



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
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CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Monday, April 23, 2012**

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**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 23, 2012

The House met at 11 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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• (1105)

[*English*]

## BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to inform the House that for the purposes and under the provisions of Article 50 of the Parliament of Canada Act the following members have been appointed members of the Board of Internal Economy, namely: Mr. Cullen, member for the electoral district of Skeena—Bulkley Valley in place of Mr. Comartin, member for the electoral district of Windsor—Tecumseh; Ms. Turmel, member for the electoral district of Hull—Aylmer in place of Ms. Charlton, member for the electoral district of Hamilton Mountain.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

### CANADA POST CORPORATION ACT

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)** moved that Bill C-321, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be before the House again to introduce a bill that would amend the Canada Post Corporation Act dealing with library materials.

As many members here know, this is the fourth attempt to get this legislation through the House. We have had great support from members across the way and I am looking forward to that same support today.

Historically, Canada Post has allowed libraries to move books between libraries to constituents at a reduced postal rate. That has been a handshake agreement for many years. In the last several years, Canada Post, obviously with pressure on it to increase revenues, has seen this as one of the areas where it might make a change and revert back to the full retail price, which, in my estimation, would devastate our small rural libraries.

The bill would solidify that reduced rate and protect libraries from any other rate increases without a debate in the House to verify how much and when it should take place.

I have said all along that I am not trying to handcuff Canada Post. I feel that it is important that it not only recognize what a great service this is to the communities that take advantage of it but also that many small communities could not afford to take the hit if they were to go to full retail prices overnight.

My bill also proposes some adjustments to the definition of library materials. In years gone by, a book was a book and libraries transferred books back and forth on a regular basis. My bill would expand the definition and over time this would allow Canada Post to reduce its costs in the sense that it will be shipping lighter materials, and obviously weight plays a big role in the cost. My bill would expand the definition from books to magazines to records to CDs to CD-ROMs to audio cassettes to video cassettes to DVDs and to other audiovisual material.

Having toured a lot of libraries across Canada, I have seen many of them moving into the electronic age. Their books are being transcribed electronically and, over time, I suspect that this will be the mode. Perhaps the long range view is that rate will disappear or at least stay the same for many years to come.

There are some people in Canada who do not have access to libraries either because of where they live, of a disability or for some other reason. Giving people the ability to access a libraries across Canada brings the world to them. This bill would benefit a lot of Canadians. I am told that about one million Canadians use this service directly on a regular basis and up to three million people use it on an occasional basis over a year. It is important that everyone in Canada has access to a library's resources. I see it that way and I see it as a way for libraries to share material.

I will give the House one instance that brought this to my attention. I have a small community library in my riding. It was brought to my attention during a campaign that this rate increase may happen. The annual cost to the library was about \$1,800 and to see the rate change overnight would probably cost \$15,000 to \$18,000, which the library cannot afford. My bill would fix the rate.

*Private Members' Business*

I appreciate the good work that Canada Post does in providing this service. I encourage libraries to make people aware of the service and I encourage people to access a library. I travelled to Alberta last week and the library there told me that this was a good way to build traffic because people do need to go in.

I am not sure I started the expression but I have used it many times. Many years ago, if a community had an elevator it was a thriving community. However, we know what has happened in the past several years, sadly, but if we have a library, maybe it will make up the difference. That is the gist of what I am trying to do.

I thank my colleagues on all sides of the House. I have received tremendous support so far. The last time I introduced the bill, it made it to first reading in the Senate. However, due to changes in the electoral environment I need to start again, which I am prepared to do.

I thank all the people who have written letters and have had libraries write letters of encouragement. I look forward to debate on this. I appreciate this opportunity and I look forward to the bill going forward.

• (1110)

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I stand in the House today to talk about Bill C-321. I salute the member for Brandon—Souris for his work on this bill and for the many years that he has tried to pass the bill through the House. I would like to underline that I will miss his chairmanship now that I am no longer on the same committee. I was vice-chair of the committee on which he is chair. I have always found him to be a very fair member and that his ideas are very practical and pragmatic. He takes a balanced approach to public administration. I know he has tried to pass this bill in the House many times. Therefore, it gives me pleasure to say that our party will be supporting this bill at second reading.

We will be supporting this bill at second reading because it is a practical proposition. We believe that rural communities are dependent on this postal rate. In order to give access to everyone across Canada and fill the gap between the rural and the urban, we need measures like this so that people in rural communities are not deprived of library materials. We believe this bill would allow Canadians to get the library materials they need and would allow Canada Post to do it at a reduced rate.

