if they so choose, or they can grow any other pulse crops or anything else they choose to do. There is not that tyranny or oppression that one thinks of when we think of those things as if they must do it.

My colleague asked a fair question about how we should actually govern ourselves when we come together as communities and societies. It seems to me that it is about respecting the wishes of a group that decides on its own for itself. It is not about a decision being imposed by the government because it thinks that is the group deserves.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour for me to rise in the House in order to defend principles. Today, I am pleased to defend democracy. My distinguished colleague from Churchill has moved a motion in the House to defend democracy and the right of farmers to determine their destiny.

The motion asks the government to do three things: consult, step back and accept. The government needs much more practice in order to excel at these activities. I hope it will start practising right now.

Business of Supply

The motion asks this government to consult those affected by this ill-intentioned bill: the farmers. The Canadian Wheat Board is managed by the farmers, for the farmers. They control and direct the Wheat Board. Is the government telling us and telling farmers that farmers do not know how to manage their own business? Not only does it believe that the farmer-run board is not doing its job but, furthermore, it does not trust the farmers' ability to decide whether or not their Wheat Board should be dismantled. If the government would allow farmers to decide in a plebiscite, such as the one organized by Ontario farmers, we would be prepared, on this side of the House, to accept that decision.

I know that I am the hundredth person to raise the next point, but it is an important one. Farmers have already voted to keep the Wheat Board: 62% of wheat producers and 51% of barley producers voted to keep it. Certainly, 51% is a close result. However, because this government does not stop repeating that it was given a strong mandate with less than 40% of the votes in Canada, I find that its argument lacks credibility.

I am suggesting to the House that the government does not want to consult farmers because it is afraid of their decision. Farmers have done their homework. They know that if the Canadian Wheat Board disappears, they will suffer the same fate as their Australian colleagues, who saw a dramatic drop of 70% per tonne in wheat prices. This is an ideological decision. It does not respect the farmers, contrary to what is implied by the misleading title of the bill introduced by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

This motion is not just about the Canadian Wheat Board. I was not joking when I said I was rising to defend democracy. In case the government has not noticed, people are currently demanding their right to speak. They want their voices to be heard. A stunt like this only fuels public cynicism about our respectable institutions. The government has to listen to reason and hear the voice of the people. It has to take a step back and accept the verdict handed down by the farmers.

This government has to stop showing contempt for the public. It has to stop looking down on those who do not share its views. Democracy is much more than just winning elections. Democracy is about holding ongoing discussions with the public. I do not mean it is about controlling the message, as the Prime Minister's Office does; it is about listening to the needs and opinions of the public.

Why is the government refusing to listen to the farmers? Why will the government not consult the farmers? Why does the government not follow Ontario's lead?

• (1300)

Yesterday I was listening to the speech by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst on Bill C-18. He spoke passionately about the situation with the fishers in his riding who struggle to earn a living from the fruits of their labour. What I gather is that sometimes there is a disparity between different producers in terms of the price they get for the same products. Has the government forgotten that the Canadian Wheat Board is responsible for marketing Canadian wheat?

The strength of the board is its ability to develop markets for our farmers. How do the Conservatives plan to replace the board in that

role? It is not an insignificant role when we know that 80% of western wheat is exported overseas. What is the government doing about the role the board currently plays in terms of transporting the goods? Can the government guarantee that western Canadian farmers will have the same access to the railway? Can it guarantee the same favourable prices? No, obviously not. The government is playing with the lives of thousands of farmers. The government is having fun while our hard-working farmers are assuming all the risk.

I am afraid this government has abandoned family farms and small-scale farms. It is not surprising. This government has chosen to side with the multinationals and big oil companies by granting them huge tax breaks, to the detriment of small and medium-sized businesses, taxpayers and consumers. Now it is choosing to side with large agri-businesses at the expense of Canadian farmers, without thinking about the impact this bill will have on their lives, their families and their communities.

The Canadian Wheat Board is the farmers' union, their way of getting better prices. In unity, there is strength. Group insurance exists, which allows people to pay lower premiums than they would individually. Employees' unions allow them to negotiate with their employers for better salaries. Whether my colleagues across the floor like it or not, farmers will be the ones who lose, and they know it. That is why they voted to maintain the Canadian Wheat Board.

I am proud to rise in this House and defend the position they have taken. I am proud to stand up to the Conservative steamroller and defend the democratic rights of all Canadians. I am proud to stand here, alongside my NDP colleagues, and oppose the government's destructive policies. I am proud to do so on behalf of the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert and on behalf of those who are overlooked by this government. We will proudly stand up to the government and oppose every bad bill it brings before this House.

The government's plan to eliminate the Canadian Wheat Board without the farmers' consent is just one more example in a list that is already too long.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spoke a lot about democracy and about the rights and responsibilities of democrats. Does she not agree that a fundamental principle of democracy is that the majority cannot violate the rights of a minority? Does she not agree that individuals have the right to sell what belongs to them? Does she not agree that it is a violation of the spirit of democracy for the state to force farmers to sell their own products to the government, instead of selling them on the market and doing what they please?

It is strange that a member of Parliament from Quebec is talking about this, when Quebecers are able to sell their own products on the market and are not forced to sell them to the government. Does she not agree that it is not fair to put farmers in prison, as has happened to farmers in western Canada for committing the crime of selling their own products? Does she agree with imprisoning Canadian farmers?

Business of Supply

•(1305)

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his comments. The Wheat Board was originally established and founded with the approval of farmers. I spoke about democracy today. I know what I am talking about. When we talk about democracy, we talk about choice. As a result, we defend the right of those involved to determine their own future. That is democracy. Here in the House, I am standing up for Ontario farmers. I am a member from Quebec, but I also fight for the interests of all Canadian farmers.

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the economic health of the agriculture sector is very important in Canada. The Canadian Wheat Board levels the playing field. My colleague gave very concrete examples of price disparities, and in light of the dismantling being proposed by the Conservatives, this creates yet another division between small farms, family farms, and larger farms that are more prosperous.

I would be interested in hearing my colleague's thoughts on holding consultations with all types of farms on how small farms would be affected.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question. I will be brief. We have repeatedly asked the government if a study has been done concerning the impact of eliminating the Canadian Wheat Board. Unfortunately, as always, the government is not answering our questions. We know that this will be disastrous for families and their communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We have time for one quick question and a brief response.

The member for Vegreville—Wainwright.

[*English*]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way says that she knows what she is talking about, however she really does not. She indicated that the Wheat Board was put in place with the approval of farmers. That is not true. Originally, when it was a voluntary board it was, but under the War Measures Act, during the war, to get cheap grain for the war effort and not to give farmers a better price, the monopoly was put in place and it simply was not removed afterwards. So, farmers were given no choice on the issue of the monopoly.

All we want to do is return it to its original state, which was a voluntary organization where farmers could choose to participate or not. So the member should listen, get her history right, and I then think we would have a more beneficial debate in this place.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member opposite for his question. I would like to say that it is true that the board was abolished after the first world war, but farmers fought back and filed a complaint and it was reinstated.

•(1310)

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just came from something that relates to what I want to talk about, and that is trade and having the freedom to change my businesses. Indeed, it is a pleasure for me to participate in this

debate. I am proud that our government introduced the marketing freedom for grain farmers act in the House last week. I am particularly pleased that we have the opportunity to correct those misleading assumptions and predictions some people have been making, that providing marketing choice for wheat and barley producers in western Canada would somehow alter our system of supply management in my home province of Ontario.

Our government supports marketing choice for western wheat and barley growers, and it is entirely a separate issue from that of supply management. Those who try to link the two, providing marketing choice for western grain producers and our government's commitment to support Canada's supply management, are simply making mischief, but more so, they just do not understand it. There is no link.

Producers in the five supply managed industries, dairy, chicken, turkey, eggs and also the broiler hatching eggs, worked long and hard to establish these systems. There was clear support, and that is the important part, in all cases for the implementation of a supply management system before the provincial government and the federal government established and brought it in.

Quite honestly, I remember well that I had not taken over and purchased the farm yet in 1965, when supply management came in. The then minister of agriculture for the Province of Ontario, and I might add, the best agriculture minister that the Ontario has ever had, William A. Stewart, brought in supply management. In 1970, I had the opportunity to start to purchase the family farm.

Supply management was one of the main reasons I understood and was able to continue on, going into the dairy industry. Also at the same time, it was an opportunity for me as a young individual just graduating from college, when I started to buy the farm, to start to purchase land and grow grains and oil seeds. I have had the opportunity of being in both systems, which actually give freedom for marketing in Ontario.

The vast majority, if not all, of the producers who now participate in the supply management system support it. On the other side, the Canadian Wheat Board has a regionally shared governance administration. If farmers grow wheat and barley in western Canada and actually want to sell it for export for food use, then they have to sell it through the Wheat Board. Or the other option is to go to jail.

I do not understand the people on the other side always wanting to give farmers the responsibility to grow the crops, spend the money on the input, make the decision to grow them, but then actually saying they do not have the ability to market it. Quite honestly, it is amazing. They do not mind sending farmers to jail for the long gun registry or for selling wheat, but they do not want to give them the opportunity for marketing.

Business of Supply

Far from being universally supported, as is the case of supply management, a large number of these producers involved just want an option. Farmers want an alternative to the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly. We are going to continue to work to give them just that.

Farmers should be in the driver's seat when it comes to making their own business decisions. They make the investments and they build their business, all through hard work and knowledge. They take all the risks. Should they not also have the right to decide how and to whom they market their products? Absolutely, they should.

Whether people are barbers, plumbers, financial advisors, hardware store owners or car dealers, as Canadian business owners, they have the opportunity to make the decisions. They choose to make those decisions, as do the eastern farmers, like myself and my fellow farmers in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Ontario. Why would we not give the western farmers the opportunity to do the same?

● (1315)

The Government of Canada is working hard to give the wheat and barley producers the marketing freedom they deserve. Farmers want the ability to add value to their crops and capture more profits beyond the farm gate. They deserve to have the opportunity to get the best possible return for their product.

Farmers are already making business decisions for commodities such as canola, pulse crops, cattle and even vegetables and a number of other farm products. Farmers know how the open market works. It is amazing to me that we would burden the farmers with all the expense of putting a crop in but the opposition does not want to give them the opportunity, and do not think they have the knowledge, to market it. Quite honestly, that is an insult to the farmers of western Canada.

Our vision for the Canadian Wheat Board is as a strong, voluntary and viable wheat board that farmers can use if they so choose.

Let me talk a little about supply management because, quite honestly, that is what this is all about.

At the same time, the government continues to support supply management at home and on the international stage. The Conservative Party of Canada is the only party that actually talked about the support for and the need to stand behind supply management in the last election.

The third party, the Liberals, had been in power for 20 years. Oh sorry, maybe it was 13; it just seemed like an eternity. They always just talked about it, but actually never did anything about it. As the Minister of Agriculture said at the Dairy Farmers of Canada annual meeting in February, our record on supply management speaks for itself. I cannot say enough about the support that the farmers have for our Canadian agriculture minister as he deals with both supply management and the freedom of marketing across Canada and the vision and goals that he has in mind to keep this incredible industry strong and sustainable.

What have we done on supply management? We have actually acted under article 28 of the GATT agreement to limit the import of milk protein concentrates. We harmonized the compositional cheese standards to bring greater certainty to processors and also to consumers. Canadians know that cheese is made out of milk, and we

have made sure that Canadian families know what kind of cheese they are getting when they go to the grocery store.

The government is working also to continue to make sure that the WTO special agriculture safeguards are available if they are needed in the future. Finally, the government is also continuing to defend the interests that are important to supply managed industries in the international trade negotiations.

Clearly, supply management is an issue of paramount importance to all Canadians. Why? It is because supply management creates jobs and prosperity for Canadians. It creates prosperity in our urban areas and for thousands of well-kept dairy and poultry farms from coast to coast, from British Columbia to Newfoundland. Supply management provides livelihoods, not only for tens of thousands of Canadian farmers and their farm families, but also for their suppliers, transporters, and everyone right up the value chain from the gate to the plate. It is an economic engine not only in rural Canada but clearly in urban Canada also.

Why would anyone want to tamper with the supply management when it has been so successful and brought so many benefits to consumers, producers and others in the industry right across the value chain? It makes absolutely no sense, and that is our point.

I would suggest that because there has never been any action on the other side of the floor, and in fact during the election they never saw the need or the importance of supply management, that actually they are the ones who are continually pushing to maybe do something about supply management in terms of its dissolution.

● (1320)

The Conservative Party of Canada, the members on this side, are the only ones who not only say we support it, but we will put boots to the ground and put action in place when we are asked and see the need to do so.

On the other hand, grain growers have told us for years that they want the opportunity to make their own business decisions. It is not the case with supply management, where producers have strongly supported their marketing systems and have thanked the government for firmly supporting them.

A long-standing and continuing support for supply management and our commitment to increased options for western grain producers reflects this government's commitment to giving farmers what they need to run their businesses effectively.

We recognize that providing marketing freedom is a major change in agriculture in western Canada. That is why we have consulted extensively. We have gone across the country to talk about the supply chain, from farm to seaport.

Business of Supply

Over the summer, a working group comprising experts in the field has done just that, finding out how we market the grain and about the transportation systems and how we can transition the current CWB-run system to an open market that includes the voluntary marketing pools. The working group is one of many ways the government is seeking advice on how we move forward.

The marketing freedom for grain farmers act is part of our commitment to move forward with the programs and processes that are most beneficial to farmers, not just to them but to the entire industry.

We came to office with a set of principles and issues that we promised Canadians we would tackle. We have remained focused and determined to accomplish the things we were told were important to them. One of the issues was providing marketing freedom for western barley and wheat producers. That is why we introduced the Marketing Freedom for Grain Farmers act.

The Canadian Wheat Board and some members across the way have fought change because they want the status quo. Apparently in their view, farmers just do not know how or do not have the ability to market their grain.

As was mentioned earlier, farmers take all the risks: when to plant, when to harvest, what to put on it, how to grow it, when to market it when they produce it. That is unless they grow barley and wheat in western Canada. It does not make sense.

Where does the idea come from? Oddly enough, it does not come from history. Let us go back a little bit. The Canadian Wheat Board was established in 1935. That is 76 years ago. It was originally established as a voluntary marketing agency for prairie wheat, but the sale of wheat through the board became compulsory in 1943.

In 1949, the Canadian Wheat Board's powers were extended to include prairie oats and barley. From 1949 to 1975, about 25 years, the board was the single desk for western oats, barley and wheat, whether it was for human consumption or for animal consumption. But with changes to the feed grain policy in 1974 and 1976, exclusive marketing rights over prairie grain fed to animals in Canada were removed by the board. Interestingly, the sky did not fall. These changes took effect and in fact the use of grain cereals for livestock has grown significantly since then.

Next, oats were removed from the board's jurisdiction in 1989. Again, it is amazing that the sky did not fall, but what actually happened was that a thriving oats processing sector has since developed in western Canada.

What started out as a monopoly has been evolving over 37 years, until what we are left with is a single desk for barley and wheat for export and domestic human consumption, those two only.

Farmers quickly adapted to the changes that were made, and the Canadian Wheat Board was not missed. What made sense during World War II just does not make sense in the 21st century.

● (1325)

Wheat and barley growers recognize, and so does this government, that the Canadian brewery industries have lost confidence in the ability of the Canadian Wheat Board to reliably supply the malt

and barley they need to be competitive in the dynamic international malt and beer markets. Therefore, moving into the 21st century involves looking at the Wheat Board in a totally different way. It means putting on a new set of lenses and looking at what is going to be good not only for farmers but for the industry.

We recognize that this is a major change for agriculture in western Canada. That is why we have been consulting extensively with stakeholders from across the supply chain, from the farm to the seaport. Over the summer, a working group comprised of experts in the field heard a broad range of advice on how the grain marketing and transportation systems could transition from the current Wheat Board-run system to an open market that includes voluntary marketing pools.

I want to be very clear about this. This is not about the abolition of the Canadian Wheat Board. It is about giving farmers the choice of free marketing on their own or using the Canadian Wheat Board, something that opposition parties do not want to seem to comprehend would actually give them choice. They just talk about getting rid of the Wheat Board. The working group is one of many ways that the government is seeking advice on how to move forward.

The government is intent on making tangible progress in reducing the long-standing interference in farmers' business on the Prairies by the Canadian Wheat Board, which has taken the reins away from individual grain farmers when it comes to their very own businesses.

We need the monopoly Canadian Wheat Board, quite honestly, as a monopoly so that it can get out of the way and let farmers conduct their business. We know there are a number of farmers who will want to use it, as they do in Ontario because the wheat board still exists under the Grain Farmers of Ontario, for example. That is why members of the House need to support giving marketing freedom to grain farmers.

By the way, this has nothing to do with supply management, but our government has the same passion for the protection of supply management as we do for the support of the marketing freedom for grain farmers.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully and I am beginning to believe that some of the members opposite have missed the point of the motion. The point of the motion is not that the Wheat Board be preserved, it is not that farmers not have a choice but that there be a vote. The point of the motion is that the farmers affected by this decision by the government be given the opportunity, as is so clear in the legislation, to cast a ballot and exercise their democratic right to decide for themselves if they want to abandon the Wheat Board or not. That seems to be what is being missed.

My question for the member opposite is, what is it that the government is so afraid of that it refuses to allow a vote?

Business of Supply

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that last spring 76% of young farmers said they wanted a choice. It is sort of interesting that when the Wheat Board provided the opportunity for a vote, it forgot to ask whether farmers wanted the option of choice, yes or no. To me, quite honestly, it did not ask the farmers whether or not they actually wanted the choice.

I was on the agriculture committee in the last session. When the committee toured the country, one of the topics discussed was the future of farming and young farmers. It got to the point of farmers asking the government to give young farmers the opportunity to get the talent, technology, training and education older farmers got, and not lock them in to only controlling their expenses but also to sell their products.

• (1330)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, but I have to admit I am a little surprised by his revisionist history. On the agriculture committee on which I sit, all members of the opposition in the past session, whether it be Liberal, NDP or Bloc, wanted assurances from the Conservative government that while supply management was on the agenda during the CETA discussions, the comprehensive economic trade agreement with the European Union, we continually sought assurances that supply management was not on the negotiating table. We never received those assurances, not once.

This feigned new alliance with supply management is of some concern to all of us on this side of the House and all of those engaged in supply management. Why suddenly this rebirth, this feigned alliance with supply management?

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, the member comes from Guelph which has the agriculture university and I do appreciate his thoroughness on the agriculture committee. He gets a little confused from time to time, but he is honest in his approach.

We have never changed our position on supply management. I wish the member's party and the other ones would have talked about it during the election. They chose not to because I do not think it is relevant to them. Not only have we talked about it, we have put our boots on the ground and when supply management comes to us with the issues that need to be dealt with, our Minister of Agriculture and this party stand behind it. We will go to the wall to support supply management.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's support. I represent hundreds, if not thousands, of family farms. I hear, especially from younger farmers, on a daily basis their desire to use the expertise, to use their business sense to develop markets for the grains that are currently held under the Canadian Wheat Board jurisdiction. They want to market those crops the same way that they are able to market other crops, the crops that are getting maximum value, the world price.

I think I know the hon. member's answer to this, but I have asked the opposition parties and they have never been able to give me a straight answer. I want to know if the hon. member who comes from Ontario believes that western young farmers are as educated, smart and as astute businessmen as the people in Ontario. The folks in Ontario have the freedom and are doing an excellent job being able

to market their wheat and barley. I wonder if he believes the same success can be transferred to young farmers in western Canada as well.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from Peace River for all the work he does for his agricultural community and others. Since 2003, we have had the freedom of choice in providing sales for our grains. Absolutely.

When we met with the young farmers across Canada, they were educated. It is an insult to western farmers to tell them we want them to spend all their money on the input and make tough decisions, but when it comes to marketing, we do not think they have the talent or ability, so we are going to direct it to the Wheat Board which will market it for them. That is an insult and I hope young western farmers will soon have the same opportunity that we do in Ontario.

• (1335)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is an insult is that western farmers had a plebiscite whose results were released on September 12 where 51% of barley growers and 60% of wheat growers wanted to maintain the single desk.

The Minister of Agriculture, in response, said that the direct vote was flawed. I would like to define plebiscite for the members across. It is the direct vote of all members of an electorate. In this case the electorate would be rural western farmers.

Why does the member not protect the integrity of his government by allowing a direct vote of western Canadian farmers on a clear question on whether they want to maintain the monopoly of the Wheat Board. Why muddy the results of our election that we had in May and insult western farmers by implying that they saw the May election as a CWB plebiscite?

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. When the Wheat Board did the plebiscite, it is my understanding that many of the young farmers who actually do the farming did not get a ballot. We can show where ballots were actually sent out to people who had passed away. We know that because of the way it was handled. The turnout was very dismal and about 33% wanted to get rid of the single desk.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned car dealers in his speech as examples of businesspeople who get to make their own decisions. However, I am sure he realizes that car dealerships are very carefully controlled. There can only be one Ford dealership in a certain area. It is designed that way in order to minimize competition so that there are not two Ford dealerships competing with each other, driving down their business margins.

Business of Supply

My question for my hon. colleague is, does he realize that the idea of the Wheat Board is so that small farmers get together and agree not compete with each other, to their mutual benefit? That is the benefit of the Wheat Board. It looks like there is no benefit in an up market. However, in a down market, believe me, it is good to band together.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to comprehend whether that actually means something. I just bought a car. I think it was a truck. And guess what? I could go to any dealer. I had that option. Why? Because they sell on the open market. I have a choice whether I want to buy a car or buy a truck of the 15 or 20 different models which are out there.

I am sorry. I just do not understand the relevance of that kind of question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Windsor West.

The Canadian Wheat Board was created in the spirit of solidarity and to protect its members. It has existed for over 70 years and still has the unwavering support of its member farmers.

In a referendum conducted by the board, a majority of the 40,000 farmers who participated voted to maintain the single desk system, which has an effective monopoly on sales and prevents competition among farmers. In other words, the board unites western Canadian farmers, while the government's bill will only destroy these connections and divide the prairie farming community. This is just one more clear example of the regressive attitude that taints all of the policies put forward by this government.

The united front created by the board, which operates without public funding, gives prairie farmers peace of mind and financial stability that would be impossible without this institution.

Our farmers, who work tirelessly to provide Canadians with high-quality products, should not have to experience the additional financial stress that the Conservative government wants to impose on them. The Wheat Board protects farmers from the vagaries of the market, ensures that all of them receive a fair and equitable income regardless of their production volume, and prevents money from ending up in the pockets of the middlemen who seek to profit from our farmers' hard work. Chances are slim that the price of wheat will drop on the international market. However, if the Wheat Board is dismantled, farmers' income will certainly be significantly lower.

In economic circumstances such as those we are experiencing today, we cannot afford to weaken our economy's small financial stakeholders. In Manitoba alone, over 3,000 jobs are at risk. The province will be deprived of over \$140 million in revenue. Is this a good strategy for boosting our economy or is it a way to line the pockets of large American corporations that are just waiting for the green light from their Conservative friends to invade the Canadian grain market?

The motion of the member for Churchill—the motion currently before the House—would ensure that farmers are able to exercise their democratic right to express their views on the future of their institutions. Democracy is a right that all countries have a responsibility to protect. Why is the Conservative government

trying to threaten the democratic rights of our farmers? Do the Conservatives feel threatened by such a democratic process?

A number of studies have shown that a single desk model, like the Wheat Board, makes it possible to bring in hundreds of millions of dollars more per year than on the open market. Why then does the Conservative government want to deprive Canadian families of this income? Why do the Conservatives want to deprive farmers and their families of revenue that allows them to actively participate in the economy and be involved in their communities?