Usually from the government side we see a desire to privatize public services such as Canada Post. We often hear rhetoric about how the government should not get involved with these arm's-length corporations. We are glad that the government is not taking that approach with this bill. We believe that government does have a role to play and that it can make practical propositions to benefit all Canadians. A crown corporation does not necessarily need to be privatized in order to achieve those aims. Therefore, we are delighted with the fact that members on the government side are willing to make propositions that make sense and are pragmatic.

The one provision I would like to see explored at committee is the five year time limit for the first definition of library materials. In other words, the definition would be decided in five years' time and after that it would be ten years' time.

We never know the pace of technological change. Ten years ago we did not have resources such as YouTube. Then, from 1992 to 2002, technological change went crazy. Therefore, we have put a question mark on the period for the review of library materials just because the pace of technology change in the past 20 years has been fairly accelerated and we would not want libraries to lose out on this reduced rate just because the review period is too long.

Other than that, we believe the bill, as it is, with some minor discussions at committee, will probably pass quite quickly. We do not see any roadblocks. I am sure the member for Brandon—Souris is quite happy that this bill will finally see royal assent.

As a member of this place, I am sure it is a great pleasure to see a bill that comes from one's heart make it through all of the stages of legislation and finally gets passed. That is a great achievement and the member for Brandon—Souris can be proud of that achievement. We salute him.

Other than the things I have mentioned, which perhaps need to be discussed at committee, we plan on supporting the bill.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to echo the compliment paid by the hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges to the hon. member for Brandon—Souris with respect to the value of this bill. The latter must have Irish blood, because he certainly is tenacious. This is the fifth time he has introduced this bill. I find that interesting.

More interesting still is his bill, which the Liberal Party of Canada is very pleased to support. The House passed it during the previous Parliament. I believe the bill made it all the way to the Senate. The House passed it unanimously.

This bill is important for a number of reasons. On behalf of my party, I would like to salute Canada Post workers for their extraordinary work.

[*English*]

I think that even if they were mistreated by the current government, we have to make sure that we salute them for the amazing job they do and their contribution. I would also like to salute the member for Brandon—Souris, whose private member's bill sends a clear note to the government that it has a role to play in this crown corporation.

[*Translation*]

The name of the game, as they say, is access to literacy and making sure that all people, whether they live in rural, urban or suburban communities, are treated like first-class citizens.

Without a doubt, this bill will ensure that all Canadians, regardless of where they live, have access. It makes sense to establish a library book rate to help people become better citizens and fight ignorance and illiteracy.

My party and I have no choice but to vote for this bill.

The questions that my NDP colleague raised are valid. Technology is changing extremely quickly, and that is why this bill will really emphasize access to those kinds of documents. This is about audiovisual materials, not just books. Books come in many guises now, including paper and electronic versions. We have to take that into account, but we should not get bogged down in the details. This bill deserves our support because Canadians need it.

I believe that there were over 713,000 packages sent, each containing one or two books. The Canadian Library Association also supports this bill.

I just want to say that we are very happy to support this bill. Nevertheless, we will ask questions. The chair of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities bombards us with questions from time to time. Now it is our turn, but this bill has our enthusiastic support all the same.

[English]

**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, one of the reasons that I am proud to serve as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport is the essential nature of transportation in a country with a geography such as ours.

If we consider the facts of our country, the longest distance north to south on land is 4.6 thousand kilometres from Cape Columbia on Ellesmere Island in Nunavut to Middle Island in Lake Erie, Ontario. The longest distance east to west is 5.5 thousand kilometres from Cape Spear in Newfoundland and Labrador to the Yukon territory at the Alaska boundary. Despite this fact, we have the 39th biggest population in the world, meaning we have one of the less populated lands, despite our enormous geographic breadth.

In short, Canada has one of the lowest population densities in the world. That means that we have enormous challenges moving people and things to their destinations. One of the things that matters most is books and other reading materials that come in the form of magazine publications, journals and specialized articles that are very hard for some people to get other than at their local libraries. This bill seeks to address that challenge.

Before I discuss how it does that, I would like to talk a bit about the changing nature of the marketplace of cultural products. I have been reading a book called *The Long Tail*, by Chris Anderson. He talks about how, not so long ago, sales of music products, for example, were overwhelmingly concentrated in the top 20 or top 100 artists or albums. That was because of something called shelf space. Music stores had only so much shelf space that they could offer to musicians. As a result, they had to dedicate that shelf space to those products that sold at the highest volumes. That meant that promising artists who had a dispersed following with a moderate but no less significant demand would not even get into music stores. They could not get shelf space. As a result, it was always the top 20 and top 100 that had most of the sales.

Something interesting happened with the growth of the digital world, which was infinite shelf space. No longer was physical space required to store the books, cassettes, CDs or records, as used to be required in the pre-digital era. Now there is literally infinite shelf

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space at our fingertips as we sit in front of our personal computers, laptops, iPads or any other devices that connect to the Internet. This means two things: one, it eliminates the barriers of transportation that afflicted a vast country such as ours; two, specialized artists, which is to say people who write or produce music in areas for which there is a small niche demand, can now have an easier time reaching their market because they do not need to secure shelf space at major retailers. This is true for music and books, and it is an exciting development in the democratization of literature and reading.

People who have unique interests and live in remote communities will not have to travel long distances or wait long periods of time for books to be delivered to them. In fact, they can order them online as long as they have some sort of Internet connection, which increasingly they do.

● (1120)

In 2007, 65% of rural Canadians used the Internet, compared with 76% of urban Canadians; by the end of 2009, 84% of rural households had access to broadband, compared with 100% of urban households. Less than 80% of rural households in the territories, Newfoundland, Quebec and British Columbia had access to broadband. Nearly 100% of rural households in P.E.I., New Brunswick and Nova Scotia had access to broadband.

To summarize all of these statistics, what is most interesting is that in a two-year period, from 2007 to 2009, we saw Canada's rural communities go from two-thirds with broadband access to three-quarters. That trajectory is very promising. It means not only the democratization of the Internet but also increased digital access to literature and other cultural products.

This is very positive. What we need to do as a government is more or less stay out of the way and allow, in a low-tax, free-trade, limited regulatory environment, the marketplace to provide this great explosion of digital opportunities to the Canadian people.

There remains a gap, however. That is the gap that my hon. colleague and chairman of the transport committee is seeking to address in moving this private member's bill. We all congratulate him for doing that.

His bill would allow Canada Post to continue to take advantage of its enormous economies of scale in delivering things from one place to another. One very important thing, as I said earlier, is literature: publications, books and other materials. There are certain people who are either disabled, do not have the financial means or are, for whatever reasons, suffering from an inability to access written materials; this bill would help them to do just that.

By taking advantage of the economies of scale of this vast crown corporation, which already delivers vast amounts of mail across the country, we can provide a low-cost opportunity for these Canadians who would otherwise be excluded from publications that interest them to have access to those publications. It is in that spirit that we support this bill.

*Private Members' Business*

At the same time, we celebrate the fact that the free enterprise economy is delivering to Canadians of all incomes, of all walks of life, in all geographies, access to knowledge that was not even contemplated only a couple of decades ago. To call the transformation in communications technology that we witnessed in the last quarter century “revolutionary” would be an understatement. It is a tribute to the enormous power of free enterprise economics that this commerce has brought us these new tools that make it possible for people of limited means to have extraordinary access to knowledge and to thereby have incredible upward mobility in our economy.

Every day that I wake up, I celebrate the fact that I was born in a free country with a largely free economy, a country that is now the sixth-freest economy in the world, four spots ahead of the United States of America. This government made its decision to reduce the cost of the state by \$5 billion over the next three years, to expand free trade, eliminate excessive regulation and keep taxes low. We are building upon that Canadian tradition of free enterprise. That is the source, the fundamental source, of our prosperity; we celebrate it and we build upon it.

• (1125)

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-321.

As indicated by my hon. colleague from Vaudreuil-Soulanges and all members on both sides of the House who have spoken on this issue, the NDP will gladly support this bill, which the House has been trying to pass for the past few sessions and which, for various reasons, has never passed third reading to receive royal assent.

I would like to take this opportunity here today to address a few issues related to this bill. These issues are not necessarily part of today's debate, but I think they are worth pointing out.

As hon. members probably know, the postal subsidy program has existed since the 19th century, but it was modified in 1939 specifically to include the shipment of library books. I mention library books because that is probably one area that will have to be revisited in committee, in order to increase the bill's scope.

We must not forget that in the 1990s, the program was cut by 50%. I am sure we all recall the cuts made by the Liberal government of the day, including the social program review, in particular. So, funding to this program was cut by 50% and the eligibility criteria had to be tightened considerably in order to promote Canadian owned and controlled subscriber-paid publications.