The Canadian Wheat Board is the largest and most successful grain marketing organization in the world. Why does the Conservative government want to dismantle this jewel of the Canadian farming community, which allows Canada to shine at the world level? This tactic is clearly part of the Conservative government's strategy to strip Canada of all its international credibility.

Not only do farmers rely on the board to ensure fair access for all, but they do not all have a local market to provide them access to the 70 countries worldwide that are buying our wheat. The board is also synonymous with quality for these 70 purchasing countries because our institution sets quality standards and speaks out against the unlimited use of GMOs. Clearly, our farmers are proud of the high-quality products they provide to consumers, and with a system like the Wheat Board, they benefit fully. They reap their grain and the rewards from their hard work.

All Canadians across the country should feel threatened by the government's bill. Some 80% of the wheat sold in Canada comes from this single desk, or the Prairies in Canada's west. The quality of the products on our shelves is being threatened. If the government goes ahead with its plans and ignores the voice of the majority, then pride in our products and the quality of those products will suffer.

● (1340)

Farming is the foundation of Canadian society, our larder, as they like to say. Canada needs a healthy farming industry in order for all of Canadian society to prosper. Contrary to what the Conservatives are saying, this issue affects more than the Prairies. Ending the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly and dismantling the board jeopardizes the entire Canadian farming industry and threatens the survival of family farms, which are so dear to communities such as Kamloops, British Columbia, Stanstead in my riding, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and Sainte-Marie-de-Kent, New Brunswick; it is an insult to one of the founding professions of our society, our great country of Canada.

Business of Supply

I did not think I needed to remind the Conservatives that democracy is also a founding principle of our society. The motion moved by the hon. member for Churchill seeks to preserve the democratic rights of farmers to allow them to decide for themselves on the future of the board that they have been running and financing themselves for decades. The Conservatives would do well to vote in favour of farmers and democracy by supporting a motion that stands up for our agricultural workers.

Since the Conservatives champion non-interference in the free market and refuse to intervene in the actual creation of stable jobs, how does they justify their interference where it was not asked for and where it is not warranted? The Canadian Wheat Board is managed and funded by farmers. The government and taxpayers do not fund the activities of this institution. With this bill, the Conservatives are not defending the interests of our farmers in any way. Once again, the Conservatives are completely out of touch with the reality of Canadians and are taking action that is contrary to the will and values of the Canadian public.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food invokes marketing freedom to justify his bill. The Canadian wheat market is currently not controlled by the big American corporations, which are close to the Conservatives. Currently, farmers are free of the financial stress that would be created by dismantling the Wheat Board. The Prairie grain market is free of the Conservatives' regressive attitude. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food should allow farmers to express their opinions freely and should set aside this bill.

The Conservatives keep repeating that they were given the mandate to dismantle the Wheat Board in the last election. However, they refuse to prove this support by holding a plebiscite of the farmers who are members of the Wheat Board in order to allow them to have their say and give the government a clear and precise mandate. If the Conservatives are so convinced of the farmers' support for their bill, they will not hesitate to support the motion of the member for Churchill, who merely wishes to ensure that our farmers have the democratic right to have a say in the future of their management tools.

Along with my colleague from the riding of Churchill, I firmly believe that the government must organize a proper free vote for all current members of the Canadian Wheat Board, so they may again express their will to the government, with the hope that this time the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food will listen to what farmers want to tell them.

• (1345)

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member talk about democracy being a fundamental right and that the voices of the farmers who voted in the plebiscite should not be ignored. There were issues about who could vote and who could not. However, at least 50% of barley producers want the freedom to market outside the Wheat Board. A good number of wheat producers want to do the same. Why is the member and his party ignoring those farmers who want to market outside the Wheat Board?

The member and his party say that they have nothing against people pooling their resources together and selling through the Canadian Wheat Board. However, they also say that the government should not compel those who want to sell somewhere else to sell through the Canadian Wheat Board. What does my colleague have to say about those farmers? Why is he and his party not listening to those farmers, a good percentage of whom grow their own crops and want to deal with them as they wish? They also make huge investments into their farming operations. If the existing legislation is not changed they would be fined and put in jail. In a democratic country like Canada, how can the member justify putting farmers in jail for selling their own crops at the best price they can get for them?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board has played an important role over the past 70 years, and it will continue to do so if the government is willing to pass the motion moved by the hon. member for Churchill. This motion calls for a free vote that would include everyone who is affected by this process.

This board works, is effective and gives everyone a fair price within an open market. We are simply saying that farmers should be given the opportunity to have a say on this issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it takes a great deal of courage for a member of the Conservative Party to stand up and ask why that party is not listening to farmers. There are prairie grain wheat farmers who have voted in a plebiscite to say that they want to retain the Canadian Wheat Board and yet the government wants to get rid of it. I ask the member who posed the question, why are he and his government not listening to farmers?

Although evidence is important, it is not something the government gives an ounce of credibility to. There was an interesting report entitled, "Performance Evaluation of the Canadian Wheat Board" which came out in 1996. The authors were three professors from three major universities, the University of Manitoba, the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Alberta.

The report states:

The single-desk selling system in Canada is viewed as something that facilitates transactions and is regarded by Brazilian buyers as a key to the confidence and reliability of purchasing wheat from Canada.

There are so many wonderful reasons to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. It brings so much value to our prairie farmers. Would the member not agree that is the case?

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree.

There is strength in numbers. It is disappointing to hear the government say that opening the market will help farmers across the country. We need to join forces and give farmers the chance to have a clear say.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead for his spirited and interesting speech.

The Conservatives are planning to abolish the Canadian Wheat Board. They also want to abolish the gun registry and creators' rights regarding private copying. In fact, they want to abolish anything that people use to protect themselves, if it resembles a collective in any way.

Will the Conservatives go down in history as the abolitionists of social democracy?

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for this wonderful question.

Uniting people for a common cause has always been a strength in our communities and in Canadian society. We become bigger and stronger when we work together. We can have a bigger impact on everyone's future. Solidarity is always far better than division.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I call on the member for Windsor West to resume debate, I should let him know that I will have to interrupt his remarks at the top of the hour for statements by members.

The hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion from the member for Churchill discussing a central principle of democracy, which is people having their rights, especially having their rights respected. It is bound from a tradition of legislation that has been duped by the government and usurped by the people who have the vehicle of the Canadian Wheat Board as part of their conditions of doing business and their investments, not only in terms of their businesses but their families.

It is important to note that Canada's current challenges stem from a lot of different issues related to our massive geography, our disperse population and a very diverse group of individuals and people across this country with different interests. In the 1920s, the farming community felt enough need to band together to create a collective to be able to compete in the open markets with the wheat product they were providing. It is important because there was motivation at that time to do so, which came about from their personal experiences and their understanding that if they could come together as a collective, at times it would be to their advantage.

We do that even to this day in many respects, and we have in this country in many other fora. The credit unions are an example. When it became impossible for the farming community or others to get access to credit that was reasonable and fair, people got together. Still to this day, in cities we have collectives of financing, accounting and services in the banking industry because the profits then go back to the people. They understand that together they do much better than they do alone.

We also do this when we form cities, municipalities and towns. Instead of having independent police or fire departments, everybody understands that if we work as a collective and pay a fee for this, then we will get that service and that insurance. This is about respecting a tradition that was set up in the 1920s.

In 1943, they went to the single-desk marketing. The legislation that was created for the Canadian Wheat Board calls for it to have vote if it wants to dissolve or change the concept that it has now. To be clear, this board does not bring in a profit for itself. It has democratically elected its members, ten of whom come from the farming community and four of whom are appointed by the government, and it chooses a chair. That is critically important because in the legislation from the government, it would not allow the democratically elected farmers to remain on the Canadian Wheat Board. It would appoint its own people to dismantle it and it would not allow the elected farmers to make those difficult choices, even if they did not want to and are forced to have this legislation.

The member for Churchill should be commended for this motion because it goes to an important piece, not only behind the Wheat Board, but understanding that legislation that was a protectiveness chamber, that was here and there are expectations toward it, would be dismantled. That could set a pattern for other legislation. The government is saying that it says that but that it will disregard that altogether.

The member also needs to be commended because there has been a plebiscite with 63% of farmers saying that they would like to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. The farmers have had their vote and they were very clear on that mandate. The Conservatives often talk about having a clear mandate from the Canadian people when they only had 38% of the vote. That is unacceptable. Their 38%, which we hear daily in the House of Commons at question period, ad nauseam, seems to make some type of a mandate for an absolute majority of everything from legislation to discourse that happens not only in this chamber but also in our committees. However, the reality is that Canadian farmers were far louder when they said that they did not want to dismantle the Wheat Board.

When we look at some of the economics of this, with an economy that is fragile right now, world markets in a turmoil and a great deal of uncertainty coming up, why would the government actually do this without an action plan? There has been no study or analysis. We do that as a regular business. Cities and towns do that before making multi-million dollar contracts, awards and services. However, meanwhile, we would have billions of dollars tied up in the future and we are not even seeing an economic analysis presented before us, which is unfortunate because it shows the reckless abandon of ideology that the Conservatives have and the reckless nature of their intent to ram this through as fast as they can. I believe they want to do so because of electoral timing. They want to tear down the Wheat Board and bring in the different changes that will take place before the next election.

● (1355)

Once again, farmers have been out there saying that they would prefer to keep this as the particular option right now. There could be a further debate among farmers about what they want to do. I know in Ontario they had that debate and they had that choice. However, they had that debate first, which was much more effective than what is taking place here.

All the member for Churchill is doing is defending the rights of those individuals who have the system in place that they have invested in. They have invested their families, their money and their lifelong interest into their farms and to have that thrown to the wind without an economic analysis and without the due diligence necessary is completely unacceptable.

It is important to go back to the 63% of people who responded. There has been a debate about the type of plebiscite that took place and the different types of problems that they faced. We should go to the suggestion by the member for Churchill to have that educated, earnest attempt to let farmers understand the consequences of what is going to take place, to know them and to face them in a very strategic way. However, we need to do so in a responsible way before we undermine ourselves, our country and our farmers, especially when they have the right to make the destiny for themselves, not have it imposed on them by others.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The member for Windsor West will have three minutes remaining for his speech and five minutes for questions and comments when the House resumes debate on the motion.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

DIWALI

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is a special day for Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. Tomorrow marks the holy day of Diwali, the Festival of Lights. It is a joyous celebration of good over evil, light over darkness.

The foundation and meanings of Diwali can be shared by Canadians of all faiths. This holy day is often observed with the lighting of an oil lamp, the setting off of fireworks and the generous giving of gifts and sweets. These traditions bring families, friends and loved ones closer together under the values of peace and friendship. Diwali is a time that reminds us all about the incredible contribution toward this great country by Indo-Canadians.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of my constituents of Brampton—Springdale, to extend my most sincere best wishes for a happy, healthy and joyous Diwali to all those celebrating around the world.

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week there was an article in a weekly paper in my riding about the status of women in Fermont. The article confirmed what everyone already knows: violence; verbal, physical and sexual abuse; geographic isolation and distress are commonplace for women in Fermont.

During a recent visit to my riding, I witnessed the extent of the social tragedy currently playing out in Fermont when I met with staff

Statements by Members

at the shelter that provides assistance to women. This centre has seen a 300% increase in demand for its services over the past year. The cost of living in the region has also increased.

These women have had enough. I am calling on the Minister for Status of Women to come up with a contingency plan and concrete assistance measures for isolated regions experiencing an economic boom, in order to fund projects that provide a safe place and housing for women. The women of Fermont also have a right to health as well as physical and economic safety.

* * *

[English]

NORMAN LALONDE

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have some very sad news to tell this House. Cornwall's own "Mr. Canada" has died. Norm Lalonde, who single-handedly began Canada Day festivities in Cornwall, has, unfortunately, passed away.

In the early 1970s, Norm took it upon himself to celebrate Canada's birthday. He gathered together about 200 residents, cooked some hot dogs, let off some fireworks and led everyone in the singing of Canada's national anthem.

From that very humble beginning, Norm grew this event into one of the largest celebrations in eastern Ontario. Today, crowds of 25,000 to 30,000 proud Canadians regularly turn up at Lamoureux Park on July 1 every year to celebrate Canada's birthday.

We owe all this to "Mr. Canada", as Norm was affectionately known in Cornwall.

Our condolences go out to his wife and greatest supporter, Thérèse, and his children, David, Patricia, Stephen and Norm Jr.

God bless Mr. Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

RICK HANSEN

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the kickoff of the 25th Anniversary Relay in honour of the Rick Hansen Man in Motion World Tour. Some 7,000 participants will retrace the Canadian portion of the gruelling journey completed 25 years ago by an extraordinary man who wanted to make the world a better place, inspire Canadians and help people with spinal cord injuries.

[English]

This relay will remind us all of the importance of investing in research for effective cures to help improve the lives of thousands upon thousands of Canadians.

Statements by Members

Rick Hansen has been an exemplary role model for our society, having inspired so very many of us to surpass ourselves over the past quarter century. It is with profound admiration and gratitude that we recognize today the depth of his contribution to Canada and to medical research around the world. With that in mind, this year, relay participants will proudly carry the Rick Hansen Medal as it makes its way across the country.

I wish everyone involved with the Rick Hansen 25th anniversary relay tremendous success.

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CAPITAL EXPERIENCE

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a special group of students in Ottawa today participating in a program I call a “Capital Experience”, wherein student leaders from each of the seven high schools in my riding come to Ottawa for three days each year to learn about career opportunities in public life.

They have visited Parliament, the South Korean Embassy, Amnesty International, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the press gallery, the University of Ottawa and Summa Strategies.

I wish to thank those who shared their time with these students and thank the businesses and services clubs that sponsored them.

Today, I welcome to Parliament: Katelyn Lloyd and Iain Sullivan from Brock; Chad Leroux and Matthew Steele from Crestwood; Meredith March and Amber Wilson from Fenelon Falls; Samantha Brixi and Puru Shah from Haliburton; Samantha Thompson, Alec Becking and Dan Lowe from I.E. Weldon; Megan Connell and Mandi Manderson from L.C.V.I.; Courtney Kavanagh, Keira Mann and Robert Ridenaur from St. Thomas Aquinas; and Kali Tucker from Apsley.

I ask my colleagues to join me in wishing these young people all the best as they make decisions regarding their future careers.

* * *

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

JEAN-MARC AUBIN

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for over 30 years, Jean-Marc Aubin has been an ardent defender of education rights for francophones and has dedicated himself to developing French-language services.

Mr. Aubin was a founding member of Collège Boréal and president of the Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario. In the 1990s, he was president of the French language section and, under his leadership, that section carved out its own unique place in the region and in the province. Mr. Aubin is currently the chair of the Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario. He is always ready to bring forward innovative projects to benefit students and the francophone community.

In November 2010, he was awarded the Jean-Robert Gauthier prize for his outstanding contribution. In May 2011, he was

decorated with the Ordre de la Pléiade, an honour bestowed by the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

Mr. Aubin continues to focus on and promote the rights of Franco-Ontarians. I am pleased and very proud to rise today to congratulate Jean-Marc Aubin.

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[*English*]

DIWALI

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, October 26, 2011, marks the celebration of Diwali, the Festival of Lights, and Bandi Chhorh Divas around the world. A holiday in India, Diwali symbolizes the victory of good over evil.

I would personally like to wish happy Diwali not only to people in India or people of Indian descent but to all Canadians. Canadians of Indian origin would like to thank their parliamentarians for sharing in the celebration of Diwali on Parliament Hill for many years.

This year as we celebrate 2011 as the Year of India in Canada, there is an opportunity to learn more about the richness of Indian culture. As Canada and India continue to forge closer ties economically, we also see the contribution the vibrant Indo-Canadian community has made to the fabric of Canada.

On behalf of the constituents of Calgary Northeast and my family, I wish all of my colleagues a very happy Diwali and Bandi Chhorh Divas.

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HUNTING SEASON

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, fall is a special time of the year in Renfrew County. It is a time of traditional heritage activities as the days get shorter and the nights grow longer.

Farmers are finishing up with the fall harvest, loggers are preparing to go into the bush for the winter cut. It is a time for church suppers and getting caught up with neighbours at craft fairs and bazaars as we ready for winter and, best of all, it is hunting season in the Ottawa Valley.

For the first time in over 15 years, law-abiding sportsmen, thanks to our Conservative government, can look forward to doing what they have always done without the heavy, oppressive hand of big government on their shoulders.

There is a new attitude in Ottawa. It is one that respects the rights of individuals to enjoy lawful activities without passing judgment and constantly telling people what they can and cannot do.

In the great riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke we value our freedom, and when it is fall, it is hunting season in the Ottawa Valley.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

COMMUNITY CARE AND HOME CARE

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in the House to acknowledge the exemplary work of Aide à la communauté et services à domicile, a community care and home care agency based in my riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent that serves the entire greater Quebec City area.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of this non-profit organization, which in that time has served almost 15,000 people in need by providing them with almost one million hours of care. It has created almost 1,500 jobs, not to mention all the young people it has reintegrated into the workforce. Today I am proud to recognize their contribution to our society.

Community groups play an essential role. To the extraordinary people who are the backbone of our society, people like Linda Couture, the founder and managing director of this care agency, and her entire team of dedicated employees and volunteers, we wish a happy 25th anniversary.

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[English]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw the attention of the House to 20 Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada staff and volunteers who are in Ottawa today to raise awareness on the importance of continued MS research in Canada.

MS affects thousands of Canadians and is a disease for which there is presently no cure. This disease knows no bounds. It affects young and old, male and female alike. It not only affects people living with the disease but also their families and caregivers, health care professionals, researchers and people who fight against MS.

Our government is investing in research such as funding and developing an MS monitoring system, providing new tax support for caregivers, and working closely with provincial and territorial governments, medical associations and the MS Society of Canada.

Close collaboration will help ensure that people living with MS and their caregivers get the support and advice they need to ensure they have the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of life.

I encourage all members of the House to support programs that more directly meet the needs of the people affected by MS today and advance research to help us find a cure for tomorrow.

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● (1410)

DIWALI

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Diwali is an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the past year, to look forward and plan for the future with renewed optimism. Many people in my riding of Newton—North Delta, including myself, will gather with family and friends to give thanks, to celebrate and to contemplate.

Diwali, the Festival of Lights, celebrates the light within each of us as we welcome the coming new year. It is a time where hearts are filled with joy and minds look forward to the bright new future.

Every Canadian can share in hope for the future. We pride ourselves on our openness and we strive to build an inclusive society.

We are not there yet. We must draw on the good within each of us, to open our hearts and minds, and increase our understanding of one another. At this time, let us all recommit to this goal.

On behalf of my NDP colleagues, *Diwali aur naya saal mubarak*. Best wishes for Diwali and a happy new year. I wish everyone celebrating this special occasion right around the globe the very best.

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WORLD FOOD PROGRAM

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the number of people suffering from chronic hunger and malnutrition grows due to crises resulting from conflicts, natural disasters and poverty, it is even more important than ever to help those in need.

Today, we welcome to Canada Josette Sheeran, executive director of the United Nations World Food Program, and I am proud that Canada is the second-biggest donor to the World Food Program.

[Translation]

For more than a half century, the World Food Program has been on the front lines of major food crises around the world, providing food to those who need it most. Today, the WFP is playing a crucial role in East Africa, using all means available to deliver food to the more than 13 million people affected by drought.

Canada and the WFP are working together to put an end to famine among the most vulnerable populations.

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[English]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Multiple Sclerosis Society volunteers and staff from across the country, including from my own constituency of Vancouver Centre, are on the Hill today.

[Translation]

As a doctor, I know about the often devastating effects that multiple sclerosis can have on patients as well as their entire family and their caregivers. Multiple sclerosis is a debilitating lifelong disease that affects approximately 75,000 Canadians. Three new cases will be diagnosed today.

Oral Questions

[English]

That is why the Liberal Party of Canada calls for urgent clinical trials on CCSVI to ensure that MS patients have the best possible evidence-based care.

The issue of caregivers is also an important one for MS patients. It is imperative that this House works toward giving them the financial support and resources they need to be cared for at home as long as possible.

I ask the House to applaud all of the volunteers on the Hill today. They deserve it.

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TAXATION

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP interim leader thinks anyone who has a tax-free savings account is wealthy, but 6.7 million Canadians have tax-free savings accounts. That is a lot of NDP taxation targets.

The NDP thinks anyone who plans for their future and saves their own money is wealthy. It not only wants to hike income, sales and business taxes, but now it has also set its sights on Canadians' hard-earned tax free savings.

Our Conservative government brought in tax-free savings accounts to provide greater incentives for Canadians, especially low and modest income individuals, to save. Our government deliberately set up the TFSAs to ensure that income in, and withdrawals from them, would not affect eligibility for federal income-tested benefits and credits.

While the NDP embarks on its latest tax-grabbing scheme, our government will continue to occupy the side of Canadian taxpayers.

By attacking Canadians' savings, the NDP members have proven yet again that they are simply not fit to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

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• (1415)

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today marks the annual firefighters' legislative outreach, where firefighters from across Canada come to Parliament to raise critical issues for public safety. For 14 years they have asked for the creation of a public safety officer compensation fund.

In 2005 the NDP brought forth this issue as a private member's motion. New Democrats and Conservatives voted 161 to 112 to establish the fund, yet, six years later it has yet to be put in place.

We can think of no better time than this year's firefighters' lobby for the government to announce that it will finally do what Parliament mandated six years ago.

Every year an average of 10 firefighters die in the line of duty to protect the public and save lives. They pay the ultimate price. Their families make a tremendous sacrifice and far too often suffer enormous financial hardship.

Today we rise in the House to pay tribute to the firefighters of Canada for their selflessness and sacrifice.

Today we renew our pledge to work to establish a public safety officer compensation fund for our nation's firefighters and police officers. Their courage is exemplary. They deserve no less.

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FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is a huge day in our government's commitment to eliminate the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

I personally would like to thank the Prime Minister and our caucus for their support over the years as we exposed what a sham this registry is. For me, this is like payday after almost 18 years of exposing the registry as having nothing to do with effective gun control measures.

Canadians have recognized that the long gun registry is a waste of taxpayers' money. They replaced the member for Ajax—Pickering with a strong Conservative voice. They replaced the member for Yukon with a strong Conservative voice. They replaced the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming with a strong Conservative voice.

Those defeated MPs listened to their Ottawa bosses rather than their constituents. In fact, this issue was important in giving Canada a strong, stable, majority Conservative government.

Finally, long gun owners in Canada will no longer be unfairly targeted by a wasteful, paper-pushing exercise.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

G8 SUMMIT

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more ministers were involved in the G8 gazebo fiasco. The Minister of the Environment also has a friend in the area. Here is what the Huntsville mayor's hand-picked operator got from the environment minister: "He told me he will whole heartedly support the Huntsville IMC at cabinet and wanted to make sure we pass along our pitch...ASAP".

Can the Prime Minister explain the environment minister's involvement in the G8 slush fund?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts on this are well known. They have been completely reviewed by the Auditor General. The former minister of transport, who is now the Minister of Foreign Affairs, made the decisions. There have been recommendations made by the Auditor General on how we can improve the process in the future, and we will do so.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, little by little, the truth is coming out. These new documents show that the Conservative ministers were given the authority to directly approve infrastructure projects submitted by members of Parliament.

We know that the President of the Treasury Board is heavily implicated. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is also involved, as is the Minister of Finance and now the Minister of the Environment. Something stinks, and it is spreading throughout the cabinet.

When will a parliamentary investigation be conducted to shed some light on the minister's re-election fund?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts on this are well known. They were reviewed by the Auditor General. She made recommendations, and we have indicated that we intend to follow those recommendations to improve the process in the future.

• (1420)

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the documents from the Town of Huntsville show that the purse strings were opened because of the privileged relationship the Conservatives' friends have with Conservative ministers. The documents show that the G8 funds were mainly approved by the Minister of Finance.

Knowing how much control the Prime Minister and his office exert, we have to wonder: when will the Prime Minister take responsibility for the G8 funding scandal?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Auditor General reviewed all the relevant documentation. The government agreed to follow her recommendations to improve the process. We approved 32 projects, and all the funds have been transferred. They were good projects but we intend to review the recommendations and improve the process in the future.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, new documents now show that the maverick member from Muskoka was not alone in subverting accountability. We find out that the cabinet ministers were dividing up the cash and projects without any bureaucratic oversight whatsoever. They turned the cabinet table into a one-stop shop for pork.

What better way for the minister to get his hands on the money than to get one of his friends hired at \$187 an hour to lobby other ministers? Will the minister come clean and tell us how many ministers he and his buddy lobbied in order for him to get his hands on the G8 slush fund?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former minister of infrastructure has been clear. He approved all of these projects. This has been thoroughly aired by the Auditor General. Our government accepts the Auditor General's recommendations and we will improve the process for the future.

In a spirit of generosity, we are also giving the hon. member an opportunity to do the right thing and finally keep his promise to vote in favour of the elimination of the long gun registry as he has promised for so many years.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after 130 days the fig leaf that the member is hiding behind is looking a little frayed over there because this is about the fact that he got his buddy hired. It was his idea. He called the mayor and said, "hire my buddy". Then what did his buddy do? He started calling the other ministers to get his hands on the cash.

Buddies were hired by the minister, contracts were given on tender and the Auditor General was misled. The minister's fingers are all over this file. Will he release the documents that show who was in the meetings where it was decided how to carve up the money to get his hands on the G8 slush fund?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for infrastructure has indicated that he approved all of the projects. The matter has been completely aired. We accept the recommendations of the Auditor General to improve the process.

That hon. member has had two chances on his feet today. We have reintroduced legislation to eliminate the long gun registry, which he called for year after year during election time. I ask him to stand a third time and announce that he will keep his word, that he will do the right thing, that he will not break his faith with his constituents and that he will work with us—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Wascana.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada today confirmed what the TD Bank, Scotiabank, BMO, the International Monetary Fund and others have said: that economic growth is slowing to a crawl both globally and here in Canada, where it is down 25%, and the risk is rising that things could get worse. Canadian jobs are obviously in jeopardy.

Why has the government increased the burden of EI payroll taxes this year by \$600 million? Why is it adding another \$1.2 billion in further job-killing payroll taxes next year?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a surprising question coming from a party that has voted against every single tax reduction the government has brought into effect and in fact continues to oppose measures that are before the House at this time.

Obviously, the fact that we are in a fragile global recovery and that we are anticipating slow growth comes as no surprise to anyone on this side of the House. I welcome the Liberal Party to that realization. I encourage its members to do as we are doing, to focus on jobs and growth, and pass the important tax reduction measures that are before the House of Commons.

*Oral Questions***SENIORS**

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a tax credit of \$160 million does not fix a tax increase of \$1.8 billion.

Among the Canadians getting clobbered on the stock market are those with RRSPs withering away. At age 71, they have no choice and must convert their RRSPs into registered income funds and begin reporting them as taxable.

Given the stock market turmoil, will the government show flexibility for seniors, flexibility on the date when RRSPs must be converted to RRIFs and flexibility on the minimum amounts to be taken into income?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again that is a surprising question from a party that has consistently opposed the tax measures that the government has brought in for Canadian seniors, including those as important as the tax-free savings account, income splitting for senior citizens and increases to the guaranteed income supplement.

I would encourage the members of the Liberal Party to support the measures that are before the House and actually support Canadian seniors rather than coming up with excuses as to why they constantly vote against good things for our Canadian seniors.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government announced non-refundable tax credits for volunteer firefighters, caregivers and young people taking art lessons. Unfortunately, these tax credits are discriminatory because low-income Canadians cannot take advantage of them, since they simply do not pay enough taxes. We estimate that it would not cost much to make these tax credits refundable.

Is the government prepared to reconsider that?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again we have a problem with a member not practising what he preaches, or in fact an entire party not practising what it preaches.

The volunteer firefighters tax credit was in the budget. We brought forward the budget. We listened to the volunteer firefighters. We listened to our caucus on this side of the House. We brought it in. It was voted on in the House, and those members voted against it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise coming from that end of the chamber.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were appalled yesterday to see a troubling video posted on the website of the Parliamentary Secretary to the

Minister of Agriculture. At the very least it was insulting, and in the words of national Inuit leader Mary Simon it was “a racist slur”.

In the video a cartoon Wheat Board executive tells a farmer, “Slow down, young man. You are talking Eskimo....You cannot do those things in Saskatchewan”. The slur is used not once, but three times.

Will the parliamentary secretary please apologize to all Canadians for this slur?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that the offending video has been removed. I know the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands would certainly apologize to anyone who found it offensive. However, what he really finds offensive is the opposition's continued hammering at the government for allowing western Canadian farmers the freedom to market their own product. That is untenable.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only is the video insulting to aboriginal people, it insults the intelligence of the majority of farmers who voted to save the Canadian Wheat Board.

Simply taking the video off of the website is not enough. Will the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands or his government do the right thing and apologize to the Inuit people? Will he apologize for his government's arrogant dismissal of farmers' voices calling on the government to save the Wheat Board?

After having shown such disrespect, will the government now show respect by allowing farmers to have their voices heard and respected in their—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we do respect is the right of western Canadian farmers to have the same options as their cousins and colleagues in Ontario. What we are moving for is called fairness, the right to handle one's own product in a way, time, price and place of one's choosing.

I cannot understand why the opposition refuses to see that. Certainly the vast majority of farmers in western Canada are accepting of this. They want to move forward. We are already seeing value-added opportunities being announced. We know that small communities will benefit from this type of opportunity and we will move forward.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives really believe that prairie grain farmers will make more money by selling their grain outside of the Canadian Wheat Board, then that means every single Conservative MP involved in the grain industry is in a conflict of interest and must recuse themselves from the vote on Bill C-18.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

If it is not true, then one must ask why the Conservatives are destroying this great Canadian institution if they do not in fact believe that it will be better for Canadian farmers.

They cannot have it both ways. Which is it, a conflict of interest or a reckless and irresponsible idea that will bring uncertainty and instability to the whole agricultural community of the Prairies?

• (1430)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers will never be intimidated by what I think is a lingering case of beaver fever over there. They will never be intimidated by that. They want to move forward.

The members on this side will never apologize. Farmers and non-farmers alike have banded together on this side of the aisle to move forward with marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers. It is the right thing to do. The timing is right to do it. They will continue to produce that top-quality product that is in such demand around the world. We will get the job done in spite of these ridiculous antics.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, coming from a failed ostrich jockey, I do not know what the member knows about beaver fever.

One thing is clear: the government actually has no idea what will happen when it does away with the Wheat Board. It is legislating away a \$6 billion-a-year successful company without a business plan, without a cost-benefit analysis, without any evidence whatsoever that prairie farmers will actually be better off. If the government has such documentation, why does it not table it in the House?

If the government will allow government MPs who are in a conflict of interest to vote, why will it not let prairie farmers vote on how they want to market their grain themselves?

The Speaker: Order. I think some of these metaphors involving animals may be causing a little disorder in the House. I would urge all hon. members to try to avoid using them so that we can get through question period.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is sound advice. Over the top never works.

I will say that farming ostrich allowed me the opportunity to get used to working with the lesser life forms I sometimes see here on the floor of the House of Commons.

Having said that, we are moving ahead with marketing freedom for farmers. They are smart enough to know what is required for their own bottom business line. We will get the job done.

The Speaker: Order. Similarly, those types of comments when referring to our colleagues are also unhelpful during question period.

The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, time and time again the Minister of National Defence fails to respond to a straightforward question. Why are we buying jets sight unseen, with no tendering process, that cannot even defend the Arctic north?

The F-35 cannot communicate in Canada's north. It cannot even land on Arctic runways. Our military pilots deserve better. Canadians deserve better.

When will the minister learn that he will not get jets that work in Canada's north by dishing out untendered contracts to a company headquartered in America's south?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have another fact-free question from the NDP on the F-35.

The member would know, with a little bit of time and effort and a little research, that the F-35 is the only fifth-generation aircraft available to Canadians. This aircraft will provide sovereignty and security over our Arctic and over our massive coastlines. It is interoperable with our NATO allies.

This is the aircraft that the Royal Canadian Air Force needs. This is the aircraft that this government will give those brave men and women who do that important work.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this minister has no answers.

His "just trust me" approach has gone from incredibly hopeful to ridiculously irresponsible as the government moves ever closer to blowing the budget on these jets that do not even work.

The independent Parliamentary Budget Officer has already pegged the cost overruns at a staggering \$53 million per plane. How many more millions is this minister planning to spend to get working radios on these things, and how much more is he going to spend so that they can land?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is the difference. This is a government that is prepared to spend millions on important equipment that saves lives and provides mission success for members of the Canadian armed forces. That is the difference.

On every occasion over the past five and a half years that we have presented important projects, procurement and investments in men and women and equipment and bases, this member's party has consistently voted against our efforts to support the men and women in uniform.

• (1435)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence needs to clear the air once and for all on his government's plan for the future of military bases.

Oral Questions

Therefore, on behalf of military families and their communities, I have a very straightforward question: will the Minister of National Defence stand in his place today and either confirm or deny that he is considering closing any Canadian military bases?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said time and time again, I am extremely proud of the investments our government has made in the men and women in uniform, and in where they train, where they live and where they work, as well as the equipment they need to do that important work, and we are going to continue to do that.

Everyone knows the NDP's views on the Canadian Forces. The NDP has consistently demonstrated that it is opposed to our government's investments in the military. Time and time again NDP members have stood in here in this House and stood in the way of these important investments, which, by the way, are also important for the Canadian economy. Investments in the F-35 will create thousands of jobs.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we could not have been any clearer in trying to get the minister to be clear his position.

In the absence of a denial, we have to assume that there are plans to close bases, which will cause economic damage across all kinds of communities and hurt our troops.

Therefore, the questions are going to keep coming. There will be questions on how many bases will close and how many jobs will be lost. How will these decisions be made? Will communities get an opportunity to have a say in those decisions?

At a time of economic fear, these troops and communities are now facing the added fear of these base closures, and it is not acceptable.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton Centre is not new to this place. He should know that raising his voice and expressing bogus outrage do not make these allegations true.

I know we are getting close to Halloween now. I know that the member is a bit of a goblin on this and wants to scare people. It is not happening; we are going to continue to invest.

The Speaker: I think we will have to deal with that after question period, but I do not find the word "goblin" parliamentary.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence refuses to reassure soldiers and their families who are worried about the closure of some Canadian armed forces bases. The military bases in Bagotville, Valcartier and Montreal support thousands of families and contribute to the economic success of these regions.

Will the minister assure us, here in this House, that these facilities, which are vital to our armed forces, employees and their families, will remain open?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course they will. We have made historic investments in Bagotville. When we did, this party voted against those investments

to build the infrastructure of Bagotville, so they have no credibility whatsoever when they stand up and try to scare members of the Canadian Forces and Canadians about closures.

We are going to continue to invest in the important work of members of the Canadian Forces.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Prime Minister to show some respect for our prairie farmers. The Prime Minister said no to the plebiscite. The Prime Minister closed debate on the Wheat Board.

My question to the Prime Minister is this: will the Prime Minister agree to conduct committee meetings related to this bill to kill the Wheat Board in the Prairies so that the prairie producers can share their concerns directly?

The government talks about experts; let us bring the committee to the Prairies, where the experts and grain farmers can contribute to this debate. If he has nothing to fear, why does he not do it?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is precisely what members on this side of the House do every weekend. We go home and talk to our friends, our families and our neighbours down the road, who are actually farming. That is what we do for fun on the weekends, and, without exception, they continue to tell us to get this job done, to make sure they have marketing freedom, to make sure there is certainty and clarity in the marketplace starting the first of this year. That is what they want for a New Year's resolution.

* * *

● (1440)

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Trade is becoming renowned for being surprised and disappointed when awakened to actions by our most important trading partner, the United States. He was surprised and disappointed with buy American, shutting Canadian business out and costing Canadian jobs. Now, after the bill being in Congress for 23 days, he is surprised and disappointed that the United States imposed a \$5.50 fee on all Canadian entries by sea and air.

Would the minister surprise us and not disappoint us by standing up for Canadians?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is not surprising is that the member continues not to stand up for Canadians.

While that member has been grandstanding in the House, we have been raising this issue with the Americans for some time. As the member should know, the U.S. is sovereign and has a right to impose this tax. However, we have made it very clear that now is not the time to erect new trade barriers. We continue to impress upon the American government that new trade barriers hurt both Canadian and American businesses as well as travellers and workers.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a new study from SFU confirms the evidence coming out of Texas that the Conservative government's misguided punishment policies just will not work. They discriminate heavily against first nations, who already account for a disproportionate percentage of prisoners. The evidence predicts increased prison overcrowding, reduced access to treatment and a higher likelihood of prisoners reoffending.

Expensive, ineffective and discriminatory: that is Bill C-10.

Is the government against evidence, or is it against real solutions for Canada's aboriginal peoples?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our very first priority when it comes to public safety is that of keeping our communities and streets safe for all Canadians.

We have made unprecedented investments in ensuring that those who are in those facilities receive treatment so that they can come out rehabilitated, because that also makes our communities safer. However, we make no apologies for ensuring that we proceed with a program that ensures we keep criminals where they belong until such time as they are safe to return to the community.

We want to keep our communities safe. I am not surprised that the opposition does not share that view.

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CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): The government, Mr. Speaker, is ashamed of Canada's history, ashamed of the cherished public broadcaster that has served this country for 75 years. Conservatives have criticized the CBC, bullied it in committee and even cheated Canadians out of celebrating this important milestone. For three-quarters of a century, the CBC has shaped our memories and marked our history, yet Conservatives treat it like an embarrassment.

Can the minister tell us why he denied Canadians their chance to celebrate their CBC?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague is talking about my speech on Canada Day last year, which I wrote myself. Instead of celebrating the CBC, which the member is free to do as he wants, what I chose to say instead in my speech was, "On this Canada Day...to those men and women of the Canadian Forces serving in Afghanistan, in Libya, and other difficult places in the world: to put it simply, you are the bravest and the best, we are proud of your service, and we are honoured by the work that you do for Canada".

Oral Questions

That is what I said instead of praising the CBC. I had two minutes, and I stand by my decision.

[Translation]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we would be hard pressed to find a Canadian who did not grow up with at least one favourite CBC show. I am sure that even the minister had his own favourite show. The CBC is one of the best public broadcasters in the world and it has been offering quality programming for 75 years. Canadians are very proud of the CBC. It is an important Canadian institution.

Why do the Conservatives refuse to celebrate it?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as part of its 75th anniversary programming this year, the CBC aired an excellent show on Sir John A. Macdonald. It was very good.

The CBC can celebrate its 75th anniversary. What we would like, as a government elected based on a platform, is a balanced budget and responsible spending and savings. We are therefore asking the CBC to spend taxpayers' money responsibly and respectfully. That is our program and our promise to Canadians. We will keep our promises.

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●(1445)

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government clearly does not have the interests of families and artists at heart.

Our artists make a huge contribution to the development of Canadian society. However, instead of helping them, this government prefers to make their lives difficult. In the bill, artists' royalties are not protected. Distance education is hampered and young people may be subject to large fines.

When will this government protect our artists and reintroduce the levies that were removed, instead of making massive cuts to the arts and culture sector?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member does not understand or does not agree with what I said about our arts and culture policies, perhaps he will agree with Gilbert Rozon, president of Just for Laughs, who said, "Prime Minister Stephen Harper recognizes the role of this sector in the national economy."

[English]

Heather Ostertag, the CEO of FACTOR, a music publisher, said that the government has "...clearly demonstrated its commitment to Canadian culture" and that what is provided to Canada in support of artists is the envy of the world. It does not get better than that.

Oral Questions

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to copyright law, we know whose side the government is on. It is not with researchers and educators who rely on non-commercial copying, not with artists who have serious concerns and not with Canadian families who are worried about digital locks being added to the everyday devices they use in their own homes and becoming criminals in their own homes. The government refuses to listen.

Will the government stop protecting major corporations and start putting Canadian consumers first? Will it work with us to amend its bill so that consumers are protected from the arbitrary use of digital locks?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's comments could not be further from the truth. This legislation, our copyright modernization act, is supported by the Council of Ministers of Education.

The member referenced education in the preamble of his question. He said it is not in the best interests of educators. Then why is it that the NDP education minister for Nova Scotia is endorsing our bill? Why is it that the education ministers across the country—Liberal, Conservative and NDP—are all supporting our bill? It is because it strikes the right balance.

The member said in French as well, although he did not say it in English, that the NDP is opposed to our bill because we are not in favour of putting in place a new iPod tax against consumers. He had better believe we are against that tax. We are going to fight it—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

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FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 17 years ago the former Liberal government introduced a long gun registry. This policy, which was supposed to cost no more than a few million dollars, ballooned to well over \$2 billion of taxpayers' money. On top of the ridiculously inflated cost, this measure does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and needlessly targets law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters. Conservatives have long promised to end this wasteful and ineffective measure.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please tell this House what he is doing to address this important issue?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud that this morning our government tabled a bill to end the long gun registry.

Our Conservative government does not support treating law-abiding outdoors enthusiasts and farmers as if they were criminals. We have consistently opposed the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, which does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Canadians gave our government a strong mandate in places like Sault Ste. Marie and Nipissing to once and for all end this long gun registry. We are doing what we said we would do.

CANADA- U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian families will now have to face a new tax every time they fly into the United States. It is an added expense at a time when budgets are already overstretched. Conservatives claim to be serious about dealing with the border thickening, but what do we get? We get higher taxes, more fees and greater wait times.

Why is it that every time the minister returns from Washington, Canadians have to pay the price for Conservative ineptitude at the bargaining table?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made it very clear to our American partners that any new taxes and other trade barriers threaten the economic recovery in both our countries.

Last week, the NDP trade critic actually expressed sympathy for the American position on buy American provisions. Instead of expressing sympathy, the NDP should be standing up for ordinary hard-working Canadians.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government cannot get anything right when it comes to standing up for the interests of everyday Canadians. First there was the buy American fiasco, then tariffs on Vancouver ports and now a new tax on entering the U.S. People taking a family on a trip will be dinged \$5. Small businesses that need to cross the border will be dinged. Snowbirds going south for the winter will be dinged.

My question is this: when will the government stop letting the U.S. steamroll over Canadian interests?

• (1450)

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is pretty rich, coming from the NDP trade critic.

Let me quote what he said last week. He said that he does not begrudge the United States' taking a protectionist decision. Imagine that, standing up for the Americans rather than standing up for ordinary hard-working Canadians.

We continue to focus on what is important to Canadians. We are focusing on economic growth, and we are focusing on creating jobs for Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government is proving once again that it is incapable of defending the interests of Canadian families. Starting next month, Canadians will have to pay a \$5.50 tax every time they cross the border by air or water. Canadians are again the losers with this decision.

Oral Questions

Did Canada have a say in the negotiations? Is the U.S. leading the parade, while Canadian families just have to pay?

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while that member has been in this House grandstanding for weeks, I have been in Washington and my colleagues here on this side of the House have been in Washington, connecting with our counterparts and impressing upon the Americans that new trade barriers are bad for business in Canada and bad for business in the United States.

It is only this Conservative government that is standing up for ordinary hard-working Canadians.

The Speaker: Order, please. Members must allow the minister to answer the questions once they have been asked.

The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our most important trading partner is going to charge us a \$5.50 fee to enter the United States by air or by water. That means that the people in my riding who regularly travel by boat to the U.S. will be penalized by this measure. My constituents just do not understand this move. They already lost one point of access to the United States when the Franklin border crossing was closed.

We do not expect preferential treatment from the American government, but can we at least expect our own government to stand up for our interests?

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one is going to rely on the NDP to stand up for the interests of hard-working Canadians who want to travel across the border.

It is only this government that has taken steps to remove the thickening at our border, to move security to the perimeter and strengthen security around our borders. This is the government that stands up for expanding trade opportunities all around the world. I will not take any lessons from the NDP on standing up for Canadians.

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LOBBYING

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, new emails from Vern Freeloader, prepared while on a G8 lobbying—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

I am just going to wait until there is a little bit of order before I recognize the member. I know the member has been enthusiastic. All of question period he has been enthusiastic.

The hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, new emails from Vern Freeloader, prepared while on a G8 lobbying contract to the mayor of Huntsville, spell out how his buddy, the environment minister, personally told him that the local MP, the industry minister, and a gaggle of other ministers were approving G8 projects. That is a problem for the freelancer, since neither he nor his company is registered to lobby public officials. It is also a problem for the government, but if the government insists no such communication occurred, will the government express its concern that Vern Freeloader may have invoiced the people of Huntsville for lobbying work that was never actually performed? It is one or the other.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has evidence that somebody may have lobbied without registering, I suggest that he contact the lobbyists registrar.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the assertion of the Minister of Agriculture, the insulting video is still on the website of the parliamentary secretary, in the video gallery.

When will these racial slurs be removed from the website, and when will the parliamentary secretary stand in the House and apologize to all Canadians and to the Minister of Health and all the people she represents?

• (1455)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was assured that the video had been removed. I will certainly check after question period. If it has not, it will be coming down.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Kinder Morgan is set to double the capacity of the Trans Mountain pipeline that runs from Edmonton to Burnaby. Residents and local municipalities are concerned about what this project could mean for the local environment, especially in the wake of the 2007 oil spill that forced the evacuation of hundreds of Burnaby residents and leaked oil into Burrard Inlet.

Will the minister agree to full public consultation on this project, including direct talks with affected municipalities and first nations?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every major project is reviewed by a regulatory agency. Our government respects the regulatory process, and that will proceed in every case.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for months now, people in my riding have been seeing leaks in the pipeline that crosses Brome—Missisquoi. This pipeline is close to a waterway, the Missisquoi River. In an inspection report dated May 20, engineers from the National Energy Board raised doubts about the company's ability to detect and stop the leaks, even though the company is responsible for them.

What does the government intend to do to reassure the residents about the safety of the pipeline?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board is a strong, independent regulatory body. Its mandate is to ensure the safety and security of pipelines, from the moment they are proposed until they are abandoned.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week our government introduced the historic marketing freedom for grain farmers act in the House. Unfortunately, this past week has shown a desperate opposition willing to pull any underhanded trick in the book to try to undo last night's vote on the bill.

Yesterday the member for Winnipeg Centre said, "There are ways to reverse a vote".

Can the Minister of Agriculture please explain why our government will not be bullied by the NDP on this very important legislation?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Palliser is absolutely right. The opposition will stop at nothing to try to intimidate farmers, whether they are sitting in the House or out in western Canada, not to move ahead with marketing freedom, but of course they do not represent them.

Having said that, the member for Winnipeg Centre also went out afterward and recanted, saying his actions are purely political and not grounded in reality. What he did then was actually say about the Conservative MPs, who he is trying to sideline, "They wouldn't be in a conflict of interest", so I am not sure whether he is on or he is off, but we do know that he is wrong. We agree that farmers will never be intimidated by those kinds of ridiculous tactics.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certain provinces, like Quebec, have expressed concern about plans to abolish the gun registry and are considering creating their own registries. Now the government wants to throw out the baby with the bathwater and destroy all of the valuable information that has been duly collected and is ever so useful to police forces.