However, in March 1996, the legality of the postal subsidy was challenged before the WTO, which revived the whole issue of cultural exclusion in international trade relationships. Indeed, Canada and especially Quebec have always defended the notion that the cultural industry—books, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, movies, DVDs, music—and, to some extent, broadcasting express and reflect ideas, opinions, values and traditions, and as a result, contribute to the structure and identity of a community, a population or a nation.

Canada had to comply with the terms and conditions of the GATT agreements in 1998. The program's preferential postal rates were

converted into direct subsidies through separate accounts at Canada Post for each registered title. The costs related to these rates therefore had to be absorbed by the crown corporation. That decision likely contributed to putting the nail in the coffin for this program, which officially stopped being a government program in 2005. However, thanks to pressure from libraries and industry organizations, Canada Post has granted an extension of the rates every year since 2005.

Since that time, the rates have never increased, which is a credit to Canada Post. However, that is about to change, since Canada Post announced for the latest year of the program—this year—a 5% increase to the library book rate, effective January 16, 2012.

For example, sending a package that weighs just over two pounds at the library book rate currently costs 92¢. That amount increased to 97¢ in January 2012. Without the library book rate, the same service of sending and returning a book would cost \$18 through a post office. There are truly very significant savings when it comes to library books and they benefit the entire Canadian library network, whether we are talking about public libraries or university libraries.

In general, I believe that this shows the importance of being able to vote for a bill such as the one introduced by my colleague from Brandon—Souris. However, the library book rate program is scheduled to end on December 31, 2012, after being renewed for more than five years. For almost 30 years, and especially since the 2008 Canada Post strategic review, the corporation has been trying to reinvent itself, sometimes even abandoning the fundamental principle of universal and accessible postal services. Thus, it is a pleasant surprise that this program is still in place.

In defence of this crown corporation, I have to agree that it is not just up to Canada Post to cover the cost of this program to promote culture and knowledge. Hence the Canadian Library Association, as well as most stakeholders, recommended that the federal government ensure the continuation of the program. However, stakeholders do not agree on whether the program is part of the universal service obligation—the USO—that Canada Post has toward Canadians. The strategic review advisory panel's conclusion was as follows:

As a matter of principle, Canada Post should not be required to subsidize or otherwise pay for those public policy objectives that are not an explicit part of the USO. If a government department or agency proposes public policy activities like the ones above, the government should open the service to a competitive bidding process on a contract basis where such options exist.

• (1130)

To quote further from the advisory panel carrying out the strategic review of Canada Post:

While Canada Post as provider of postal services to all Canadians has been delivering publications since before Confederation, it does not have the mandate to promote Canadian culture by subsidizing postal rates for Canadian publications. That is the responsibility of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

One thing is clear: if Canada Post does not receive assistance, it will end this program, be it in 2013 or at some other time.

The crown corporation estimates that in 2007 alone, it lost \$6 million because of this program. On the other hand, if the library book rate is raised or eliminated, libraries could pay postage fees that are up to 24 times higher, which would significantly curtail our access to information, knowledge and library services.

In Quebec alone, some 800 small public libraries use Canada Post's library book rate. In 2010 alone, over 115,000 interlibrary loans were made. A lot is at stake for them.

Public libraries are gateways to knowledge. That is why high-profile organizations like UNESCO promote them. In fact, UNESCO adopted the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto in 1995 in collaboration with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions to guide the creation and evolution of public libraries around the world.

The manifesto states that public libraries are a living force and a natural ally for education, culture and information. It also says that libraries are an essential agent for the fostering of civic-mindedness and peace because certain values “can only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information.”

In that sense, government support is key, if not crucial, to encouraging and promoting these local institutions, which open doors and minds to knowledge and possibilities.

I would like to add that this bill and the difference it could make are of particular concern to me given that I represent a riding that is largely rural and that depends on this kind of program so that libraries that would normally have a hard time accessing many books and library materials would be able to access them without necessarily blowing their budget. In rural settings, it is often difficult to properly fund organizations that are key to the vitality of several municipalities, because of the lack of resources. Interlibrary loans are an essential tool in sharing these costs in a uniform manner so they can all benefit.

If the book subsidy program currently offered by Canada Post as part of this interlibrary loan program were eliminated, libraries in small municipalities would suffer first and foremost.

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport said about the issue of the availability of information. He was quite right to mention that the free market in information and the development of new technology have increased knowledge through various media such as the iPad, the Internet and so on. However, this is not all that different from what bookstores were offering in terms of library materials. One can easily go and buy a book at a library, just as one can buy access to documentation online for iPads and for other devices.

In that sense, this provides part of the equation. Public libraries represent opportunities for those who cannot afford to buy books and documents, so they can consult them for free, which democratizes

### *Private Members' Business*

information and knowledge. That is why it is important that we do not confuse the issues. The issue of access to information in the private sector is an important one and we fully support that, but we need to ensure thoroughly democratic access to information and its public availability.

● (1135)

As I said, we will be supporting this bill. We would like to propose some amendments in committee, including, for example, increasing the number of materials that can be exchanged—not only books, but also other materials that can be accessed by various devices.

I am pleased to announce the NDP's support for this bill.

[English]

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise today and address such an important issue. This bill has appeared before previous Parliaments, but this is the first opportunity I have had to stand in this place and speak to this bill. I want to thank my colleague from Brandon—Souris for his dedication and commitment to ensuring this legislation goes forward. It is of critical importance and very vital to the lifeblood of, particularly, smaller and rural communities, much like the communities that make up my constituency of Wetaskiwin, which I am very honoured and privileged to represent.

Bill C-321 is an act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act, dealing specifically with library materials, as we have been hearing from all the speakers today. Librarians in my riding have been talking to me about this piece of legislation ever since I was elected in 2006. First and foremost, the library book rate supports the intellectual needs of remote or small communities. This is paramount to ensuring that Canadians have timely access to the information they need. We all know the value of libraries in providing intellectual and reading materials to keep our communities current and our education systems working well. It is the principal underpinning of the concept that the collections of all libraries across our country be accessible to all Canadians, and as such support those education and lifelong learning needs as well as help maintain our global productivity and competitiveness.

*Private Members' Business*

I started my post-secondary education in 1987. I was at the University of Alberta taking a bachelor of science but of course I had to take some arts courses. There were a number of libraries on the campus at the university. The main science library was Cameron Library. Occasionally, I would have to get some materials that would be referenced out of one of the smaller libraries on campus. While I could look up the information, I had to go from one library to another to get the materials. If I happened to be in some other library off campus, I would not have access to look up those materials. As I was on the university campus, the information from the main database was shared among all those libraries on that campus. However, if people were not hooked into that system, they did not know that those materials and resources were even there.

I left Red Deer College in 2006 when I was first elected to this House. I was a tenured faculty member there, teaching computer systems technology. We could go to the library at Red Deer College and access any vast number of resources from across the country, through various interlibrary loans and online catalogues. The advancement over that short time, with the implementation of various information technology advances, is incredible. Now we have Canadians from coast to coast to coast able to go to their small municipal library if they are fortunate to have one in their community and look up reference materials all over Canada. That is why this bill is so important. It is important to rural Canada, to western Canada and to the communities I represent.

Being able to access the catalogue of materials in major libraries and have these books sent to communities at a reduced rate allows those small communities to put forward a larger range of reading materials and opportunities without bearing the expensive shipping costs of sending books across the country, of purchasing large amounts of materials to keep in collection and of having the square footage to keep large collections. Coming from rural Alberta, I understand the limitation of not always having access to some of the larger city centres. With a library book rate, library members can easily participate in interlibrary loans, allowing urban and rural library membership alike to have access to the vast library collections across our great country.

Canada Post has been offering this highly discounted postage rate for library books for over 70 years. The rate is significantly discounted, up to 95% of regular parcel rates available to Canadians at Canada Post counters. As staff of public institutions, librarians seek to minimize their costs while maintaining a high level of service to Canadians, a paramount principle. Saving on this postage rate would allow librarians to increase their investment in educational programs and to expand their offerings to all Canadians. This was originally funded directly by the Government of Canada. In 1997, however, a ruling by the World Trade Organization required the cost of the program to be incurred by Canada Post Corporation.

• (1140)

The library book rate is not a government program and is not currently financially supported by the federal government. Members of the library community all across Canada, as well as in my constituency, continue to be concerned about its sustainability, given that Canada Post is a crown corporation with a mandate to generate a dividend for its shareholder, the Government of Canada. Yet the rate

contributes to the public policy goals of literacy, lifelong learning, inclusion and vibrant rural and remote communities.