Will the government put an end to its completely irrational behaviour and hand over the valuable information from the Canadian registry, if the provinces ask for it?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. Our government refuses to treat law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters like criminals. The provincial governments are free to act in their areas of jurisdiction, but we will not help them create another registry by the back door. The information in our possession will be destroyed and the registry will be abolished once and for all.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although all Canadians are feeling the adverse effects of economic uncertainty, students are also being hit hard by the high rate of unemployment and an average student debt in excess of \$25,000 and rising. Using the excuse that the Conservatives are doing better than the previous government is insulting. The reality is they are not doing enough.

When will this government truly help the next generation, which is being crushed by debt?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the balance sheet as to who has done what.

Our government brought in the Canada summer student grants program to help students access post-secondary education at a lower cost and without debt. We overhauled the Canada student loan program to streamline it, to make more students qualify and to help them repay it earlier.

We also increased the numbers of jobs available to students, so they could help finance their own way through university.

That is our record. What is the record of the NDP members? They voted against every single one of those ways to help students. Shame on them.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has made unprecedented investments in Canada's armed forces. Our commitment to rebuilding their capacity, after a decade of darkness, is ensuring that our brave men and women have the tools they need.

The work to supply this equipment is also providing an incredible boost to the Canadian economy. Could the Minister of National Defence please inform the House of recent developments on the economic benefits of the F-35 program?

Points of Order

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend from Winnipeg is right. Our government has committed to provide the air force with the F-35 and has enabled Canadian companies to compete for large-scale contracts to help build the aircraft for the global supply chain.

Today, Bristol Aerospace in Winnipeg celebrated the opening of its new advanced composites manufacturing centre, which will house the production lines for parts as well as the assembly of the horizontal tail structure for the F-35.

This work at Bristol, we are told, will create 100 new jobs. Our government is proud to stand with Canadians and for the Canadian economy and the Canadian Forces.

We wish the opposition would stop fearmongering and support—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the Minister of State for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, the positions being eliminated by the Conservatives within the agency do not constitute “reckless cuts”.

For months now, we keep hearing the Conservatives say that their priority is the economy, yet now they are making cuts to an agency that promotes the economy.

Can the minister tell us what he would call responsible cuts within the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised, because I thought the NDP member from Atlantic Canada was going to rise to congratulate the government on its shipbuilding strategy, which will create thousands of jobs across the country.

This surprises me, but I want to reassure the member that the jobs that will be eliminated at the agency will not affect services to businesses and communities in Atlantic Canada, and that is what matters. Only the employees' union is complaining, while business-people and job creators continue to applaud us.

* * *

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to opposing the Bloc Québécois's bill on the application of Bill 101 to companies under federal jurisdiction, the government, with the help of the NDP, appointed a unilingual anglophone judge to the Supreme Court. Now, the government is at it again with the appointment of an auditor general who does not speak French.

When will the Prime Minister respect our language, French, and stop treating Quebecers like second-class citizens?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always, our government makes appointments based on merit, and the top priority is to provide Canadians with the best service.

[*English*]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the Ladies Gallery of Mr. Rick Hansen, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Man in Motion World Tour.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

● (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I noted your admonition in question period, with respect to a question and my response. Certainly, in the presence of such an esteemed Canadian as Mr. Hansen, and out of respect for you and this House, I want to withdraw that word.

However, I did look the word up. “Goblin” refers to a small, mischievous supernatural creature that makes trouble for human beings.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I thank the minister for his withdrawal. However, I would caution him that the comments that followed were certainly unhelpful.

I understand the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans is also rising on a point of order.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that what we say here is covered by immunity, especially on this day when you had warned members on a few occasions about being careful regarding their language. I would invite you to look at the blues for the question that was asked by the member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, where he, twice, attacked a very serious servant of this community.

As a former municipal councillor myself, I know how hard municipal servants work. This man across the way, probably in the noise of all the others from that third party, attacked the mayor of an Ontario municipality by calling him names. It was not a *lapsus linguae*. He did it twice.

I invite you, Mr. Speaker, respectfully, to read the blues.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no such attack occurred on any mayor.

In fact, the mayor of Huntsville was very forthcoming in providing information to this Parliament, to Canadians, through the Access to Information Act.

Business of Supply

We have not been able to get much information out of the government quarters about anything related to the G8 summit and the spending therein. However, it has been noted that as a result of the exchange of information, the emails that were produced in accordance with the request that was put in through the Access to Information Act, we learned—

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Just say sorry, Gerry.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: I will answer the charges which were brought forward, if the member would not mind.

We learned that the consultant in question did indicate that he had direct and personal communication with a minister of the crown, yet he had no such availability under the—

The Speaker: Order. I am going to stop the member there because it sounds like it is just a continuation of a debate of facts. I will look at the blues and see what types of words were used and to whom they were directed, and come back to the House, if necessary.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased the member for Churchill has called this debate because it allows me to explain to the House why our government is moving forward on marketing freedom and to dispel some of the myths that surround this issue.

Our government has been open and transparent about our commitment to marketing freedom from day one, through four elections and countless interactions with Canadians along the way. We welcome this debate as part of our commitment to clearly communicate our reasons for moving forward on marketing freedom.

To briefly address this motion, supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board are totally different issues. Unlike the opposition, we have done more than talk about our support on supply management. We have consistently defended Canada's right to this marketing system at different international meetings, including the World Trade Organization and most recently the Cairns group meeting held in September in Saskatoon.

We have just received a letter addressed to the Prime Minister and to the leaders of all the parties in the House from the president of Dairy Farmers of Canada, which I will read into the record. It is about supply management.

We are urgently writing to you today in response to the discourse that has been taking place and is having an unintended negative impact on supply management. We do not want our system to be drawn into discussions on other collective marketing systems such as the Canadian Wheat Board.

There are key distinctions between the various marketing models and justice is not served to any model, or the farmers that operate within those systems, when they are not considered in their full and distinct context. We are fortunate to operate within a dairy supply management model that is strongly supported by all partners in the system—farmers, processors and government.

Dairy farmers appreciate the strong support of all political parties for the supply management system. We also appreciate the repeated support and demonstrated willingness of the federal government to defend supply management both domestically and internationally. We do not question this government's support for our system. We have accepted the clear policy intentions that the government has stated in several throne speeches.

We are instead focused on working with the government and our sector partners to ensure that we continue to have a strong and profitable dairy sector in Canada. We strongly reject all attacks and misinformation that is advanced by other self-interested organizations that are not interested in having a strong Canadian dairy sector where farmers are able to get their returns directly from the marketplace.

We hope we can continue to count on all political parties and parliamentarians as we work on continued success in the Canadian dairy sector.

Yours sincerely,

Wally Smith

President.

I would also like to address the other part of the member's motion regarding the Canadian Wheat Board's plebiscite.

The Canadian Wheat Board announced the results of its expensive survey. It is interesting that according to the Canadian Wheat Board's spring survey some 58% of wheat producers and 62% of barley producers favoured a dual and/or open market system. The Canadian Wheat Board's so-called plebiscite did not even give producers the option of selecting marketing choice, even though the Canadian Wheat Board knows that marketing choice is preferred by producers.

Whatever the numbers say, this debate is about rights not rhetoric. The rights of one group should never be allowed to silence the rights of another. Farmers should not run the risk of jail time for driving our economy. We are listening to all farmers, including the thousands who did not vote in a plebiscite that the Canadian Wheat Board's own director says is non-binding.

Should farmers have the right to voluntarily market their grain through the Canadian Wheat Board? Absolutely. That is why our government intends to let every farmer have the right to choose how to market their grain, whether it is individually or through a voluntary pooling equity.

Farmers who wish to continue marketing their grain through a viable Canadian Wheat Board would be greatly advantaged if the board would stop wasting time and instead get to work on ensuring a smooth transition to an open market. After all, western Canadian farmers help feed the world. They deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions.

Our government was elected on a mandate to provide western Canadian farmers marketing freedom and we intend to deliver on that promise.

The transition to marketing choice for farmers will provide opportunities for farmers and is a key component of the work that this government is doing to ensure Canada's competitiveness in an increasingly globalized marketplace.

The Government of Canada firmly believes that freer trade is key to securing the success of the Canadian economy. Trade enhances domestic competitiveness, improves productivity, raises real wages, and provides consumers with more choice at lower prices.

Participation in global commerce has helped Canadians build a strong, stable economy that boasts leading edge companies, a highly skilled and educated workforce, world-class financial infrastructure, and top quality research and development facilities.

Our government knows that Canada's long-term prosperity is driven by the ingenuity and creativity of hard-working families, small business owners, entrepreneurs and farmers across the country.

It is about time that western Canadian grain farmers stopped being treated like second class citizens and had the same rights as farmers in other parts of Canada and around the world.

• (1510)

Marketing freedom is ultimately about rights, but it is about the economy, too. Canadian farmers have been the backbone of Canada's economy for generations. They provide families across this country and around the world with the safest, high quality food. Despite the many challenges they face, they continue to dedicate themselves to their farm businesses and in doing so help keep our economy stable.

Canada's grain industry is a powerhouse that brings \$16 billion to the farm gate and makes up almost half of our agricultural exports. What was once Canada's signature crop, wheat, has fallen behind. Grain innovation has become stagnant. Competition for acres has weakened. New crops, such as canola, have surpassed wheat in value.

With the reduced market share, the Canadian Wheat Board has less influence on the world stage. As a result, it has become a price taker rather than a price setter.

Let us look at some of the successes in crops that are marketed by farmers independent of the Canadian Wheat Board. We need to remember that non-board crops make up a full two-thirds of Canadian farmers' farm cash receipts from grain.

From 1989 to 2010, the area ceded to canola has increased by a staggering 233%. Meanwhile, Canada's pulse industry has gone from negligible in the 1980s to becoming a significant world exporter in 2010, with \$2 billion in export sales last year. Combined, these industries are bringing real dollars to the farm gate and creating jobs right across Canada.

Let us look at what happened to oats when it came out from under the monopoly. In Manitoba alone, the acreage of oats has increased by 175,000 acres since its removal from the Wheat Board's control. This has allowed for the opening and expansion of Can-Oat, a processing mill in Portage la Prairie.

These are the types of value-added industries and jobs that exist when farmers have the option to market their products as they so choose.

Our government simply wants to give western wheat and barley farmers their chance to stand alongside canola, pulse and oat farmers

Business of Supply

in marketing their products to world markets the way they see fit. We want to give all farmers every opportunity to succeed.

Marketing freedom is about rights and the economy. It is also about innovation. We have seen how innovation has driven value-added processing in other crops, such as oats and canola. Well, marketing freedom will unlock this potential for our barley and wheat growers as well.

Farmer entrepreneurs will be able to target new untapped niche markets for their wheat and barley through speciality pools, value-added investments and other innovative strategies. They will work with the entire value chain to attract new investment to the Prairies, create new jobs, revitalize rural communities, and grow wealth in western Canada.

That is the power of innovation, and that is why our government is supporting marketing freedom. Giving farmers the option to determine where and how they sell their products comes down to sound forward-thinking, and a realistic and optimistic view of agriculture in today's marketplace.

Over the past year we have demonstrated our support for farmers through significant investments in research, innovation and marketing. For example, we are keeping our wheat producers on the leading edge of innovation through investments in the wheat genome and fusarium resistant varieties.

These kinds of investments represent our unwavering commitment to moving the grain industry forward so that farmers can continue to succeed in markets here at home and around the world.

Many of our leading edge innovations in wheat and barley have come from the great work of Canadian International Grains Institute, the Canadian Malting Barley Technical Centre, and the Western Grains Research Foundation. This great work will continue under marketing freedom.

As we work through the transition, we are making every effort to ensure the certainty and clarity producers need to plan their businesses for the coming year. Producers need to know that the financial tools they rely on will be there when they need them.

As I said at the outset, we need to cut through the rhetoric and focus on the road ahead. The future looks bright. Demand and opportunity are growing in our agricultural industry as never before. Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia governments, representing up to 85% of the wheat and barley grown in western Canada, support the move to marketing freedom.

Our government will continue to work with the entire value chain, including the Canadian Wheat Board to ensure that every farmer has marketing freedom. The Canadian Wheat Board is welcome to be part of the solution, but we will not waver from our commitment to marketing freedom.

Business of Supply

In this open market, all farmers will be able to choose how they market their grain, whether it is individually or through a pooling entity. This is the choice that farmers have asked for, and that is what we intend to deliver.

Right around the world, we are working hard to unfetter our grain farmers from the shackles of protectionism through free trade agreements with key customers in South America, Africa and elsewhere.

We recognize that this is a major change for agriculture in western Canada. Canadian farmers have proven time after time that they can compete and succeed in the global marketplace if they have a level playing field.

• (1515)

That is why our government is working so hard to build new opportunities in global markets. We want to ensure that our farmers and food processors can continue to deliver their high-quality products to consumers around the world. Market access is a priority for this government and we are working closely with industry both to develop new markets for agricultural goods and to expand existing ones.

Just this week we issued a report that outlines Canada's successes in market development and the results are very good. The report reflects our government's commitment to improving the profitability, competitiveness and trade opportunities for the Canadian sector. It highlights accomplishments in 10 different markets for commodities, including beef, pork, canola, wheat, pulses and animal genetics.

For example, in 2010 the government negotiated a new duty-free access for Canadian hormone-free beef to the European Union. As of July 2011, this new access had resulted in shipments of approximately 626 tonnes of Canadian beef worth almost \$5 million.

As well, we increased access for Canadian beef to the Russian market. Consequently, our beef exports to Russia have tripled, 328% by value, and surpassed \$23 million in 2010.

We obtained a stable trading environment with China for canola, and negotiated transitional measures for canola seed exports. This helped to maintain our market for exports of canola seed, oil and meal to China which exceeded \$1.8 billion in both 2009 and 2010.

We also secured a breakthrough agreement with China to allow staged market access for beef and tallow. When fully implemented, this may be worth an estimated \$110 million annually.

In 2010 we were the fifth largest agricultural and agrifood exporter, with exports worth over \$36 billion.

Canadian farmers have asked for tools and options to compete globally and that is what we are providing. Canada's exporters, investors and service providers are calling for opportunities. Business owners and entrepreneurs want access to global markets and this government is listening.

These successes on the international scene benefit Canadian farmers and exporters and contribute to our economic growth. Our government is very proud of that and so is industry.

Following the release of the market access report, Travis Toews, the president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, thanked the ministers for agriculture and trade, and I quote:

...for working hard to create that access for us. I appreciate [their] continued emphasis...on improving and maintaining market access for Canadian farmers and ranchers.

Likewise, the Canadian Meat Council, said it is:

...very grateful for the consistent hard work and dedicated persistence of the Government of Canada in securing and expanding foreign market access for Canadian beef and pork products between January, 2010 and March 2011.

In addition to the achievements I just mentioned, last summer we announced a breakthrough in restoring long-awaited access to the lucrative South Korean beef market, as well as access to the Vietnamese market for live breeding cattle, sheep and goats.

Opening and expanding markets around the world creates opportunities for our farmers to drive the Canadian economy and it helps all Canadians by creating jobs and prosperity. Our government works hard to ensure that our farmers and food processors can continue to deliver their high-quality products to consumers around the world. By reopening, maintaining and expanding international markets, we are making sure that Canadian farmers can contribute to this country's economic growth and make their living from the marketplace, not the mailbox.

We want Canadian farmers and processors to get the credit they deserve for the high-quality products they bring to market. Our agricultural exporters are innovative and competitive and we are working with them to expand their markets.

Canada is working on all fronts to boost our agricultural business around the world. We have already announced branding strategies in Japan, Mexico and Korea. These dollars are supporting market research, advertising, store features, culinary tourism and other promotional activities that bolster the work being done by Canadian industry to sell its products. Opening and expanding markets around the world creates opportunities for our producers to drive the Canadian economy.

There are challenges facing the industry, but the long-term signs are positive. During this time of global economic uncertainty, we have to maximize trade opportunities on the world stage. The marketing freedom for grain farmers bill is another way in which this government is providing opportunities for our farmers to shine both at home and internationally. I hope my colleagues in the House of Commons will support this important piece of legislation and not support the motion from the NDP. In supporting the legislation, they would be supporting western Canadian farmers who produce some of the best wheat and barley the world has to offer.

Business of Supply

• (1520)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I found that speech to be quite interesting. I am a very strong advocate for supply management. I see the value of the dairy industry just as I see the value of wheat farmers and the Canadian Wheat Board.

Many of the arguments the government is using today to get rid of the Wheat Board can and in all likelihood at some point in time will be used by a Conservative regime, whether it is this one or another in the future, to get rid of supply management. I believe that there is great value for both. When the member says we should stop treating farmers as second-class citizens, my challenge to the member and the government is to do just that: stop treating our prairie grain farmers as second-class citizens.

If the government believes that it is on the right side of this debate, why does it not listen to over 20,000 prairie grain farmers who want the government to respect the role the Canadian Wheat Board plays today? Does he not believe that those farmers have a right to have their opinions respected? Does he not see the benefit of allowing them to have a plebiscite?

• (1525)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, this government certainly does respect farmers. There are many farmers on this side of the House who speak to their colleagues every weekend when they go home. They spoke to us on May 2 when 51 out of 56 rural ridings returned this government to majority status in the House of Commons. The farmers in those ridings understand that we ran our campaign on giving western farmers the same marketing freedom that farmers in the rest of Canada and around the world have. That is freedom and that is farmers talking with their votes.

We respect the Canadian Wheat Board and the job that it does. That is why we are proposing that the Canadian Wheat Board be part of the solution. We are proposing that farmers have the freedom to use the Canadian Wheat Board if it is as good as people think it is. I have no doubt that many will choose to use it and that is their option. If the Canadian Wheat Board provides a service that the farmers can rely on and trust and can get them the best price now and into the future, the Canadian Wheat Board will be part of the solution. That is up to the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noticed at the beginning of my colleague's very informed speech he mentioned about getting beyond the rhetoric and that he wanted to dispel the myths.

I have sat through the debate today and many times I have heard misinformation being given by the opposition members of Parliament. I have heard phrases today that we are abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board, that we are ending the Canadian Wheat Board, that the Canadian Wheat Board will be gone, that we are dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board, that we are getting rid of the Canadian Wheat Board, that we are destroying the Canadian Wheat Board.

The truth is that we are not ending, abolishing, dismantling, getting rid of, or destroying the Canadian Wheat Board. Canadians expect us to provide factual information, not to give misleading information to other members of the House, or more importantly, to Canadians who may be observing and reading the proceedings of the House.

I want my colleague to confirm that in fact we are simply giving western grain farmers marketing freedom. Also, would he like to speculate as to why in the world opposition members would be opposed to giving farmers the freedom to market the very products they are producing?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, the member for Kitchener—Conestoga is quite right. The bill is not about abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board, full stop. Members across the way are using their rhetorical slurs to suggest that is what we are doing. We are absolutely not doing that. All we are doing is giving western Canadian farmers the same freedom that farmers in eastern Canada have. Why should they not have the same freedom? That is totally undemocratic. It is counter to everything that all Canadians who believe in freedom, free enterprise and opportunity should be standing up for.

I really cannot understand why people such as the member for Malpeque, who is fond of chirping in the House, would be opposed to giving Canadians freedom. Canadians in his riding have that freedom. Why should Canadians in my part of the country not have the same freedom? We are not abolishing the Wheat Board. There is a five year transition. Opposition members are welcome to be part of the process. They should stop this nonsense and get on with it.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not an issue specifically on what the member was saying regarding the Canadian Wheat Board. This is an issue of giving farmers their voice. In the current act under section 47.1, they have the right to determine their own destiny with a proper vote called by the minister on a question tabled by the minister. The government is disallowing that right.

In terms of the Ontario Wheat Board, farmers had the right to vote. In terms of supply management, farmers had the right to vote. In this case, the government is denying farmers the right to have their say which was granted to them by law in 1997.

What are the minister and members on that side afraid of? Are you afraid? The government has not won one election yet relative to the Wheat Board. Eight out of ten of the farmer-elected directors are pro-board and the government is going to fire them. Why do you not give farmers a voice?

The Speaker: Order. I would just remind the hon. member to address his comments through the chair and not directly at other members.

The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, this really is about freedom. He talked about farmers voting. Farmers did vote. Fifty-one out of fifty-six rural ridings in Canada returned government members who ran on giving farmers freedom.

Business of Supply

The legislation he is talking about refers to a commodity being added or subtracted. That is the kind of vote it talks about. It is not talking about basic freedom for farmers to market their produce. They will vote with how they market their produce. That will determine the future of the Canadian Wheat Board. If the Canadian Wheat Board serves their purposes, it will survive. If it does not, it will not. That is free enterprise. That is freedom. That is what Canada should stand for. That is what the member should stand for, for farmers in Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, just like farmers in Prince Edward Island. If he does not, I have no idea where he is coming from.

• (1530)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is in regard to an issue that is very near and dear to my heart. It is because I hear on an ongoing basis the calls from my constituents for farmers to have the opportunity to make the decision and to have control over their own destiny.

I just met with some constituents in the lobby who were here with some friends from Ontario. We had a discussion about the Wheat Board. My constituents were asking when the legislation is finally going to be in place, when they will have an opportunity to market their own wheat and barley. Their friend from Ontario turned to them and said, "What are you talking about? We've always had that freedom". The person from Alberta said, "Well no, you do in Ontario, but we in western Canada do not."

The person from Ontario was outraged and could not imagine that. The person said, "Sometimes we use the wheat board in Ontario and sometimes we choose not to. It depends on what is in our best interests as farmers. We have full determination over what we are going to do. The choice is ours on an annual basis. On a daily basis we can choose if we sell a bit on the board and if we sell a bit to the miller down the road". The Albertan said, "Isn't it an interesting country where we don't have that same freedom across this country."

Let us talk a bit about that freedom. It is the freedom especially that young farmers, people producing in my community, are demanding. I wonder if the hon. member can talk about the freedom Ontario farmers have that Albertans do not.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Madam Speaker, I will just reiterate some of the things we talked about earlier. This is a simple matter of freedom. It is a simple matter of choice. It is a simple matter of treating all Canadians the same.

I am not surprised at the story from my young friend from northern Alberta about Ontario farmers being amazed that western farmers do not have the same rights that they have had forever.

I am amazed too, that we would have such opposition in this place to what is simply a matter of freedom and equality for Canadian farmers across the country. That is what our government stands for. That is what Canadians stand for: freedom and equality. I really cannot understand where those folks are coming from.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

I stand in support of the motion tabled by the member for Churchill. It is a motion requesting the government to observe

democracy and the rule of law, and I intend to address my comments in that direction.

The government is very fond of the use of euphemisms. We heard many euphemisms when it dealt with its Criminal Code bills, but the euphemism in this case, the use of the word "freedom", which appears at least a dozen times in each of the speeches by government members, is an abuse of the term given the way it is moving forward in its legislation and the very nature of that legislation.

Before the government evolved from the Reform Party to the Canadian Alliance Party to the Conservative Party without the word "Progressive", it was very fond of talking about and actually ran on a platform of transparency and grassroots democracy. Many of my constituents were drawn to and interested in the party when the members said that enough of those with money in central Canada making the decisions for the party. They said that it was time to have transparency and decision-making and to have a place at the table for Canadians who are directly affected.

Therefore, when the Conservatives stand and say that they are tabling this measure to essentially get rid of the Wheat Board by delisting wheat from the work of the Wheat Board and eventually phasing it out or, to use their favourite term, streamlining the Wheat Board, it is not freedom at all.

Why do I say that? Previously on this bill, I shared with the House information that was provided to me by the major national agricultural organizations in this country. The National Farmers Union very clearly said:

It is simply bad public policy to eliminate something as beneficial as the CWB. Why would [the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food] spend his time and our tax dollars to do something this harmful to our economy and farmers?

The Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan advised that farmers vote for the Wheat Board. The president of that association said:

Producers have now sent a very clear message to government. So if government chooses to ignore the message and we do see the loss of the single desk, we're concerned about the transitional issues that will result.

He further stated that they are opposed to this move.