The library book rate remains very economical and will continue to be substantially lower than the most discounted commercial parcel rates. Consider this. A package weighing about 1.3 kilograms mailed at the library book rates today costs about 97¢ to cover both the sending and returning of a book. This reflects an increase of about 5¢ in January 2012. However, if we did not have the library book rate, the same service of sending and returning the book would cost \$18 if mailed at a post office.

As I have gone across my riding, I have spoken at many libraries and to volunteers who have expressed their concern about what may happen to their libraries if this legislation does not pass. This is a legitimate concern, because this is a musing from Canada Post that comes about from time to time. Of course, as soon as that happens, virtually every library across the country contacts its member of Parliament and brings this issue forward with deep concern.

Many people believe an unfair library service, as those who can afford to pay to expand their libraries will, and those who cannot afford the shipping costs would be left in the dark. This is an issue of fairness. It is making sure that all Canadians have access to those materials and that Canadians in small communities are not prohibited from using their libraries to expand their knowledge in the information economy of the 21st century. Not only that, but the level of service libraries provide would be reduced if the program were forced into a cost-recovery basis, with patrons and distance learners having to bear the cost.

As a matter of fact, my colleague from Brandon—Souris was out in my constituency to talk to people at libraries. We stopped at the Blackfalds Public Library, and I congratulate Yvonne Ketcheson and her staff. Ron Sheppard was there from Parkland Regional Library. Later on in the day we went up to the Pigeon Lake Library at Ma-Me-O Beach and we met with Opal and her staff as well as some folks from the board. We had municipal councillors come out, who are on the various library boards. They talked about the impact it would have on their communities if they lost the library book rate. Someone would have to pick up the difference, which could be so great that it would be hard to imagine the continuation of some of these small libraries in some of these small communities.

Every so often Canada Post muses over raising this rate to make it on par. However, one of the things my colleague and I heard was that if Canada Post were to raise the library postage rate to make it on par, then instead of paying to mail a DVD out and receive it back via mail, a library would be further ahead to send the person the money for the DVD. A person could go out in their local community, buy the DVD or the reference material and keep it, if the postal rate were conducted at cost. We can see the dramatic expense it would be if, every time a person went to the library, the library actually bought the person the material rather than lending the material. This is the impact that an on-par cost for postage would have for libraries. It would simply become unaffordable.



*Private Members' Business*

Thankfully, Bill C-321 proposes that before Canada Post could increase the library book rate it must receive approval from the Government of Canada. This would ensure that the opinions of the constituents of every member of Parliament in the House can be expressed. If that were to come about, members can be assured that every MP in this House would know right away that the library book rate was proposed to change, because the libraries in their communities would be the first to let them know.

Just as technology improves and as innovation goes on, our laws need to be updated to keep up with the pace. I am very pleased that this bill not only proposes to ensure Parliament is aware of any proposed changes but it also broadens the definition of what library resource material is. Right now it includes only books. However, as we move into the digital age, it is not unreasonable for someone who is visually impaired to order a library book in Braille or in large print, an audio book or a book formatted for a computer screen or reader. These are the kinds of things the bill proposes.

It makes complete sense for Parliament to pass this legislation. I would again like to thank my colleague from Brandon—Souris for bringing this forward. I urge all members of the House to speak up and make sure they do the right thing and vote in favour of Bill C-321.

• (1145)

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on Bill C-321, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials). It is an important bill.

I know this bill may not be the flavour of the month, so to speak, in terms of being a bill that people across this country can sink their teeth into, and is controversial, and so forth. That is a good indicator, though, of a Parliament that is functioning well, that we can actually move legislation forward that we do agree on.

New Democrats do agree with this and congratulate the member for bringing this forward yet again. It has been through this House a number of times. Unfortunately elections have interrupted its actual final delivery for Canadians.

It is important. We do live in a technology-based age. At the same time it is really good to see the Conservatives actually supporting good solid public institutions today, be they the library or the Canada Post Corporation, which is a public institution. They were formed because the private sector cannot do everything. To assume that the private sector should or could do everything is a fallacy not only in our country but across the globe.

We founded the Canada Post Corporation to provide for those services to be done efficiently, so Canadians could communicate from coast to coast to coast. We continue to do so because of the principle that we need to communicate amongst ourselves and bind ourselves as a nation in a way that is cost-effective. It is not just about making money. If it were just about making money, then we would charge as much as we could for a stamp, for example.