Wild Rose Agricultural Producers, Alberta's largest producer funded, general farm organization, very clearly opposes the government's move. It states:

WRAP has consistently maintained that farmers should be afforded meaningful consultation and involvement in any decisions that directly affect their livelihoods. The results of the CWB vote clearly demonstrate that western Canadian grain producers want to retain single desk marketing for their wheat and barley.

Prairie farmers deserve the same consideration as grain producers in Ontario and Quebec – the latitude to determine the fate of their marketing system. This plebiscite was coordinated by a reputable third party and the results are valid.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture also has decried the move by the government. The Federation of Agriculture stated:

The CFA believes the farmers' voice in the single-desk issue should be formally represented and respected, as any change to the single-desk would directly impact the business plans and livelihoods of farmers across Western Canada.

While the government berates other nations around the world for not respecting democracy and, by the very definition of democracy, grassroots and giving those impacted by their decisions a voice, how can it call this freedom?

The next important point is the observance of rule of law. There are clear definitions through the United Nations. How does one define a democracy? How does one enter the United Nations. One agrees to and signs on to abide by the rule of law.

• (1535)

Astoundingly, in the House last week, in response to a question by the leader of the official opposition, the Prime Minister stood in the House and said:

...the law of our constitutional system is extremely clear. A previous government cannot bind a future government to its policy.

That is true. Any government has the right to table new legislation and to change the law of the land, but what the present government or any other government does not have the right to do is to thumb its nose at the law that is in place and in effect.

The law that is in place and in effect in this country under the Canadian Wheat Board Act, 1985, as amended, section 47.1, which has been pointed out a number of times in the House, is very clear. It is a very unusual provision in Canadian law to precisely impose a mandatory obligation on an official to consult before he or she makes a specific decision. This provision was added to the act. It was updated. In other words, this is not an outdated provision, which the government has tried to suggest. It has also tried to suggest that it is not keeping up with modern times. That provision specifically requires that a minister, before he or she decides to exclude any kind, type, class or grade of wheat or barley from the Wheat Board, must allow the producers of the grain to have voted in favour of the specific exclusion or extension.

In this House, we have heard over and over that the government's idea of democracy is, once every four years, maybe earlier if it breaks its fixed election act again, is all that counts. The Conservatives are asking us to delve into the mind of the Canadian voters and make up the reasons they voted. I would say that is not democracy. What is democracy and what is the rule of law is that the government must obey the law in effect and it has clearly violated that law.

The Conservatives' next argument is economics. What my question would be is economics for whom? We hear from farmer after farmer with concerns that this move may harm them. I need only remind the members in the House, particularly from Alberta, that that was a promise made by the Government of Alberta when it deregulated the delivery of electricity at the retail level. It said that we were not to worry, that it would deregulate, that there would be all this competition out there and we would get the cheapest electricity in Canada. When it deregulated, the costs quadrupled. Deregulation is not a route to protecting the equity and fairness to Canadians, and certainly not to farmers.

Business of Supply

We have heard that the farmers support the direction in which the government is going. The hon. member for Peace River just shared with us that he consulted with his constituents. Perhaps he failed to talk to Nathan Macklin, a grain farmer from DeBolt, Alberta, who farms next door to the member's farm. He told me that he was extremely concerned about increased costs to his farming operation and the loss of a democratic organization that advocates for farmers. He had three specific concerns about increased costs.

First, the Canadian Wheat Board now enables farmers like him to load the grain directly on to producer cars, bypassing the high fees charge by elevators owned by the big grain companies.

Second, Canadian wheat is a high quality product and the Canadian Wheat Board is able to sell it at a better price to premium markets in Europe and Asia. These higher profits are passed back to the farmers.

Third, the Wheat Board can negotiate better transportation rates, something farmers are powerless to do on their own.

Where is the cost analysis for this farmer assuring him that by taking away the Canadian Wheat Board in this area it would enable him to do better?

The second farmer from central Alberta, Ken Larson, fourth generation Alberta grain farmer, has the same issues. He asks, "Why are we taking democracy out of the Canadian Wheat Board by getting rid of the farmer elected directors? The majority of farmers have always been in favour of the Wheat Board".

He has a blog and he has been remonstrating against this. He is a very straightlaced farmer. I respect his wishes and I respect the farmers who contacted me.

In my final comment, the first person who contacted me after I was elected the first time in 2008 was a retired farmer from the Camrose area, and he said, "Miss Duncan, please save the Wheat Board".

• (1540)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I just did an interview with Barry Wilson of *The Western Producer* and he asked me how long I had been involved with the Wheat Board file. I have been involved since 1973. I remember the Saskatchewan wheat pool at one point in time, the Manitoba pool and the Alberta pool, and how their whole system was paid for with no debt by prairie producers. They were big and powerful at the time and they were an economic powerhouse. Today, they are gone.

The Wheat Board is the core in the middle that protects prairie grain farmers from the big railways, from the likes of Viterra, from Cargill and so on. Viterra today may think it is big and mighty, like the Saskatchewan wheat pool did at one time, but I am saying in the House right now that within five years it had better watch out. Who will pay the price? It will primarily be western producers.

Who does the member think will defend farmers in western Canada? Who has the political and economic clout to do it if the Wheat Board is destroyed, as Bill C-18 would do?

Business of Supply

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, that was the very reason for the creation of the Wheat Board and the creation of such co-operative ventures where those who are directly affected have a voice. It is a unique institution where the farmers elected the board to speak on their behalf and they could hold them accountable.

The government says that it believes in accountability, transparency and grassroots participation but it is taking away the very mechanism that could stand up for the farmers who would be impacted. Who do I think will speak for them? It will not be the government. It has a reputation for standing up for big banks and big investors, not the small farmer.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank the hon. member for her very interesting speech, which provided a great deal of insight into the position of the vast majority of prairie farmers.

[*English*]

I just do not get it. Why does the government want to do something to a board that is so important for the farmers without asking them or considering what we have already asked them? How can it do that without asking farmers what they want with this institution that is there for them?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the recommendations that she has made in the course of the discussion on this reprehensible move by the government.

I would take one step further. I and many members of the House are trained as lawyers. I am stunned that the government would violate the law in bringing about this change. The law is clear and it is direct. It obligates the government to hold a plebiscite. The government would not honour the plebiscite that the farmers did, which they had to do because the government would not deliver one. It could simply endorse that or hold its own.

We have a clear case where the government is trying to hold up to show other countries around the world that this is how democracy is done. It is absolutely shameful.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona for her lovely speech, which, as the other hon. member mentioned, provided a great deal of insight into the terrible situation prairie farmers will find themselves in if the Canadian Wheat Board is dismantled.

I am rising in the House today, as many of my NDP colleagues have done, to oppose the Conservatives' bill to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. I come from a riding with many farmers and family farms. They are having a great deal of difficulty in the current economic context. I am therefore very much aware of the concerns of farmers across the country.

Bill C-18 wants to rip apart the Wheat Board and eliminate the single desk marketing system for wheat and barley in Canada. This bill clearly shows that the Conservatives are completely out of touch and do not understand the needs of Canadian farmers.

The Wheat Board is the largest and most successful grain marketing organization in the world. In 2009-10, it generated approximately \$5.2 billion in revenue. That is a lot of money. The government needs to take this into account when considering the possibility of dismantling certain extremely important components of the Canadian Wheat Board. The single desk system that the Wheat Board offers is very important to the Prairies. The Wheat Board provides financial stability for farmers, prudent risk management and certainty of grain supply.

The Wheat Board has become an essential structure for western Canadian farmers. It is a need. The Wheat Board is truly helping farmers to survive in the difficult economic context we are experiencing right now. The Canadian Wheat Board is controlled, run and funded by farmers. Canadian taxpayers are not paying for this essential structure. Farmers fund operations out of revenue from grain sales.

Are the Conservatives afraid of the collective approach that farmers have chosen to take? I understand that this is not a concept that is overly familiar to them or that they appreciate, but it is something that is at the very core of western farmers' values. In addition, do the Conservatives not understand that it is more advantageous to work together than to adopt an "every man for himself" approach? That is a good question.

For western farmers, the Wheat Board is an effective way to maximize the price of grain. The board's size and power on the market allow it to negotiate internationally and to ensure fair access to the market for all producers.

Why is the Conservative government refusing to respect the wishes of farmers in western Canada? Why is this government ignoring the strong voice of farmers who are speaking out against the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board?

As we have heard many times in this House, the Wheat Board recently held a plebiscite of its members. The results, released on September 12, showed that 62% of respondents wanted to maintain the single desk for marketing wheat and 51% wanted to maintain the single desk for barley. Those two percentages constitute more than a majority. The participation rate in the plebiscite was 56%, which is equivalent to the rate in the last three federal elections. But the Conservative government is constantly bragging about receiving a strong mandate from Canadians with a participation rate similar to what was obtained by the Canadian Wheat Board. Why does this participation rate work in one case and not in the other? This is another one of the Conservatives' classic double standards, which are part of its divide and conquer strategy.

Western farmers have spoken and they oppose Bill C-18, like all of my colleagues here. They want to keep the board's single desk system.

The Conservatives are saying that their bill will make it easier for farmers to market their grain by allowing them to choose to whom they sell their products and how. That is false. It will only create more problems. They have a structure that allows them to pool their resources and make sure they are getting the best prices, with all the strength of their combined resources.

Business of Supply

•(1550)

Leaving farmers to fend for themselves would only create other problems, and their lives are hard enough already.

I am aware of the financial difficulties facing family farms in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. My constituents come and see me in my office in Pont-Rouge to talk about this situation, since they are so worried about it. That is why I feel I can relate to the concerns of western farmers. Times are very hard, and farmers are looking more and more for new ways to market their products in order to earn a good living from their hard work.

Young farmers are pooling their resources more and more, in order to survive in the current economic climate. My riding has a number of farming co-operatives and more are being set up every day, because everything is very expensive and because individual farmers cannot survive right now. Prairie farmers have a long history of uniting in order to prosper, which is why the board was created in the first place. This is the legacy that the Conservatives want to consign to oblivion, at the expense of western Canadian farmers.

It is clear that the Conservatives are using Bill C-18 to try to destroy family farms. There is no other foreseeable outcome from this decision they are making with no regard for the clearly expressed opinion of the farmers.

The Conservatives' dogmatism and ideological stubbornness are undeniable. They are going to completely ignore the will of western Canadian farmers and shove their own interests down the farmers' throats. This government has long been looking to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board at all costs, regardless of what anyone here might say. Are the Conservatives bending to pressure from big American corporations, as they often do? It would not be surprising; it is practically a tradition for them. We are concerned about the reasons behind the decision they are making today.

Since the beginning of this debate, the NDP has been saying that any decision on the future of the board has to be made by farmers for farmers. That is part of the act governing the Canadian Wheat Board. The members opposite seem to have forgotten about that detail. We keep reminding them, but to no avail. Let us hope that this time, my voice, added to the others, will have an effect.

The majority of the farmers want to keep this single desk system, and that is what the NDP is asking the Conservatives to do today. The government has to stop being so stubborn and start respecting the will of the farmers. This government has to stop gambling with the prairie economy and withdraw Bill C-18.

•(1555)

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier today I pointed out that it is important for members of the House to be sure that they are presenting factual information. It is quite obvious that this member did not take heed of that admonition, because in her intervention she made a number of comments that are totally inaccurate.

She said that we are dismantling the Wheat Board, that it will be unfortunate for farmers without the Wheat Board, that we are doing away with the Wheat Board, that we are doing away with the

collective approach and that we are consigning the Wheat Board to oblivion. In fact, her colleagues earlier today used similar rhetoric. They said that we are abolishing the Wheat Board, that we are ending the Wheat Board, that the Wheat Board will be gone, that we are destroying the Canadian Wheat Board.

Numerous times today, and indeed prior to today, members on this side of the House have tried to bring the truth to the table. The truth is that we are not ending the Wheat Board; we are simply giving western Canadian farmers the right to market their grain freely. The Wheat Board can continue to exist. We believe, on this side of the House, that Canadian farmers deserve that freedom.

Why would she and her party be opposed to giving farmers the freedom to market their produce freely?

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Speaker, what I have gathered from the debate is that the Conservatives want farmers to be able to live freely in poverty. Eliminating the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk has the same impact as completely dismantling the Wheat Board. Producers will not have the same power on international markets to negotiate and to sell their wheat and barley at the best price. I thank my colleague for providing the opportunity to clarify once more the government's true agenda.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government is being very disrespectful to the farmers. A member stands up and says, "Well, we are not killing the Wheat Board." The government will have to respect me for not listening to what it is saying, as opposed to listening to what over 20,000 prairie grain farmers are saying today, which is that they want the Canadian Wheat Board.

No matter how often the minister stands up and says that the government is not killing the Wheat Board, the prairie farmers have spoken very clearly through a plebiscite. Over 20,000 say that the government is killing the Canadian Wheat Board.

My question to the member is this: does she believe the 20,000-plus farmers who are saying it means the demise of the Wheat Board if the bill passes, or does she believe a member of the Conservative Party who, in trying to defend the government, continues to stand up and say that the government is not killing the Wheat Board? Who does the member believe?

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very pertinent comments about this matter and for his straightforward question. I believe that the voice of farmers is louder than that of certain Conservative members, who are here to defend their own interests and not those of the people at the Canadian Wheat Board.

I believe the Canadians who have spoken to my colleagues throughout the country and various organizations and institutions that are asking that the Canadian Wheat Board not be dismantled.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher for a very short question.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be brief. I would like to ask my colleague what she would call a government that does not obey the law and that does not respect a valid plebiscite such as the one conducted.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Madam Speaker, as there is very little time, I will give a short answer: the Conservative government.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

The motion that is before the House today is:

That, in the opinion of the House, farmers have a democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards; and recognizing this right, the House calls on the government to set aside its legislation abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) single desk and to conduct a full and free vote by all current members of the CWB to determine their wishes, and calls on the government to agree to honour the outcome of that democratic process.

How could anyone in the House oppose that motion? The motion gives voice to western Canadian farmers, in a balanced way, to have their say on their marketing institution for the crops that they want to market.

I begin from the point of supporting the motion. Western grain producers and, I believe, our supply-managed commodity groups are at risk from the government. On the issue of whether western farmers have a right to vote in an honest plebiscite to determine the future of the Canadian Wheat Board, section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act provides for such a vote. In fact, the Wheat Board held a vote on its own, with 62% support, but the government is failing to abide by that section that is in the law of Canada. In my view, it is violating the law.

The only reason such a vote has not been held is that the government knows it would lose the vote, so rather than being defeated by western grain farmers, the government simply refuses to allow them the right to vote at all. In fact, the Wheat Board's greatest critic, and this is ironic—crazy, actually—is the Parliamentary Secretary Responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, who through his whole career as Parliamentary Secretary Responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board has provided misinformation. In fact, in his own riding, the farmer-elected director who won in that riding is pro-single desk and is against the parliamentary secretary's using his MP's office and his office as parliamentary secretary to propagandize against the particular director who won the election.

The legislation to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board single desk is now before a committee. The question the Conservatives have yet to answer is whether they will allow the committee to travel. If they will not allow farmers to vote, then will they at least allow farmers to have a voice and allow them to speak to the committee in western Canada?

The Minister of Agriculture has told the House that the spring election was a mandate to basically destroy the single desk. That is not true. That is wrong. The law of the land says it clearly, and farmers who voted in the election knew the law of the land. They felt they were going to have the right to vote and determine their own destiny on this specific issue. They may have supported the government on gun control and other issues, and I expect they did, but in western Canada they did not vote for one single issue, the

Wheat Board. The law of the land at the time of the election stated in section 47.1 that they would be given the right to vote on their own destiny, and the government is ignoring that law.

During the election, the Minister of Agriculture told an audience in Minnedosa, Manitoba, "Until farmers make that change"—i.e., to vote for the removal of the single desk—"I'm not prepared to work arbitrarily. They are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too."

What was the minister doing? If he is not having a vote, then he obviously was not telling the truth.

• (1600)

That said, the government is deliberately betraying western grain producers in not allowing them a say in determining their own marketing institution.

I have heard the minister, his parliamentary secretary and others stand up in the House and say that the Canadian Wheat Board was brought in the way it is in 1943 and has not changed since. That is absolutely wrong. The board was changed in 1997 under an act of Parliament. It was designed at the time to give producers control, meaning that they would elect 10 directors and five would be appointed by the government. In other words, farmers in western Canada who market their grain would be able to determine their own destiny, run the Canadian Wheat Board and make the changes necessary, and there have been all kinds of changes over the last number of years exercised by those farmers.

Bill C-18, if passed, would do away with the elected directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. The fate and control of the board would be turned over to the five appointed government hats that the Conservative Party has put in place to do their bidding and destroy the farmers' grain marketing organization from within.

Let us look at the people the government would fire.

There is Stewart Wells. He is an organic farmer from Swift Current, Saskatchewan. He holds a Bachelor of Agricultural Engineering from the University of Saskatchewan, has served eight years as president of the National Farmers Union and is a Saskatchewan Wheat Pool delegate. He would be gone.

There is Cam Goff. He is an owner-operator of a 5,000-acre grain farm and agriculture supply business near Hanley, Saskatchewan. He would be gone.

There is Bill Woods. He is one of the founding members of West Central Road and Rail, a large producer car loading facility that has provided innovative grain marketing options for producers throughout western Saskatchewan. He is also a leading advocate for grain shippers' rights. He would be gone.

Business of Supply

There is John Sandborn, owner and operator of a 3,300-acre grain farm near Benito, Manitoba. John holds a certificate in management leadership from the University of Calgary and a Bachelor of Science from Brandon University. John was a founding director of the Parkland Crop Diversification Foundation and a district representative for Keystone Agricultural Producers of Manitoba. He is a former director of Manitoba Pool Elevators and Agricore Co-operative Ltd. He would be gone.

There is Bill Toews, owner and operator of a large grain and oilseed and specialty crop farm west of Kane, Manitoba. He has international development experience. He is a former director of Keystone Agriculture Producers. He served with the Manitoba Farm Products Marketing Council and the Prairie Region Recommending Committee for Grains subcommittee. He has a degree in agriculture and a post-graduate degree in soil science. He would be gone.

These are not small, outdated, out-of-touch producers who are afraid of marketing on their own; they are the best and brightest, elected by their peers to represent their interests on the only grain marketing entity that still belongs to farmers.

What would Bill C-18 do? It would turf them. They would leave the Canadian Wheat Board in spite of the fact that it is the farmers' grain and it is the farmers who would still be paying every last cent of the Canadian Wheat Board costs. This would leave the board in the hands of unelected government representatives with huge ties to the private grains trade, the very companies that stand to gain from the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board.

The bottom line here is that these producers were elected by their peers. They are not outdated producers. They are good producers who made the changes that producers asked for. Producers voted 62% in favour of maintaining that single desk selling agency. Eight out of ten of those directors are pro-single desk sellers. With the government's representation in the bill, without giving farmers a voice to have their say in the marketing institution, they would all be fired. Left in their place would be five directors appointed by the government.

Why are we seeing this in a democracy? Is the government's ideology just to ignore the facts and disallow the right of primary producers to have a say in their own destiny and the specific institution that they want to market their grain?

• (1605)

How can anybody, and especially those backbenchers in the governing party, sit there and allow themselves to be run by the top? How can they sit there and not support this motion by the member for Churchill?

• (1610)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have been sitting here today trying to figure out why those members opposite are taking the position they are on the Wheat Board. It is really difficult. I am not going to impugn motive, because I do not know the motive, but I am guessing. That is all I can do, and I have come to the conclusion that the most likely reason has to be that they want to continue to impose on western farmers something they do not want for their own farmers.

The member for Malpeque in Prince Edward Island and all members of the NDP have spoken to this motion. They favour maintaining this brutal monopoly for western farmers, but the motion does not ask for it to be put in place for farmers in Quebec, Ontario and Atlantic Canada. Why have they not done that? The only reason I can think of is that it is because they want an unfair competitive advantage for their constituents over constituents of mine and others in the Wheat Board area.

Why should the Wheat Board monopoly only be maintained for farmers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta? It just does not make any sense. I would like those members to put an amendment to the motion that would impose this monopoly on their farmers as well.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, I would love to answer the question.

The "brutal monopoly", as the member calls it, is really the marketing system that in every study over the last 20 years has been shown to maximize returns back to primary producers far better than the open market does.

I read the member's remarks in the House. He talked about his grandfather, who was a grain producer, and how times were tough. He needed cash in the fall, but he was not allowed to sell because of the Canadian Wheat Board. That was true at the time. His point on the record was that his grandfather had to sell at a lower price in order to get rid of his grain.

Two things have happened since. First, the Liberal government of the 1970s put in place an advance payment program to allow producers to hold their grain so that they do not have to sell into a surplus market when they harvest in the fall. Second, the member admitted that his grandfather had to sell at a lower price. That is what will happen with the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board single desk: the lowest seller will set the price, in contrast to maximizing returns through market intelligence, as is done now through the Canadian Wheat Board single desk.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will again ask the member what he would call a government that does not respect the law or a valid plebiscite, such as the one already conducted.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Simply put, Madam Speaker, it would be called a dictatorship. What we have in this country is an absolute executive dictatorship. I cannot understand government backbenchers, who are not the government. They think they are, but the government is the executive council of cabinet. They are members of the governing party, but they take their orders and hide.

The fact of the matter is that if the Conservative government is serious about giving grain farmers marketing freedom, it would extend to them the same right that producers have in every other sector of the agricultural industry, as well as society as a whole: the right to organize themselves into a bargaining unit with the negotiating clout to advance their economic interests.

Business of Supply

That is all farmers are asking for. That is all we are asking for. We are asking the government to allow the vote that is specifically stated in section 47.1 so that if farmers wanted to organize themselves into a marketing unit to maximize their returns in the international marketplace, they could do it.

It is unbelievable. The Minister of Agriculture has never done a tour of the Canadian Wheat Board, other than to drop in once for about 15 minutes to see its marketing intelligence, its war room, and how it gains those returns back to producers from the international market.

● (1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board has served the prairie farmer for over six decades now. All in all, we would find overwhelming support for that Wheat Board over that period of time.

The Canadian Wheat Board has been highly successful at garnering a wonderful brand that ultimately has allowed it to get into markets and to maximize markets because countries from around the world recognize the Canadian Wheat Board and its efforts, and the way in which it has played such a strong role, in terms of feeding the world, and that food comes from our Prairies.

I look at what the government would actually do by the bill that it is pushing through the House of Commons. What the government would really do is destroy family farms. What it would really do is hurt rural communities.

We look to the government to table, to provide any information, any credible information, any studies that it has conducted, that would clearly show that the actions that it is taking are for the betterment of the prairie farmers.

The government members have stood up time and time again to say they believe that this is all about freedom and that this is something that has to be done in order to achieve freedom. That is the only argument that I see the government bringing forward to date on this issue. I have not seen any documents demonstrating how the rural community would prosper and how our wheat producers would prosper in any tangible way.

Instead, what I witnessed is a Prime Minister who has a personal agenda, and that personal agenda can be dated back to before he was even the prime minister or leader of the Reform Party or the Conservative Party of today. For some odd reason, the Prime Minister has had it in for the Canadian Wheat Board for so many years. Because he now has a majority government, he believes he has a mandate, the mandate may be in his own mind, to override what the prairie farmer really and truly wants.

The prairie farmer wants to retain the Wheat Board. We know that because there was a plebiscite. Even though there was a moral and legal obligation for the Prime Minister to conduct a plebiscite, he chose not to. The reason he chose not to conduct a plebiscite was because the Prime Minister had a very good sense, based on experience, that he would not be able to win the plebiscite. He felt that by not conducting a plebiscite that the Conservatives would be able to get away with killing the Wheat Board as we know it today.