Canada Post Corporation does do very well. It is an important employer for our country. However, the principle element behind it is to make sure we continue to be able to communicate as a nation. Whether or not we live in Windsor, Ontario, in my riding and want

to send a letter to a relative who might have had to move out to British Columbia or somewhere else, like Alberta, we can actually do that.

I know the digital age has taken up a lot of the different types of communication, whether they be email, Skype, electronic books or video games that people can play online at the same time. However, we still have the old-fashioned written letters, as well as distribution of hard materials that takes place.

As a former job developer for persons with disabilities, I can say it is very expensive to keep some of the library content available. For example, large-print books, talking DVDs or CDs and audio books are very expensive. This bill actually defines those materials as library content so they can be shared with other libraries, be they rural or urban. That is important because, again, as a former job developer for persons with disabilities, I know it is really important for those large-print books to be shared. Often they are more expensive, and different titles are not available across the country. This is an opportunity to be able to share them with other people.

The intent of the bill is to enhance public institutions, enshrining the fact that libraries are a critical component for Canadian learning and should be enhanced. I know a lot of municipalities are under a lot of strain right now, including my own, with regard to keeping these institutions going. If they disappear or we withdraw services, the institutions will be weakened and Canadians will be weakened.

When we look at and think about the bill, on the surface we might think it is just a convenience to be able to have the latest book available, but it is actually the learning experiences necessary for training, education, employment, health and safety and a series of different things that are key to the materials that are out there.

I think it is important to really home in on a couple of things. Canadians do support this. It is interesting that it was unanimously passed in the last Parliament. Every member of Parliament recognized that these institutions are critically important to the foundation of communities.

In my own community of Windsor West, we are going through a process right now with our library where there is the possibility of the re-districting of it. It is generating a lot of interest and lot of different types of commentary. It is all based on trying to enhance it, not actually withdraw services.

• (1150)

The municipal politicians are under difficult financial constraints with regard to their budgetary process right now, but at the same time there is a loud voice out there saying that the library is very important to it.

What is interesting is that we have moved beyond libraries just being a place to go to pick up books. I remember when I used to go as a kid. It was essentially a place to go to get books and bring them home. Now, they are tapped in with the Internet and with computer resources and they support learning services. Our main library has a wood carving museum as well. Libraries have public meetings and functions that take place. They have become social places where people gather. There is a café and all those different things.

*Private Members' Business*

The bill would provide that repertoire of enhanced services to other places. I remember in university, as well, going down to the book store and the library. We had a choice to make. If we could find that book in that library or someone else's library, we could order it and it would only cost about \$1 or \$2 as opposed to paying \$20 to \$40 for a resource we only needed for a week or two. This would provide, again, an opportunity for people to do that at low cost.

The service part of it is really important too, because this would also protect jobs at those institutions. I am glad the Conservatives are protecting the jobs in the public institutions in this particular case, because it would provide more need for staffing and more need for services, but the value we would get out of that is way more than the actual cost to Canadians. In fact, there is no real way to estimate what this would cost, but it would be modest in the overall budgetary picture for Canada. What it would do is re-enhance some of the services necessary to keep these institutions going.

Some countries have moved to privatize parts of their postal services, and that has been to the detriment of the public purse. It sounds good on the surface to privatize some of these services, because we say we will get that revenue stream at the immediate point, but at the same time we weaken the overall organization, so then it appears to be a failure because it is doing the hard work and heavy lifting that the private sector will not do.

Therefore, this would provide more work and activity to enhance that service and also to provide some stability, which is necessary.

We on this side of the House have been fighting significantly to maintain postal services over the last number of years. In Sandwich Town, for example, the management of the Old Sandwich Town post office actually tried to build a business case to move a lot of the services to the University of Windsor, which would actually damage the service to the Sandwich Town area and cost the businesses, the community, seniors and even some of the students a number of services, which they might eventually employ.

I was thankful the union came forward with leaked documents that it provided me. These showed that when it looked at the business case of the closing of the Sandwich Town facility, it saw that the regional manager's salary was included in the business plan, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars, when the manager was not even at the Sandwich Town post office but at another location. However, his salary was included to make it appear much more costly than it was. Thankfully, we were able to reverse the trend, and that post office is still open today. It has been open for a couple of hundred years in that area, and we are very proud to have that now as another stable point.

The member has brought the bill back to the House of Commons several times. We have seen a few of these bills where that has taken place. I am hopeful the Senate will dispose of this bill rather quickly, that it will move rather expediently and we can be done with this. We have a majority government and more stability now with more opportunity to finish legislation.