A plebiscite was conducted, not by the government, by a third party, sponsored through the Wheat Board. It saw how important it was to have the plebiscite. Over 20,000 grain producers, farmers, who live in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, sent a very strong message, over 60%, that the Canadian Wheat Board was something of great value and we needed to retain it.

Now, we have the government somehow believing that it still has the mandate. If it were to still believe that it has a legitimate mandate, I would suggest it do what the law prescribes and conduct the plebiscite.

However, I do not believe for a moment that the government is going to do that because it is not about facts. It has nothing to do with what is in the best interests of prairie farmers. It has everything to do with this personal hatred that our current Prime Minister has for the Canadian Wheat Board.

● (1620)

I want to quote the *Globe and Mail* from October 17. I made reference to this the other day.

Prime Minister—

Fill in the blank with today's Prime Minister's name.

—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 goes on:

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

Some 20,000 farmers disagree. The Prime Minister is asking those 20,000-plus farmers to get on the track. I find that highly disrespectful. I have never witnessed something of that nature in my 20-plus years of being involved in the parliamentary process.

I would suggest that there are some things that the Prime Minister could do to try to redeem himself to the prairie farmer. The first thing he could do is to agree to hold the plebiscite, recognize the value of a plebiscite, and then respect the wishes of the plebiscite. The Liberal Party of Canada will respect the plebiscite. We will listen to what our prairie farmers are saying.

We have had member after member of the Conservative Party stand up and say that they went home over the weekend and had all this wonderful support for what they are doing, and that we should continue to move forward. I, too, live in the west, and over the weekend I met with prairie farmers who indicated that this is a bad thing and it needs to be stopped.

There are many more prairie farmers agreeing with the farmers I met with than there are who agree with members from the other side of this House.

Earlier today in question period I asked why prairie farmers were not being allowed to voice their concerns to a committee of this House. Instead of a committee of this House dealing with this bill here in the Ottawa bubble, why do we not allow that committee to go to Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta? It could listen to what prairie farmers actually have to say about this bill.

Business of Supply

I have been in legislative forums before where we have committees. We were open and invited public participation. Why not allow that? Why not afford those prairie farmers, the ones the government claims to want to represent, the ones the government says are supporting them, the opportunity to come before a committee? They should not have to fly to Ottawa.

The committee should get out of the Ottawa bubble, go to the prairie provinces, and afford those wheat producers the opportunity to say whether they like what the government is doing or they do not like what the government is doing.

What is the government of afraid? I suspect that if we do not do it, it will be for the same reason the government does not support a plebiscite because it believes it will not win. I suspect the government knows full well that if a committee went to the Prairies, a vast majority of those making presentations would be saying, "Please, do not do this. The Wheat Board is too important to the Prairies. It is too important to our prairie producers. It is too important for our rural communities".

I would like to invite members of the government caucus to participate this Friday, October 28, in a rally of farmers in Winnipeg. There is a day of activities. If any of them would like to participate and do not have the agenda, I would be more than happy to provide it to them. I am sure they will be afforded the opportunity to address our farmers and others.

•(1625)

As much as I talk about prairie farmers, there are many concerned people who live on the Prairies today that recognize the value of the CWB and I appeal to the government to do likewise, recognize the value of the Canadian Wheat Board and the wonderful things it has done for us.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Madam Speaker, to add insult to injury, all the members are laughing and no one is listening to what my colleague is saying. That shows a complete lack of respect. They are making jokes and laughing about the fact that he is standing up for his constituents. That really shows a total lack of respect. It shows just how little the Conservative government cares about the interests of Canadians right now.

I will get back to the question I have for my colleague from Winnipeg North. We saw what happened in the United States. One, two or three major companies have a monopoly over wheat. I can name a number of documentaries that show interviews with American farmers. They lost their homes and their families because they had no more money. They had to shut down their business.

I would like my friend to tell us how the government can justify the free market. Is it truly free to be at the mercy of huge American companies? Is that what the free market is about?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the concern that she expresses in regard to this important issue. We do need to recognize that the bill would kill many family farms. It would put farmers in positions in which they are going to have to

look for alternatives and in many cases it will mean getting out of the farming community.

That is why news agencies like *The Economist* have said that we are going to see rural communities hurt because farmers and their disposable income contribute to the well-being of many rural communities in many different ways. The long-term impact of the bill's passage will be to the detriment for our rural communities and many wheat producers.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Madam Speaker, there are so many holes in the argument from the other side of the House it is hard to decide where to start. Hon. members of the opposition and the third party seem to have lost the fact that everything that is being proposed by the government is already in place.

Farm folks for a number of years have marketed their own pulses, flax, canola and oats. Marketing of wheat and barley is another grain that they market. I do not know why suddenly we are going to see everything fall apart in a hand basket. It just does not make sense. If this operation is so good, from what I have heard from the other side of the House, the Canadian Wheat Board should be across Canada.

When will members opposite propose that the Canadian Wheat Board take over all grain across Canada?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, that is a pretty decent idea in one sense and if farmers across Canada were in favour of doing something of that nature, I would be open to it.

For some peculiar reason, the Conservative member does not have confidence in the prairie producer. If he respected the intelligence and the ability for prairie grain producers to make decisions, he would respect the plebiscite that was conducted. These are individuals who have the experience. They work on farms. They have been in the industry for many years and the wheat farmers have sent a very clear message to the government. We cannot just say I am one person, but I am listening to what the wheat farmers are saying. I do not understand why the member does not listen to what the wheat farmers are saying and support the Wheat Board.

•(1630)

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Saint-Jean, Flooding in Montérégie; the hon. member for Halifax, The Environment; the hon. member for Charlottetown, Veterans.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to split my time with my colleague, the member for Drummond.

I rise today to speak in support of the motion from my colleague, the member for Churchill, which is calling upon the government to acknowledge the fact that farmers have a democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards. It also calls upon the government to conduct a full and free vote of current members of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Business of Supply

While listening to the debate I was struck by the fact that government members believe they know what is best and that they have the answers. The Canadian Wheat Board is an organization that has existed for some 60 years. It was set up by farmers for farmers and decisions are made by farmers for the benefit of farmers, yet without consulting farmers the government is making a decision as to whether or not it will exist. It is completely undercutting the right and responsibility afforded to farmers in the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

The government members have made claims as to why they are allowed to do that. They claim that because the majority of farmers voted for them in the May 2 election they can do whatever they want. Another claim is that the Wheat Board was one of the items in their election platform.

There were a number of items in the Conservatives' platform. Many people voted for the Conservatives for a whole host of reasons, not necessarily because they agreed with one particular item. To suggest that everyone who voted for the Conservatives supported every one of those policies is a complete misrepresentation of the democratic process and is irresponsible in the extreme.

A plebiscite was held in September wherein farmers had the opportunity to indicate how they felt about the government's decision. The result was that 62% of farmers clearly indicated they felt the Wheat Board should continue. If they have determined that is the best way to go forward, why would the government reject that?

I know that perhaps eight, ten or a dozen or more members opposite will be directly affected by this decision. I do not know why they think they know it all and believe that the some 20,000 farmers who voted to keep the Wheat Board are wrong. Obviously, those eight, ten, twelve or so farmers who are sitting on the government benches believe they would be affected positively by this decision and feel that they have all the answers.

There is another question that I had thought of recently which others have mentioned. That is the question of supply, both for exports and for imports, which relates to the transportation network. I am the international trade critic for the opposition and one of the issues we have with regard to transportation in Canada is our ability to move goods in a timely and orderly fashion to our ports for export purposes or transporting imported goods to markets. There are serious concerns as to how that is handled.

●(1635)

One issue we will be talking about in the House at some point relates to who is in control of the rail system and whether that has been in the best interests of industry, of Canada and of Canadians. We will examine that more clearly.

In the event that the Canadian Wheat Board is dismantled, the marketing, sale and transportation of these products will either fall to the corporate sector or, as some people have suggested, to private interests. However, others believe that before long the control of the marketing and sale of these products will end up in the hands of Cargill, one of the world's largest wheat buyers and marketers. That would pose a problem for farmers. That is one reason they have largely voted against the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board.

We already have problems negotiating trade deals with other countries concerning how we can do a better job internally with the transportation of goods either to markets or from our ports into our cities.

Those are a few of my concerns with respect to transportation.

I now come back to the fact that I am struck by the lack of democratic respect the government has shown toward farmers by taking it upon itself, with the stroke of a pen, to dismantle an organization that has existed for so long and has been such an important tradition.

Farmers continue to come together to make decisions regarding how their grain will be marketed, how it will be sold and how it will be transported. That right will be taken away from them.

The members opposite suggest that farmers need freedom. Farmers have freedom. They can vote on whether or not this is in their best interests. That is why the legislation that was put in place to set up and manage the Wheat Board was constructed as it was.

If in their wisdom farmers decide that it is not in their best interests to keep the Wheat Board, they will make that decision. That is laid out clearly in the bylaws pertaining to the Canadian Wheat Board. However, they have not made that decision. Rather, they have decided that they want the Canadian Wheat Board to remain in place and to continue representing their interests, which it has done for so many years now.

Government members, who are seemingly fearful of the democratic process, thump their chests and say they know best. They claim that because farmers voted for them on May 2 they have the authority to do this, yet they have not presented any evidence, impact studies or reports to the House to back up their claim that this will be in the best interests of farmers. They simply say that this is what they will do.

NDP members and other members, including those in the third party, have spoken eloquently with regard to the history of the Canadian Wheat Board and the right of farmers to make this decision on their own. That is what this motion is about. It simply reiterates what is contained in the legislation and in the bylaws pertaining to the Canadian Wheat Board. It allows farmers who are members of the Canadian Wheat Board to make a decision. It provides for a fair and a full vote to be conducted by members of the Canadian Wheat Board that we are to live by and respect. Yet the government looks at us and says, "Why would we do that? We know best".

●(1640)

From my experience in politics and otherwise, I suggest that the people most directly affected are the ones who know best. That is why I am supporting this motion. It is why I urge members opposite to come to the realization that maybe they do not know what is best, and in this case they should allow farmers to make that decision.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member has been the leader of a provincial party. He mentioned that he is concerned about the lack of democratic respect.

Based on his experience, I know he would think there should also be some fiscal and financial responsibility in doing a net benefit analysis in terms of government making decisions.

Business of Supply

In a previous court action when the government was trying to bring in Bill C-46 the Wheat Board took the government to court. The director general of marketing policy for Agriculture Canada testified under oath before the Federal Court of Canada with respect to whether the federal government had undertaken a specific economic impact analysis in relation at that time to proposed regulatory changes to the Canadian Wheat Board. Legal counsel asked him this: "Do I have your answer that as far as you are aware, nobody within government has done any analysis of the kind I have described to you?" He means a net benefit economic analysis. The answer: "No, I am not aware that anyone in the government who has done."

That is Federal Court transcript testimony of Mr. Paul Martin, director general of marketing policy for Agriculture Canada on July 16, 2007.

In terms of a corporation, the magnitude of \$5.6 billion a year controlled by an elected board of directors, does the member think it is irresponsible to go ahead without an economic net benefit analysis?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that it is the height of fiscal irresponsibility for the government to be making a decision with this kind of impact without having determined the costs.

That member knows, as I do, we are watching negotiations with Europe regarding the CETA, where we have on the table the possibility that the government could extend patent protection to pharmaceuticals which could add \$2.9 billion in costs to the health care system in Canada and it has not done one lick of study to determine whether that will happen. That is the level of irresponsibility the government continues to show Canadians.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question. How does my colleague define a government that does not respect a valid plebiscite and a valid consultation and which breaks the law?

• (1645)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Madam Speaker, I call a government that ignores the democratic rights of farmers, that makes decisions with this kind of economic impact without due consideration of the impact on taxpayers, that flouts the law, completely out of touch. I call that government completely out of touch with the responsibilities accorded to it by the rights instilled in this Parliament to be respectful of the people of Canada, to be respectful of this institution, and to make sure government members conduct themselves in a responsible and mature manner in the best interests of all Canadians.

The government has shown again that it is completely out of touch and is running recklessly forward without any consideration for what it is doing to the fabric of this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank the member for Churchill for proposing this motion, which is truly very important. It is a brilliant response to the Conservatives' mistake, namely, Bill C-18, which proposes dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board.

Members may find it strange that, as the member for Drummond, I am rising in the House to support this motion, which seeks to recognize western farmers' legitimate, democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards.

Nevertheless, it is not so strange, since a large part of the riding of Drummond is made up of rural farmland. There are many farmers in my region, whether they be dairy, cattle, pork and poultry producers or grain farmers.

In this regard, I recently had the privilege of meeting with dairy farmer representatives when I was in my riding. They told me that they are in regular contact with farmers in other provinces and that they are very concerned to see the heavy-handed approach that the Conservatives are taking in forcing western farmers to give up a tool that they feel is essential to getting a fair and profitable price, particularly in the case of smaller farms, which are often family-owned.

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. It is the largest and most successful grain marketing organization in the world. The Canadian Wheat Board was created in the 1920s, when farmers in western Canada started to join together to market their grain in order to get the best price for their crops. Then, in 1943, a single desk system was created, which required all prairie farmers to sell their wheat through the board. The single desk structure provided financial stability, prudent risk management and certainty of grain supply. These are good reasons to support this motion. They show the importance of the Canadian Wheat Board. These things were extremely positive for marketing in the interests of farmers. Today, they provide an undeniable advantage for western farmers.

The Conservatives should acknowledge this. Even though the government's decision to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board will have a very serious impact on the lives of farmers, the decision was made without any analysis of how it would affect them. It goes against what they said they want. Indeed, on September 12, 2011, 62% of farmers voted to maintain the Canadian Wheat Board. That is incredible. That is a very decisive result. That means they want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. Where were the Conservatives when those results were released? Did they not read the news like everyone else?

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. I will come back to marketing freedom a little later. He added that the government's reckless approach will throw Canada's grain industry into disarray, jeopardize the future of a \$5 billion a year export sector and take money out of the pockets of Canadian farmers. What upsets me the most about this is that it all goes against Canadian farmers and only benefits large multinational corporations.

Business of Supply

Who will benefit from this bill? That is the question I keep asking myself. Who will benefit from dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board? Dismantling it will unfortunately not benefit farmers, but it will benefit multinationals and people who will get rich on the backs of farmers and family farms.

• (1650)

Why are the Conservatives so set on dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board when prairie farmers have voiced their opposition? This survey clearly shows that the Conservatives are doing a great disservice to western farmers.

By way of comparison, let us look at what happened in Australia after a board similar to the Canadian Wheat Board was dismantled. 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, a multinational and one of the world's largest privately owned agribusiness corporations. And where, Madam Speaker, do you think this company is based? In the United States. What are the chances? Is that what we want here in Canada, to give our agriculture to the United States, to big multinationals? I hope not.

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. And that disappoints me.

The people in my riding of Drummond are also worried. All of the farmers are worried about the current Conservative policies. They are wondering what the Conservatives have up their sleeves. First, it is the Canadian Wheat Board. What is next? In Drummondville, in the riding of Drummond, many people, including dairy and egg producers, depend on supply management. Right now this market is protected by supply management and producers make a good enough living. There are many farms in the riding of Drummond and they rely heavily on supply management; it is very important in my riding. People in my riding, farmers included, often come to ask me what is happening, where all this is going to lead, what will come of it and what the Conservatives are planning. First it is the Canadian Wheat Board, then what? Supply management?

As members know, supply management is being challenged in connection with the free trade agreement with the European Union. My constituents, representatives of dairy producers, came to see me to say that we must defend supply management, that it must be maintained in Quebec and the riding of Drummond, that it was essential and that I had to fight for it. I promised them that I would do so. We are talking about the Canadian Wheat Board now, and it is a similar topic. This is an opportunity for us to stand up for western Canadians.

In conclusion, the Conservatives often talk about freedom. They want to give prairie farmers the freedom they want so badly. They are in favour of the free market, of giving freedom to the poor farmers. I agree with them. We should give the farmers their

freedom, but we should give them the freedom to choose and not shove the Conservatives' choice down their throats. That is not freedom. Freedom is giving them the choice. There was already a survey of 38,261 farmers, and 62% of them voted in favour of maintaining the Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1655)

Therefore, I urge the Conservatives to support this excellent motion by the member for Churchill and to let the farmers determine their own future.

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, the opposition member spoke about scrapping the Wheat Board, but that is not what is happening. This is about giving farmers the freedom to market their produce.

I wonder how many of that member's farmers have told him that they want the monopoly back in Quebec. I would suspect none.

Farmers in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex in Ontario are happy that we got rid of the single desk. Now they have the opportunity to market their own produce.

The member talked about the importance of supply management. I guess he does not understand that there is absolutely no link. On the other hand, we are the only party that talked about supply management in the election. His party never even stood up for it.

I wonder if the farmers in Quebec are interested in going back to the monopoly and the single desk seller. I would appreciate the member's comments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. In fact, what I am asking him and what everyone in the House is asking him is to respect western Canadian farmers. He spoke of giving them freedom. Indeed, let us give them the freedom to choose and let us hold a plebiscite. We already have a poll that clearly shows that the farmers want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. If he believes that is not true, then let him show his democratic side and support the excellent motion moved by the hon. member for Churchill. It is a fair and balanced motion that shows a democratic vision by asking the farmers their opinion.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for reminding members of the House what we are debating here. New Democrats are not calling for farmers to decide. The law requires it and farmers are asking that their vote be honoured.

I want to share with the member a news release issued today by the Canadian Wheat Board Alliance saying that it hopes all members of Parliament will support this motion to give back its democratic rights. This is really about basic democratic principles. The people affected by decisions should have a democratic say in those decisions, and that is what this motion recognizes.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her excellent question and for reading this news release, which does not surprise me at all. When I met with dairy farmers and dairy farming representatives, as well as people from the UPA, they told me they were in regular contact with farmers across Canada, who told the dairy farmers that the Canadian Wheat Board was an essential and effective tool that guaranteed them a good salary and good working conditions. I hope the Conservatives will allow the farmers to democratically choose what they want. Do they want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly? I believe they do. The plebiscite shows that 62% want to keep the board. Now, if the government has any doubt, let it hold a plebiscite, as the motion calls for.

• (1700)

[English]

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to this motion, so I can speak against the motion.

The words in the motion seem to be about standing up for the democratic rights of western wheat and barley farmers, but the absence of a single, but important, word reveals the real intent of the members of Parliament who support this motion. That word is “each”. The motion currently reads “...farmers have a democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards...”.

However to properly and fully reflect the actual inalienable rights of those concerned, it should say “...each farmer has the democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards”.

This change captures the essence of this debate and reveals the essence of the opposition's objection to the marketing freedom for grain farmers act. The official opposition party is a self-proclaimed socialist party, and as socialists, they will promote government-enforced collectivism. We Conservatives have no problem with co-operation or co-operative organizations. In fact, we know co-operation works. However, we also recognize that the participants of any co-operative effort must be voluntary participants. Otherwise it is not co-operation; it becomes coercion. We can talk all day long about democratic rights, but if we do not include individual rights we are not talking about the democratic rights I am fighting for.

Yesterday in the House, a Liberal member referred to the correct principle that when we deny the rights of one we threaten the rights of all. However, he went on to distort this principle to defend the government-enforced elimination of the rights of not just one but many prairie farmers.

The marketing freedom for grain farmers act does nothing to remove the rights of farmers who wish to continue to use the co-operative tools provided by the Canadian Wheat Board, but at the same time it restores the rights of those farmers who want to market their grain as they see fit. It restores the equality of all farmers across the country by giving western farmers the same freedom already enjoyed by eastern farmers and British Columbia farmers.

For the benefit of anyone who is not convinced that this motion is about the NDP belief that westerners are not fit to govern themselves, let me remind them of the incredible and outrageous assertion made by an NDP member who is a city slicker from Winnipeg, that members of Parliament who happen to be western grain farmers should preclude themselves from debate about the Wheat Board and preclude themselves from voting on the act. He claims they are in a conflict of interest because they believe western farmers will benefit by the act.

Give me a break. Every bill we pass in the House should be for the benefit of all Canadians.

Let me quote part of the prayer that is spoken by the Speaker at the beginning of Parliament every day. It says:

Grant us wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to preserve the blessings of this country for the benefit of all...

The MPs who he says are in conflict of interest would only be in a conflict of interest if the bill were designed specifically to benefit them, or them and a small group, to the exclusion of others.

He says they cannot have things both ways, but if we are to apply his lack of logic to every situation, and if we believe in the principles cited in the parliamentary prayer, then all MPs should preclude themselves from all debate.

Our democracy is founded on the idea that we elect representatives from among us to represent us and our interests. We call this the House of Commons because it is supposed to be filled by the common man. The MPs who are western farmers were sent here by western farmers and they sent them largely because they are western farmers. They sent them knowing full well they were committed to freeing up the Wheat Board, because the majority of western farmers believe it should be free. Even those who want to use the Wheat Board believe it should be free.

Why would western farmers want other western farmers to represent them in the House of Commons? It is precisely because they would be motivated to pass laws that are good for western farmers and because they are far more likely to know what is good for western farmers than a city slicker from Winnipeg.

• (1705)

Furthermore it is a fallacy that this issue only impacts western farmers. Agriculture affects us all. In addition to providing our food, agriculture is the backbone of any economy. We can live without oil and we can even live without shelter, but we cannot live without food.

Just as important, as we were reminded by my Liberal friend yesterday, to limit the rights of one is to threaten the rights of us all. To continue to allow the government, through the Canadian Wheat Board, to limit the freedom of western farmers puts at risk all freedoms of all Canadians.

Business of Supply

Perhaps the New Democrat from Winnipeg should insist that I preclude myself from this debate, even though I am not a farmer, because I believe that by defending the rights of each and every farmer, I am defending my own rights, the rights of my family and the rights of my country.

Be under no illusion that the member from Winnipeg is a radical fringe member. His colleagues loudly applaud every time he brings this stuff up. It is a fundamental doctrine of NDP ideology that big brother should be in charge, that the people as individuals are not fit to govern themselves.

By now most western Canadian farmers have finished harvesting what is reported to be a high-quality wheat and barley crop that will feed the world. They have managed that crop every step of the way. They have seeded it, sprayed it, fertilized it and harvested it, and we believe those farmers are capable of marketing those crops. They do not need anybody from downtown anywhere telling them what to do with their product.

I question not only the words of this motion but the intent of this motion. I do not believe it arises out of a belief that democracy cannot be had in the absence of plebiscites and referendums, for when the NDP members were asked why postal workers were not able to vote on the strike nor the labour negotiations in June, they selectively remembered the correct principle that our democracy allows for the selection of representatives to make decisions on our behalf.

As I mentioned yesterday, when the Liberal government passed legislation allowing same sex marriage without a referendum, it justified this by citing the correct principle that our western democracies are founded upon the principle that the majority cannot impose its views upon the minorities, that individuals have rights that no majority has the right to vote away.

Yet today both the Liberals and the NDP pretend that passing this legislation without a referendum is a travesty of democratic principles. Since they know this is not true, I cannot help but believe there is some other motive. The opposition parties accuse the Conservatives of being motivated by ideology. If they are talking about the ideology of freedom and equality, then I am guilty as charged.

Over the years, the Conservatives have made it very clear that we intend to give marketing choice to western grain farmers. It has been an election promise many times. It was an election promise during the 2011 campaign. While we received support across the country, and overwhelming support in the prairie provinces, especially in the rural ridings where the prairie grain farmers live, we were supported for many reasons, including our commitment to the economy, to a more just justice system and to scrapping the long gun registry.

Rural prairie voters understood full well that by voting Conservative, they were voting to promote a Conservative majority. They knew that a Conservative majority government would put an end to the monopoly held by the Canadian Wheat Board.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

In the June 2011 Speech from the Throne, our government again committed to ensuring that western farmers would have the freedom to sell their wheat and barley on the open market.

[*English*]

That was a throne speech commitment. The marketing freedom for grain farmers act is the fulfillment of years of election promises, the fulfillment of the 2011 election promise, the fulfillment of our commitment in the Speech from the Throne.

We made a promise and we are committed to delivering on that promise. No reasonable person could honestly say that keeping a clear and definite election promise is undemocratic. In fact, every reasonable person knows that a government that is democratically elected, after making election promises, must keep those promises. To allow a small group to vote away the responsibility to keep those promises we made to all voters is to reject our democratic responsibility.

The Liberals and the NDP are willing to contradict the very principles they claim to champion in the hopes of getting the public to believe the opposite. How can parties that claim to be defenders of the little guy, the defenders of minority rights, think it is okay for farmers who want the Wheat Board to force their neighbours who do not want it? We deliver marketing choice to grain farmers, all western grain farmers, each western grain farmer.

The opposition distorts things further and thereby betrays the insincerity of its motives by telling people we are shutting down the Wheat Board. All this legislation does is make participation in the Wheat Board voluntary, thereby transforming it from a coercive organization into a co-operative organization. Farmers who want to use it can. Farmers who do not want to use it do not have to. Even if 99% of the farmers want to use it, they have no right to force the 1% who do not.

If the majority of the farmers really does want the Wheat Board, what need is there to make it a monopoly? It will thrive in the absence of the minority. We must not buy into the fear. We must embrace the future, where producers will be able to manage their business as never before, with transparency of prices and control over to whom they sell, where young farmers will finally have the tools they need to make their farming dreams a reality, where farming entrepreneurs can harness innovation and add value to their crops beyond the farm gate.

The future of our agriculture industry is bright. We want to provide new opportunities in the grain market. We want to extend to all western wheat and barley farmers the democratic property rights upon which our nation was built, the democratic property rights that farmers in eastern Canada have, the democratic property rights that farmers in British Columbia have. The marketing freedom for grain farmers act would give them the rights and opportunities they so richly deserve. It would protect their democratic freedoms.

Private Members' Business

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 advantage of land and resources. We have consulted with farmers. We have consulted with all people who are interested, which goes beyond the farmers.

In conclusion, we hope the members in the House will show their support for western Canadian farmers, the same support that is afforded to all other farmers in Canada by supporting the marketing freedom for grain farmers act. My colleagues in the House can help western Canadian farmers capitalize on this new opportunity.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion.

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

• (1715)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred until tomorrow at the expiry of oral questions.

The Deputy Speaker: The vote is deferred until tomorrow at the end of oral questions.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 5:30.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there agreement to see the House at 5:30?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC) moved that Bill C-310, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Madam Speaker, today I am pleased to rise and speak to my private member's bill, Bill C-310, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons). This bill follows my previous bill, Bill C-268, which created Canada's child trafficking offence with stiff penalties for individuals trafficking a minor in Canada. Having received royal assent on June 29, 2010, Bill C-268 is now law and is being used across Canada, most recently in a case right here in Ottawa.

Bill C-268 was supported by members from multiple parties in the last Parliament. I want to take a moment to thank the members from the Conservative Party, NDP, Liberal Party and Green Party for offering their support for Bill C-310. This bipartisan support reveals that members on both sides of the House are committed to combating human trafficking.

The term "human trafficking" can often be mistaken as human smuggling, which is the illegal movement of people across international borders. However, we must be clear and concise about what human trafficking is during our debate tonight.

Human trafficking is the illegal trade of human beings for sexual exploitation or forced labour or other forms of slavery. Human trafficking is nothing short of modern day slavery. The focus of my bill is on combating the enslavement of individuals both in Canada and abroad.

I would like to begin by speaking to the recent Ottawa case that I referred to a few minutes ago to demonstrate the reality of human trafficking here in Canada. Last week, Montreal police caught up to Jamie Byron, who was charged by the Ottawa police force for a number of serious human trafficking-related offences, including the trafficking of a minor. Mr. Byron, considered to be violent, is also wanted in Toronto for robbery, uttering threats and possession of a dangerous weapon.

I would ask members to take a moment and consider that only a few blocks away from where we are sitting today in the House, Jamie Byron was forcing underage girls into prostitution. The methods he used were particularly heinous. In a downtown Ottawa hotel a young 17-year-old girl trafficked from Windsor, Ontario was starved until she agreed to be a prostitute. This is nothing short of slavery.

As parliamentarians, we must be resolved to eradicating all forms of this slavery, both in Canada and abroad. The first clause in Bill C-310 would amend the Criminal Code to add the current trafficking in persons offences 279.01 and 279.011 to the list of offences which, if committed outside Canada by a Canadian or permanent resident, could be prosecuted in Canada. The very nature of human trafficking requires an international focus.

Canada is known as a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking. The human trafficking offence in section 279.01 states:

Every person who recruits, transports, transfers, receives, holds, conceals or harbours a person...or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person...for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation is guilty of an indictable offence—

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I would like to provide a basic example of how Bill C-310's amendment to extend extraterritorial jurisdiction to human trafficking offences would apply in an international human trafficking case.

Human trafficking can often have global implications with traffickers recruiting in one country and sending victims to another country. For example, if a Canadian trafficker were to situate him or herself in Romania and recruit, transport, transfer, receive, hold or control victims to be exploited in Canada or even within Romania, the amendment in Bill C-310 would ensure that person could be held criminally responsible in Canada.

However, if the trafficker were to return to Canada today without being caught or apprehended in Romania, the individual would not be guilty of an offence under Canadian law. In a reverse situation, this amendment would also ensure that Canada's trafficking in persons offences would apply to a Canadian who was trafficking Canadian victims within and throughout other countries.

Let us look at a real life example. John Wrenshall is a Canadian serving 25 years in an American prison for running a child brothel in Thailand. He was recruiting, holding and controlling boys as young as four years old and arranging for international child sex tourists to visit his brothel. Mr. Wrenshall even admitted to the court that his brothel was linked to a Thai pedophile sex trafficking ring.

• (1720)

The U.S. arrested Mr. Wrenshall in the U.K., after he left Thailand, for a number of charges, including aiding and abetting Americans to sexually abuse children abroad.

However, had Mr. Wrenshall managed to return to Canada, we would not have been able to prosecute him for human trafficking since Canada's trafficking in persons offences are not extraterritorial.

I also want to note that this amendment would apply to people who traffic victims for sexual exploitation, as well as for forced labour or slavery. This is important, as we know that men, women and children have been recruited abroad and trafficked to Canada for the purposes of forced labour.

Extraterritorial laws are guided by a number of principles under international law. Bill C-310's amendment would fall under the nationality principle that can be defined as "States may assert jurisdiction over acts of their nationals wherever the act might take place.

Canada has designated a number of serious Criminal Code offences as extraterritorial offences, especially those related to the sexual abuse of children by Canadians sex tourists. These can be found in section 7.4 of the Criminal Code.

There are three primary purposes of designating a criminal offence with extraterritorial jurisdiction. I would like to review these with regard to human trafficking.

First, an extraterritorial human trafficking offence would allow Canada to arrest Canadians who have left the country where they engage in human trafficking in an attempt to avoid punishment here in Canada.

Second, an extraterritorial human trafficking offence would ensure justice in cases where the offence was committed in a country

without strong anti-human trafficking laws or strong judicial systems.

Finally, an extraterritorial human trafficking offence would clearly indicate that Canada will not tolerate its own citizens engaging in human trafficking anywhere in the world.

While it would not be conventional to start applying extraterritorial jurisdiction to every Criminal Code offence, there is significant international precedence to do so for human trafficking offences. For example, a number of countries, such as Germany, Cyprus and Cambodia, have applied international jurisdiction to their domestic human trafficking offences so that they can prosecute their own citizens regardless of where the offences took place.

The UN Organized Crime Convention requires a state's parties to establish jurisdiction to investigate, prosecute and punish all offences established by the convention on the trafficking of persons protocol, which Canada has done.

However, in 2009, the United Nations handbook for parliamentarians on combating trafficking in persons also notes that the Organized Crime Convention encourages the establishment of jurisdiction on an extraterritorial basis. In 2003, the UN resource guide to international regional legal instruments, political commitments and recommended practices stated:

The adoption of extraterritorial criminal laws against human trafficking is one of the many intersectoral and interdisciplinary measures required to effectively combat this phenomenon.

The UN guide also stated:

Extraterritorial laws should be appreciated realistically as one of the many complementary measures needed to eliminate human trafficking, coupled ultimately with the political and social will and cooperation to overcome this global phenomena.

Prior to tabling Bill C-310, I consulted with numerous stakeholders on this matter of extraterritorial offences. This included law enforcement, prosecutors, and non-governmental organizations.

On further reflection, I will be seeking a friendly amendment at committee stage to add sections 279.02 and 279.03 to this clause. These are offences of receiving material or financial benefit from human trafficking and withholding or destroying travel documents in the process of human trafficking. This would ensure that all of the acts around human trafficking are covered by extraterritorial offences and there is no chance for a Canadian human trafficker falling through the cracks.

The second clause of Bill C-310 would amend the definition of "exploitation" in the trafficking of persons offence to add an evidentiary aid for courts to consider when they are determining whether a person was exploited.

Evidentiary aids are already used in our Criminal Code. In fact, the evidentiary aid found in section 153(1.2) of the Criminal Code provides greater clarity to the courts on what constitutes sexual exploitation of a minor.

There is also an evidentiary aid found in section 467.11(3) that provides additional guidance on what constitutes participation in organized crime.

● (1725)

This amendment stems from consultations with law enforcement, lawyers and prosecutors who have faced challenges demonstrating exploitation and trafficking in persons under the current definition. They feel that the current definition of “exploitation” is worded in such a way that it has caused courts to interpret “exploitation” too narrowly. The current definition hinges on an assumption that victims feared for their own safety or for the safety of someone known to them so much that they were compelled to provide a labour or a service. This has often been interpreted as a concern for one's physical safety.

UBC professor Benjamin Perrin, in his landmark book on human trafficking in Canada, called *Invisible Chains*, writes, “It could be argued that safety should not be restricted simply to physical harm but also should encompass psychological and emotional harm”. He goes on to point out that Canada's definition of “human trafficking” does not include methods of exploitation that are consistent with the UN Palermo protocol. The Palermo protocol states:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

The heart of this amendment is to provide an aid to the courts that clearly demonstrates the factors that constitute exploitive methods. In my amendment, I have proposed including “use or threats of violence, force or other forms of coercion and fraudulent means”.

Similar to the first clause of this bill after it was tabled in Parliament, upon reflection, I believe it would be helpful to also include the term “use deception and abuse a position of trust, power or authority”.

I will also be seeking a friendly amendment for these minor changes at committee to ensure this bill is sound and will accomplish what we want it to do.

I would like to share some of the feedback I have already heard from stakeholders regarding Bill C-310.

Jamie McIntosh of IJM stated:

The crime of human trafficking often transgresses international boundaries, with vulnerable men, women, and children subject to its devastating reach. Human traffickers, including those of Canadian nationality, will persist in their illicit trade if they believe their crimes will go unpunished. Extending authority to prosecute Canadians for human trafficking crimes committed abroad is an important step in the global fight against human trafficking. As a nation, we must commit to prosecuting Canadian nationals who commit these crimes, regardless of geographical location at the time of offence.

UBC law professor Benjamin Perrin said:

Human traffickers have evaded prosecution for their heinous crimes, in part, because Canada's criminal laws are not explicit enough to clearly encompass the

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range of tactics employed by these serial exploiters....I call on all Parliamentarians to support this initiative.

Timea Nagy, who is the program director of Walk with Me, and a survivor of human trafficking herself, writes:

As an internationally trafficked survivor, who has been working with Canadian law enforcement to help human trafficking victims, I am absolutely thrilled to see this legislation.... This Bill will help Canadian law enforcement and prosecutors to be able to do their job and send a message to traffickers around the world, that Canada does not tolerate this crime against human dignity.

There are so many more organizations and experts that I could list but I do not have the time to do so. It is important that Parliament continue to act to combat modern day slavery. Human trafficking is a national and international crime and this legislation addresses both.

By supporting Bill C-310, each member of this House plays an important role in strengthening the tools used by police officers and prosecutors and in securing justice for victims of trafficking both here in Canada and abroad.

● (1730)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kildonan—St. Paul for all the efforts she has made over the years to protect the young and the vulnerable both here and abroad.

Could she expand on why it is so important that we look at Canada's trafficking in persons offences from an extraterritorial perspective?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question because that is the heart of this bill.

First, an extraterritorial human trafficking offence would allow Canada to arrest Canadians who have left the country when they engage in human trafficking in an attempt to avoid punishment here in Canada.

Second, the extraterritorial human trafficking offence would ensure justice in cases where the offence was committed in a country without strong anti-human trafficking laws or strong judicial systems.

Third, an extraterritorial human trafficking offence would clearly indicate that Canada will not tolerate its own citizens engaging in human trafficking anywhere.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how could the crime of sexual exploitation be dealt with better in this bill in order to fight against the exploitation of Canadian women?

[*English*]

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but I missed the first part of the question.

However, I will say that the important thing is to support this bill to ensure that not only traffickers here in Canada but Canadians who go abroad and traffic children will know that they will be prosecuted here in Canada, even if they do it in a country where there are very lax human trafficking laws or lax judicial systems. That is very important.

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[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for introducing this bill. Does she have any idea how many Canadians are affected by this bill?

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: Sadly, Mr. Speaker, we do not have the exact number, but a lot of Canadians have gone to other countries to exploit children. The Bakker file is very well known. The recent case of Mr. Wrenshall is also well known. There are numerous cases where individuals not only have exploited children, but they have also come back to Canada and have tried to reach into the country from where they came to get children from that country into Canada. This bill would stop that from happening.

● (1735)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-310, which would amend the Criminal Code, clarifies legislation pertaining to human trafficking, a global phenomenon that requires the legislator to take a transnational approach.

This bill amends two provisions of the Criminal Code pertaining to human trafficking. The first change would make an addition to section 7 of the Criminal Code. It formally recognizes trafficking in humans as an extraterritorial offence that can be prosecuted in Canada, and applying to both Canadians and permanent residents.

The second change would replace section 279.04 of the Criminal Code in order to provide a more precise definition of the concept of exploitation. Hence, “...the Court may consider, among other factors, whether the accused, (a) used or threatened to use violence; (b) used or threatened to use force; (c) used or threatened another form of coercion; or (d) used fraudulent misrepresentation or other fraudulent means”, when determining whether or not there was exploitation. It should be noted that the bill also includes in the concept of exploitation the removal of an organ or tissue by the use of force, violence or coercion.

A number of experts have expressed concerns about the current legislation, which they believe is not detailed enough to allow the courts to prove the offence of exploitation. By including the content of article 3 of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime Protocol, the legislator is attempting to harmonize domestic law with international law in the area of human trafficking. Thus, in this article:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

In light of the extraterritorial nature of the offences set out in sections 279.01 and 279.011 of the Criminal Code, the legislator uses principles of international law in order to fight human trafficking, which must be strongly condemned. We must agree with strengthening the legislation to deal with these offences. This bill is one solution that will help limit this transnational scourge.

By making these amendments to the Criminal Code, Canada would only be respecting its international commitments. Canada signed this convention and its protocols in 2000 and ratified them in 2002. As a result, it is required to introduce legislation to recognize trafficking in persons as an offence.

I will take this opportunity in the debate at second reading of this private member's bill to talk about the difference between human trafficking and human smuggling, which is not addressed in these legislative amendments. Human smuggling is defined as a crime committed by any person who enables the illegal migration of other individuals by means of the organized transport of a person across an international border. By contrast, human trafficking refers to the recruitment of vulnerable persons for the purposes of various types of exploitation, generally in the sex industry or forced labour, through various methods of control.

Victims of human trafficking in Canada are unfortunately most often aboriginal women and girls who are sexually exploited.

● (1740)

Exploitation for the purposes of forced labour also exists in Canada. The people behind this type of 21st century slavery take advantage of the precarious legal status of foreigners under their control, who are often illegal immigrants. These immigrants are brainwashed and often fear testifying, since they worry that they themselves will be arrested or deported to their country of origin.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I support this private member's bill, which would aim to bring our legislation in line with international law.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to put a few words on the record. I had the opportunity to read over some of the comments by the Liberal Party's critic for justice and human rights and I thought he actually said it quite well. I will just repeat some of the comments that he has put on the record in previous times in the House because he has come to best understand this issue and the importance of it.

I will read the quote into the record again. He said:

We know that this grotesque trade in human beings now generates upward of more than \$12 billion a year.

In other words, he says that human trafficking is so profitable that “it is the world's fastest growing international crime. We know that the majority of victims who are trafficked are women and girls under the age of 25, and that many trafficking victims tragically also include children”.

UNICEF has estimated that 1.2 million children are trafficked globally each year. The International Labour Organization estimates that 2.5 million children are currently in situations of forced labour as a result of being trafficked.

He made reference to his daughter who has always counselled him, highlighting just how important this issue is and how important it is that we deal with it here in the House of Commons.

He further states that, “Simply put, trans-border trafficking is a multi-billion dollar criminal industry that challenges law enforcement people, that flouts our immigration laws, that threatens to spread global disease and constitutes an assault on each of our fundamental rights”.

Our critic for justice and human rights was not able to express that here today and I just wanted to get that on the record.

I look at it from a personal perspective over the years. I can recall back in 1993 when I happened to be in the Philippines. After talking with some local residents, I distinctly recall one of the colonels, who was in the forces in the Philippines, telling me a story about one of his daughters. His daughter was being told about how she could ultimately come to Canada and work in a restaurant and so forth, and how wonderful an opportunity it would be for her. What ended up happening in this particular case was that the young lady was quite excited about the economic opportunity, the opportunity to come to Canada, and thought it would be a good thing to do. She came to Canada and quickly found out that the individuals who were promoting her being able to come to Canada were really bringing her into the sex trade here in Canada.

The colonel, back then, was obviously very upset to find that out. He was able to get his daughter back out of this horrific situation, and I am really glad for the family. However, as someone who was fairly young in politics back in 1993, it left a lasting impression because of the passion with which he spoke. I hesitate to think of what would have happened had she not had that supportive father, someone who was truly in a position to get her out of the situation she found herself in here in Canada.

I will fast forward a number of years to when I was in Kansas. It was while I was on a parliamentary conference of sorts in Kansas that I really started to get a better appreciation of the degree to which it was a major world issue. I had observed a particular committee and, as fortune would have it at that time, they were talking about human trafficking, in particular dealing with the sex trade.

•(1745)

I was amazed by the numbers they were talking about. They were not talking about the odd case of women being brought over to feed the exploitation that is very real in North America today. They were not talking about a few or a hundred. They were talking about thousands of women being exploited through trafficking. That was an eye-opener for me and, since then, I have tried to keep up as much as possible on the issue.

I am aware of the bill the member has introduced to the House and of the previous bill she introduced, as well as some of the discussions that bill entailed. Many people from Winnipeg were following what was happening as it was an important issue. A number of people feel very passionate about this issue.

When I made some inquiries about 12 months ago on this issue, I was told that if we were to look at all the human trafficking that occurs around the world, we would see that somewhere in the neighbourhood of 80% is used in some form of sexual exploitation. When we think of sexual exploitation, there are two things that come to mind: one, the area of prostitution; and two, the production of pornography.

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The more I look into it, I find it amazing the circumstances in which we often find the people being exploited, as well as how young they are. The member for St. Paul's made reference to one particular case that I believe involved a four-year-old boy. There is far too high a percentage of youth under the age of 10 who are being sexually exploited. I think it would not only sadden but it would anger a lot of people to hear of those numbers.

Then there is slavery. It is estimated that worldwide there is somewhere in the neighbourhood of between 20 million to 30 million people who are experiencing some form of slavery.

When we look at the whole area of exploitation, the impact it has on society and the role Canada can play on the international scene, I would suggest that legislation such as this does have merit. Canada can play a leadership role. As other countries have recognized the exploitation that is out there, Canada can too. There are things we can do that would make a difference.

We want to send a message to all Canadians that we have laws in Canada that we expect Canadians to abide by and respect. However, as a sovereign nation, we have the ability to ensure that there are consequences for Canadians who commit these hideous crimes outside our borders.

I believe we would find a great deal of sympathy from politicians and all Canadians to look into ways in which we as a society can say that it is not right and that there needs to be a consequence to what is taking place. In terms of this particular bill, it is something I see going to committee for some feedback from some of the stakeholders.

•(1750)

The member herself makes mention that she has some friendly amendments; we look forward to seeing those friendly amendments.

At the end of the day, I am sure there is a high sense of co-operation in terms of trying to do the right thing on the issue of exploitation of this nature.

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to discuss the legislation introduced by my colleague, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, which would strengthen our ability to hold human traffickers accountable for their crimes.

Private Member's Bill C-310 proposes two Criminal Code amendments to combat trafficking in persons. I support the legislation and applaud my colleague for her unwavering commitment to this issue. I urge all members to support the rapid passage of the bill into law.

The first thing the bill would do is enable the Canadian prosecution of Canadian citizens or permanent residents who commit either the human trafficking offence, section 279.01 of the Criminal Code, or the child-specific trafficking offence abroad, section 279.011. In other words, the bill proposes to provide Canada with extraterritorial jurisdiction to prosecute two of the four trafficking offences.

Private Members' Business

I support these amendments and pause here to note that it was another private member's bill introduced by the member for Kildonan—St. Paul that created the child-specific trafficking offence. It came into force last year, having received widespread support in Parliament. I note there appears to be the same widespread support this evening. That offence imposes mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment for child traffickers, a punishment that is certainly fitting of this crime.

Canada does not normally assume jurisdiction to prosecute criminal conduct that occurs beyond our borders. Canada is not unique in this regard, and the reasons for not assuming jurisdiction for crimes committed abroad are based primarily on the principle of respect for the sovereignty of the state where the offence took place. In the limited number of cases in which Canada has extended prosecutorial discretion, it was because there was an international consensus to do so, which is most often reflected in an international treaty to which Canada is party.

Perhaps the most widely known example of this in Canada is our so-called child sex tourism offence, which allows Canada to prosecute Canadians who commit sexual offences against children while abroad. In this case, assuming jurisdiction to prosecute trafficking offences committed abroad would be based on our international treaty obligations contained in the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplemental Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

Canada is party to both these treaties, which encourage, although do not require, countries to assume extraterritorial jurisdiction to prosecute their nationals for committing human trafficking abroad.

These proposed amendments will enable us to more fully implement these important transnational crime treaties.

We would not be unique in this regard. Countries with legal systems similar to ours, including the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand and Australia, have the ability to prosecute their nationals who commit human trafficking abroad. I am very pleased that this proposed legislation would move us in a similar direction.

I stop here to reflect on these amendments and whether it makes sense to include the two additional Criminal Code offences targeting trafficking in persons in these proposed amendments. Those offences—section 279.02, prohibiting the receipt of a financial or other material benefit from the commission of a trafficking offence, and section 279.03, prohibiting the withholding of travel or identity documents in order to facilitate trafficking—also provide important ways for the Canadian judicial system to respond to this horrific practice.

It seems to me that there is some logic in ensuring that all of the trafficking-specific offences can be prosecuted in Canada when they are committed by Canadians or Canadian permanent residents abroad. I for one would certainly support that kind of amendment were it brought forward.

Second, Bill C-310 would enact what I would call an interpretive provision that sets out a non-exhaustive list of factors that a court might take into consideration when determining whether the legal

test of exploitation has been made out for the purpose of human trafficking offences.

We all know that at the very core of the crime of human trafficking is the exploitation of another person. Traffickers deny victims their individual autonomy and employ force, threats and other forms of coercion in order to compel their victims to provide their labour or services, and, because trafficking is about the exploitation of another person, our criminal laws make exploitation a critical element to be proven.

• (1755)

The Criminal Code defines exploitation. It says that a person exploits another person if they:

cause them to provide, or offer to provide, labour or a service by engaging in a conduct that, in all the circumstances, could reasonably be expected to cause the other person to believe that their safety or the safety of a person known to them would be threatened if they failed to provide, or offer to provide, the labour or service

Our laws also define exploitation in the context of organ removal, but I will not focus on that aspect of our definition today.

The definition of exploitation that I have just noted provides a flexible test and captures the various ways that traffickers compel their victims to provide labour or service, including through physical or emotional coercion.

This definition requires one to look at the effect that such conduct would reasonably be expected to have on a victim, objectively speaking, while also taking into account the particular circumstances of the victim.

I believe this kind of flexible approach is critical in this area. Trafficking in persons is a crime that is not confined to a single act like assault or murder, but rather is a complex pattern of behaviours and actions on the part of the offenders that, taken together, result in the victim having no choice but to provide their labour or service.

Our laws must provide the flexibility to be able to address the continuum of conduct. In saying this, I acknowledge that there are some who believe proving exploitation is difficult, and while our trafficking laws may be clear, they must also be clearly understood.

I believe that it is in this vein that my colleague has proposed to create an interpretive aid for the purpose of assisting the courts in understanding the types of conduct that can be taken into consideration when determining whether exploitation has occurred. I support her efforts in bringing clarity in this regard.

It should be noted that this kind of interpretive aid is not unique in the Criminal Code. For example, subsection 153(1.2) provides a non-exhaustive list of conduct that a court may take into consideration when determining whether a relationship is exploitive of a young person. Section 153 is a sexual exploitation offence involving persons in a position of trust or authority.

Another example is subsection 467.11(3), which provides a non-exhaustive list of factors to consider when determining whether an accused participated in activities of a criminal organization.

The proposed amendment of clause 2 of the bill would list force, threats and other forms of coercion, as well as fraudulent misrepresentation, as being conduct that is relevant to consider in determining whether exploitation has been made out.

This is obviously so, but it will provide police and prosecutors insight into the kinds of evidence that may be relevant and in this regard will streamline and facilitate the investigation and prosecution process.

I am supportive of this amendment. I look forward to working with the sponsor to strengthen and pass the bill in a timely fashion. I urge all members to support this important piece of legislation.

● (1800)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak today on private member's Bill C-310, An Act to amend the Criminal Code in relation to trafficking in persons, put forward by the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul. I want to congratulate her on her work in this area. It is extremely important that this legislation be brought forward.

As the previous speaker said, it arises from Canada taking up obligations internationally under the treaty known as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, a supplement to the 200 United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.

It is good that we are doing this. I know the member does not have another opportunity to speak, but it is worthy of note that it has taken some time for the kind of information in the bill to be passed. One would have thought that the government, instead of waiting for the work of a private member, would have taken this on—not necessarily the current government, but perhaps the previous government. The convention is very particular about definitions of exploitation, which we are finally putting into our own law, and I want to thank the member for bringing that forward.

It is all very well to use the term “exploitation”, but without proper definitions it is difficult for prosecutors and police to even know what evidence they have to present in order to get a conviction. I understand there have been only five prosecutions under this legislation since the amendments made to the Criminal Code in 2005. That seems to me to be an indication that there were serious deficiencies in the law. The evidentiary information that is required was not specific; now it will be.

Two aspects that the mover of the motion and bill put forward are very important. Extraterritoriality is obviously very important. It is extraordinary for us to do that, as previous speakers have said. In areas such as this, we are talking about a crime that is not committed only in Canada: the persons are brought here and continue to be exploited here, but much of the exploitive activity may indeed take place in another country. To have extraterritoriality is important.

The first time Canada has done this in recent years has been in respect of so-called sex tourism. Sexual exploitation of children or sexual pedophilia was the primary crime involved with Canadians travelling abroad for what came to be known as sex tourism. People were actually involved in promoting destinations for this purpose, to the revulsion of many Canadians.

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The government was called upon to make this a crime of extraterritoriality. People have been prosecuted under those measures, and it has done something to suppress this particular criminal activity. We hope it will be equally successful in the case of the human trafficking that is normally brought to Canada, but within Canada it is being done as well, frankly. People are being brought from one place to another within Canada. Sometimes aboriginal people from reserves are brought to other parts of this country for exploitation, and this practice needs to be suppressed.

There are two things. One is the extraterritoriality, which we support and agree with. The second is the definition of exploitation, which is very valuable in spelling out some of the factors that can constitute exploitation. It is not conclusive or exhaustive, as the previous speaker indicated, but clearly it includes the use of violence or the threat to use violence and the use of force or the threat to use force—which may be two different things—as well as to use or threaten another form of coercion or to use fraudulent misrepresentation or fraudulent means.

Fraudulent means is probably one of the most common ones. It is carried out by suggesting that people come to Canada to do a particular type of work; then they are forced into either sexual exploitation, prostitution or forced labour. This is something that is not readily recognized, but both my colleagues opposite have mentioned it.

● (1805)

People have been put in servitude as a result of exploitation and human trafficking. It is very difficult for them to get out of this, because they are in places of victimization and under the control of other people. This is something that needs work. I would urge the member to talk to other parts of her government about this.

This convention talks about the countries that are party to it also taking measures, and this is extremely important. It says:

Each State Party shall consider implementing measures to provide for the physical, psychological and social recovery of victims of trafficking in persons, including, in appropriate cases, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, other relevant organizations and other elements of civil society, and, in particular, the provision of: (a) Appropriate housing; (b) Counselling and information, in particular as regards their legal rights, in a language that the victims of trafficking in persons can understand; (c) Medical, psychological and material assistance; and (d) Employment, educational and training opportunities.

There is a whole other aspect of this. It says that when we do come across victims of this type of exploitation, we should not put them on a deportation list but protect them. Part of the threat against a person who is here is that the person who is exploiting the individual can frighten that person into believing that the government will deport him or her if the person exposes the exploitation. This is something that has to be looked after.

Article 7 of this protocol says:

In addition to taking measures pursuant to article 6 of this Protocol, each State Party shall consider adopting legislative or other appropriate measures that permit victims of trafficking in persons to remain in its territory, temporarily or permanently, in appropriate cases.

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It is not automatic, but it should be considered so that if victims of exploitation are discovered, there may be special programs whereby Immigration Canada would say the individual would be put in a special category. Part 2 of Article 7 states, "...each State Party shall give appropriate consideration to humanitarian and compassionate factors". That implies obviously that particular circumstances should be taken into consideration.

Perhaps the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration should also be looking at this to see what programs or changes may need to be included in legislation. If we are truly concerned about this and want to follow through on what we agree to here, we ought to have other things.

This is a good step. It is an appropriate step, the extraterritorial and helping to define it. People may not come forward or feel they cannot come forward unless they have a sense that they will get the protection from Canada that they will need as victims to get out of the slavery or the exploitation or the abuse they are suffering. That is the important part here.

We support this legislation. I am proud to support this legislation. Members opposite from time to time suggest that New Democrats do not seem to want to support legislation that makes it easier to prosecute criminals and assist victims. Of course that is not true. That is a lot of rhetoric that we hear from time to time. I see a smile from my colleague on the justice committee. We do hear that a bit. We are here to do a proper job for Canadians and to make sure laws are passed that achieve the objectives that are stated.

In this particular case, it is entirely appropriate that we make this extraterritorial. It is entirely appropriate that we define threats and violence to assist in the prosecutorial efforts to suppress this activity and to punish those who take part in this activity.

It is also entirely appropriate that we ask for more. It may not be a private member who can deal with this. It may require the resources and the knowledge and the experience of the people who work in the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to achieve the proper tools and the proper legislation.

I fully support and endorse Bill C-310. I sought to be one of the co-seconders but I understand it was oversubscribed. That is a good indication that this is a measure that deserves the support and consent and implementation by the House and by the government.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to rise to speak to Bill C-310. I want to thank the member for Kildonan—St. Paul for the incredible work she has done in being an advocate for this. I thank her and her family. Her husband and son have made a great sacrifice.

I think of William Wilberforce 200 years ago, who was the conscience of the British Parliament. He gave his life to see human trafficking, slavery, ended. In this Parliament we have a Wilberforce in the member, who has worked tirelessly to see modern-day slavery, human trafficking, end. I again thank her.

We have heard comments in the House today already that there appears to be unanimous support for this bill going forward. Wilberforce spent most of his life, many years, arguing in Parliament. He was nicknamed the conscience of the British

Parliament. Hopefully this bill will pass very quickly so we can deal with this important issue.

The most vulnerable members of society tend to be those who are most likely to fall victim to this horrible crime. So often the most vulnerable do not have the ability to advocate for themselves. My colleague's unwavering support and determination to improve Canada's anti-trafficking responses and advocacy for those without a voice is to be commended and ensures that we as parliamentarians remain vigilant against this criminal activity.

I appreciate the opportunity to debate this bill. It affords each of us as parliamentarians the opportunity to once again discuss this serious issue of trafficking of persons. A week ago a number of young people came to my constituency office and presented 240 letters. These were young people horrified to realize that this happens in this day and age. They were from Walnut Grove Secondary School and I admire their courage and tenacity in calling on Parliament to make these important changes.

My colleague has already provided an overview of the bill and I support her comments. I do not intend to discuss the proposed amendments in any great detail, other than to say that I support this bill wholeheartedly and am committed to working closely with the sponsor to ensure it achieves its objectives.

I know that the Government of Canada has demonstrated a willingness to work with all parties, the international community and other stakeholders to address the crime of trafficking in persons. The government takes very seriously the task of improving Canada's criminal law responses in order to protect the vulnerable, to hold offenders to account and to improve community safety. These principles, offender accountability, protecting the vulnerable and standing up for Canadian communities, are at the very core of this bill and are objectives that the government strongly supports. I believe they cut across party lines and are unanimously endorsed by all members in the House. I am sure that in the spirit of collaboration we will quickly pass this bill into law.

The Government of Canada has long recognized the importance of a comprehensive, coordinated, multi-sectoral strategy to respond to trafficking in persons. The government's approach has focused on four specific objectives: one, preventing trafficking; two, protecting the victims; three, prosecuting offenders; and four, working in partnership with others. The four Ps approach has served Canada well and we remain at the vanguard of anti-trafficking efforts around the world.

Building on this approach, the government is committed to releasing a national action plan on human trafficking to better guide Canadian efforts. I applaud the government and my friend, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, for their commitment and believe that an action plan will further strengthen our ability to prevent this crime, protect victims and hold traffickers accountable.

I would like to highlight a few examples of recent federal efforts. Recognizing the importance that a strong knowledge base can play in supporting ongoing responses, last year, in 2010, the government released a study examining the question of whether a national data collection framework could be established and the challenges associated with doing so.

• (1810)

The study and its recommendations continue to provide valuable guidance to all jurisdictions in Canada that are looking at this important issue.

Also last year, in 2010, the RCMP released its national threat assessment on human trafficking. The objectives of the assessment were to identify the extent of trafficking in persons in Canada, as well as organized crime involvement, transnational associations, source countries and trends involving foreign nationals and domestic victims.

The assessment includes analysis of organized criminal groups with suspected involvement in human trafficking, as well as discussions of issues, challenges and intelligence gaps that affect enforcement efforts in the disruption of human trafficking activities in Canada. In that way, the assessment aims to provide strategic guidance for enforcement efforts.

I know the government is also working hard in the areas of prevention and awareness and has recently launched into two national awareness campaigns—

• (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. member for Langley will have about four minutes remaining for his speech when the House next returns to this order of business.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

FLOODING IN MONTRÉGIE

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on June 8, I asked the Minister of Public Safety about our soldiers' involvement in the cleanup effort following the flooding in Montérégie, more specifically in the riding of Saint-Jean.

The people of my riding were harshly affected by the flooding in the region last spring. As is the case in any natural disaster, it was a time of high stress and great concern for all those affected. In fact, the victims of this disaster are still dealing with the repercussions today.

When the Richelieu River crested and caused the flooding, I asked the minister to explain the government's reaction to this natural

disaster. My question was specifically on the lack of solidarity shown by this federal government during this situation in particular, and during past natural disasters in general.

The minister said that the Canadian Forces did an outstanding job. I agree that when the Canadian Forces finally arrived, and during the very short time they were there, they did excellent work, and I am very grateful for the help they provided to the people of my riding. We appreciated their service and know-how, which are invaluable at times like these.

That is precisely why we asked the government to make people's safety its top priority, to show solidarity with the victims and to send the army as soon as possible in order to allow the people, the flood victims, to remain in the region to help with the cleanup. Our forces have the skills, training, know-how and experience needed to tackle situations like the terrible flooding that occurred in the Saint-Jean riding and across the Montérégie region last spring.

We needed the Canadian Forces to ensure that the evacuations were carried out properly and that no lives were put in danger because of the situation. I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to represent a community that has shown that it can really come together during tough times. At the same time, it was very irresponsible of the government to ignore its obligation to ensure public safety.

I remember the minister saying that the Canadian Forces should not have to compete with the private sector. This brings a question to mind. When he said that, was the minister thinking of the safety of Canadians as a simple consumer good? Would he not agree that it is the government's duty to ensure the safety of Canadians?

He said something else that I found rather shocking. He said that helping the flood victims with their home repairs was not the Canadian Forces' role. So, the same question applies. Does the minister not believe that, in an emergency situation, making a house safe and livable is a matter of public safety?

• (1820)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): To begin, Mr. Speaker, I would like to reassure the hon. member for Saint-Jean that this government stands by the people of Montérégie who were affected by the flooding and all those affected by disasters across Canada. This has been a year marked by flooding and forest fires in many provinces. Of course, the Department of National Defence remains committed to fulfilling its obligations in terms of national security and helping affected communities. That is what we did in Saint-Jean and the other communities throughout Canada, providing help to civil authorities during a particularly active season for natural disasters.

I would like to thank the hon. member for recognizing the expertise, know-how and contributions of the Canadian Forces in Saint-Jean. They were there not just once, but twice. The first time they stayed until the waters had stopped rising. The second time, a bit later in the summer, they were there during the flood, when the waters of the Saint-Jean River rose even higher.

Adjournment Proceedings

My duty and my commitment to the hon. member and to the opposition members who are seeking an answer to this question is to remind the members of this House of the role that the Canadian Forces play during a natural disaster and of the concrete contribution they made this summer in Montérégie and elsewhere in Canada. We empathize with the people in Quebec and Manitoba who have suffered so much, as well as with those who were affected by the forest fires in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario. Although it was not hit as hard as Montérégie, New Brunswick also experienced fairly serious flooding.

It is a top priority for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces to deliver excellence at home and to ensure the safety and defence of the people of Canada when a crisis occurs. The Canadian Forces are proud to help civilian authorities by responding to a wide variety of situations that may threaten our country, in particular, natural disasters.

In the wake of a natural disaster, such as a snow or ice storm—something for which Quebec and Ontario are famous—fires or major flooding, the Canadian Forces can use their unique abilities to help the civilian authorities. When such situations occur, the Canadian Forces deploy to the affected area immediately following the catastrophe to offer their help and they stay there until their unique abilities are no longer needed. That is exactly what they did in Montérégie this summer.

The help the Canadian Forces provide depends on the nature of the request. Specialized abilities, particularly in the areas of engineering, security, transportation, aviation and logistics, may be required. The Canadian Forces can also provide support to health services, various vessels, dive teams and satellite imagery services.

As the hon. member knows, follow-up to these operations is a provincial responsibility. The government offers programs that share the financial burden of this second phase of public assistance through the Department of Public Safety.

• (1825)

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am still looking for answers. I am a bit disappointed since I asked a question of the Minister of Public Safety, but it was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence who replied. Everyone agrees that the Canadian Forces have done a remarkable job, but my question was about public safety.

Since Canadians have every right to expect the government to have a specific action plan to deal with disasters, I had these two questions for the Minister of Public Safety, who unfortunately is not here. What lessons were learned about public safety from these tragic events? What concrete measures will the government take, before next spring, to assure Canadians that they will never again find themselves in the same situation as the flood victims in Montérégie?

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the immense, wild nature of this country cannot be controlled. Neither this government nor any other is able to prevent natural disasters in the country. However, we remain absolutely determined to ensure that one of the Canadian Forces' highest priorities is the duty to provide help to civilian authorities in the event of a natural disaster. This year, their level of commitment in that regard has broken almost every record.

In the case of operation Lotus, in Montérégie, more than 800 soldiers provided their help at the height of the operation. They repaired two major dikes, filled 224,000 bags of sand, spent more than 1,100 hours helping members of the community make checkup visits and protected more than 800 private residences.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. Your time has expired.

The hon. member for Halifax.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect the government to protect their environment. I do not know if Canadians necessarily expect the present government to protect their environment, but they want guarantees that the air, water and soil are healthy, and that future generations would not be burdened with our failure to protect the environment today. However, I do not think the present government sees environmental stewardship as a priority and I think that is a huge mistake.

As we know, a healthy and biologically diverse planet is probably the most important gift that we can give to our children and grandchildren. This includes preventing socio-economic ramifications based on inaction on climate change and the protection of the ozone. That is why recent cuts announced by the government to Environment Canada have left Canadians wondering whether the government is actually committed to improving the quality of environmental monitoring and protection in Canada, and whether or not the government truly understands the risks it is taking with our health, environment, economy and, frankly, with our national security.

The Conservatives regularly pay lip service to the idea of environmental stewardship. We see this in the throne speech and in answers during question period, but the evidence is always to the contrary.

For example, cuts to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency of 43% and the elimination of one-third of its staff fly in the face of any premise for improved environmental protection. I think the same can be said of the fact that nearly 800 positions will be eliminated from Environment Canada, and that would leave about 300 departmental staff unemployed. These workers are scientists and researchers. These cuts would severely limit the agency's ability to prepare and respond to threats to the environment.

We have heard no commitment from the government on its plans moving forward. Also, we have not heard about any analysis the government has done on what would happen with these cuts. The Minister of the Environment has said that the cuts made to the department will not affect core services. This is something he keeps saying, but he has refused to say what is a core service, or what he considers to be a core service.

Adjournment Proceedings

Water protection programs are being cut. Programs respecting the duty to consult first nations on environmental degradation are at risk as well. These are important services that I think a lot of us would consider core services.

The minister also insists that programs will not be cut, but some of the programs that we do run in Environment Canada are staffed solely by one scientist. Therefore, if we lose that scientist, we are in fact losing an entire program.

In that vein, if we look at the cuts to Environment Canada, the government has greatly reduced the department's ability to monitor ozone science, such as the Canadian ozone science and monitoring program. The government has decided that it is time to cut funding to this kind of essential program.

This is a made in Canada solution to an international problem. We are renowned the world over for the work that we are doing in ozone. It is something that we should be celebrating, not something that we should be cutting.

Action by the government domestically has further garnered an international critique of Canada's commitments to its international partners. These ozone cuts have attracted criticism from scientists around the world.

I have the following questions to the parliamentary secretary tonight. Why does the government insist on cutting these programs, which would be cut through the elimination of staff? What proof does it have that these cuts are even needed? What would be the impacts of these cuts?

• (1830)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I actually share my colleague's viewpoint and I know our government does as well, in acknowledging that protecting our environment is important.

That is why we have taken concrete action on protecting Canada's environment. We are also cognizant of the fact that we need to do that within a framework of protecting Canada's fragile economic recovery.

Again, I am in agreement with the member in sharing that effective and timely environmental assessment through the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency is very important for our country, especially with regard to ensuring sustainable economic growth for Canada.

I hope the member shares our view that we are also responsible for ensuring that we are wise stewards of taxpayers' dollars. With specific regard to her question around the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, which was the content of the question put to the House on the order paper, any suggestion that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency is being cut by 43% is highly misleading.

As the member opposite may remember, the president of the CEAA, Ms. Elaine Feldman, appeared at the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development on October 25, 2011. Referring to the 43% difference in funding reported by CEAA, Ms. Feldman said, "These are not cuts".

To continue dealing in fact-based information, in 2007 under the cabinet directive on improving the performance of the regulatory system for major resource projects, CEAA took on additional responsibilities for environmental assessment and aboriginal consultations.

To meet these responsibilities, the agency was allocated \$11 million per year for five years. An additional \$2.3 million per year has been provided for aboriginal consultations associated with review panels. Five years have now nearly passed and these funds are due to sunset at the end of fiscal year 2010-11.

The 43% difference my colleague referred in funding at issue here are in fact sunseting funds. These are term defined funds due to sunset at the end of this fiscal year. For that reason, the agency has projected a decrease in the agency's budget if the sunseting funds are not renewed.

Just to be clear to the House and to answer my colleague's question, a decision regarding whether or not to renew these sunseting funds has not been made yet. The agency's funding has not been cut.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for her comments and her answer.

When it comes to the cuts, something that is sunseted and not renewed is a cut. We have had no indication that money will be renewed. The agency has actually prepared contingency budgets for not having that money. As far as I am concerned, that is a cut.

As the member knows, we heard from Paul Cassidy today at committee. He is a regulatory affairs lawyer who specializes in environmental assessments. He talked about the fact that this is going to be something that will be very difficult for the agency to manage.

In this day and age when we have things like the unimpeded or unmanaged expansion of the oil sands, for example, there are more and more reasons why we actually need to do environmental assessments. We need to look at things like cumulative effects. We need to do a good job of this.

In fact, I think they are cuts. I want to know from the department what its analysis is of how these cuts will impact the agency.

• (1835)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, again, the money provided to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency through budget 2007 was provided to be cognizant of the fact that we needed to have increased capacity for certain programs that were coming up.

These programs were time limited and that is why the sunseting funds were put into place. That is also why we are reviewing them. Many different programs across government have sunseting clauses because we are responsible to review these programs, to be wise stewards of taxpayers' dollars.

Just to clarify, I disagree with my colleague's stance that this is a cut because we have not made a decision on whether or not to review this funding. We are doing our job as government to review the efficacy of this and whether or not we need continued funding.

Adjournment Proceedings

Just to be perfectly clear, the 43% is not a cut because it was part of a natural sunset clause. We are in the process of reviewing that right now.

VETERANS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is actually the second consecutive night that I have had the opportunity to participate in the adjournment proceedings. I am pleased to see my colleague from the veterans affairs committee, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, here for the second night in a row as well.

Last night, I perhaps made an error using my four minutes to pose four questions because I did not get answers to any of them. So I posed them again in my one minute segment and still did not get answers.

I am going to try it a little differently tonight. I am not going to need the four minutes. I have a straightforward question.

Will the parliamentary secretary confirm that she intends to vote on Thursday at committee to kill public hearings on the budget cuts at Veterans Affairs, and explain to veterans and Canadians why?

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister could not have been clearer in answering the question about whether or not veterans' benefits would be cut. The expert witnesses we heard today at committee could not have been clearer on whether or not veterans' benefits would be cut. So I will add my voice to answer the question

for the member for Charlottetown and let me say it very simply and very clearly. There will be no cuts to veterans' benefits.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I believe perhaps the parliamentary secretary has misunderstood my question. My question was whether she intends to vote on Thursday at committee to kill the public hearings on the budget cuts at Veterans Affairs.

I understand her position. I understand the party line that veterans' benefits are not being cut. The fact is that the Department of Veterans Affairs is going to spend less money this year than last. Its budget has been cut. I understand the party line to be that veterans' benefits will not be cut, but the budget at Veterans Affairs is being cut. There are hearings going on into the matter. Is she going to kill them?

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, let me try one more time in French.

[*Translation*]

There will be no reduction in the benefits provided to veterans.

[*English*]

There are no cuts to veterans' benefits.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:39 p.m.)

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