As I conclude, unfortunately, there have been several bills that have gone to the unelected chamber that have not been passed. I hope that will not happen to this bill and it will get through rather quickly.

●(1155)

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, having been a former board member of the Toronto Public Library, I can say that libraries are one of the most important services for many Canadians. In fact, the Toronto Public Library is the second most popular library in the world, second to Hong Kong in terms of its per capita population.

A tremendous number of people use libraries. Whether in small towns or big cities across Canada, libraries provide the kinds of services that for some are almost like a lifeline. Some Canadians do not necessarily have the space for a lot of books or have the money for them. They may not have the financial wherewithal to have ongoing subscriptions to magazines or newspapers.

My house in Toronto is about 20 steps away from the library in my neighbourhood, and I have seen people line up to get into it. Some go there every morning to use the Internet to look for jobs. I have seen young and old having a grand time in the library, borrowing books, cassettes, videotapes, DVDs, just name it. It is not just a place for people to read, it is also a place to gather.

Canadians who are shut-in, or are disabled, or are from rural Canada or live far away have no access to libraries and cannot borrow books. What do they do? They probably go online. For example, another book of poetry by Margaret Atwood recently came out, and I imagine Canadians will ask their local libraries to send them the book. However, if the mailing rate is too high, it can be prohibitive for some to access these tremendous collections from their libraries.

There are more seniors in our country, and I imagine, especially for homebound seniors, that it is very important for them to have discounted mailing services available to them, and the bill deals with this. There are also distant learners who want to finish their degrees, or post-secondary education or high school. They too would need library books mailed to them. In addition, people who are disabled or have various challenges cannot go to libraries.

Over a million people per year use this kind of mailing service from libraries all across Canada. This bill would impact 2,000 libraries across Canada.

This is not just about the users; it is also about the collections in libraries. Some libraries focus on certain areas. I would imagine that libraries in Brandon, Manitoba would have different kinds of books than some of the collections in Toronto, for example. I know for a fact that libraries loan books to each other. It is very important for libraries to access collections from each other. This is good for the libraries and it is good Canadians.

●(1200)

Why is the bill important? It would provide the guarantee of a reduced postal rate for libraries and Canadian users. We want to ensure that the term "library books" used in the bill is changed to "library materials" so it will include DVDs, CDs, et cetera.

*Government Orders*

This is the third time the bill is in front of the House and I am sure the member for Brandon—Souris will ensure it passes in the Senate after the House of Commons and that it will be fast-tracked at the transport committee so it can become law and the one million users will feel confident that the reduced book rates will be made available to them.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** 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. The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina will have four minutes remaining when this matter returns before the House.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That the following change be made to the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs: Nycole Turmel for Chris Charlton; and, Nathan Cullen for Phillip Toone.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Does the hon. member have unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

●(1205)

[*English*]

### PROTECTING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM ACT

The House resumed from March 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, the Marine Transportation Security Act and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to rise for my inaugural speech in the House of Commons since my election as the member of Parliament for Toronto—Danforth.

Permit me to begin by first thanking the people of Toronto—Danforth for having placed their trust in me in the March 19 by-election. I recognize that the bar has been set very high, in that I have

both the distinct honour and the distinct challenge of succeeding a truly great member of the House, the Honourable Jack Layton, whose untimely passing this past August 22 triggered an outpouring of emotion among Canadians such as our country has rarely known.

I pledge to represent the vibrant community of Toronto—Danforth tirelessly, with integrity and following the example set by my predecessor. Like Jack Layton, I will do my utmost to contribute to Parliament both constructively, working with others to secure just and sensible results and by resolutely defending the progressive values of the people of Toronto—Danforth.

In that spirit, I turn now to address the substance of the legislation before the House on second reading of Bill C-31. This omnibus bill is intended to amend a variety of existing statutes, most notably, IRPA, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and the Balanced Refugee Reform Act.

The Balanced Refugee Reform Act is itself mostly a far-ranging effort to amend IRPA and the ink is still wet on it, in that it only enters into force at the end of June.

It is important to recall that the Balanced Refugee Reform Act was ultimately a product of hard work and mutual compromise from all corners of the House, having been adopted with eventual all-party support. Less than a year after it achieved a majority in the House last spring, the government is abandoning compromise and is steamrolling ahead with its own particular uncompromising view of refugee policy.

In support of this characterization of the government's Bill C-31 legislative initiative, allow me to briefly discuss a few, and I emphasize only a few, of the disturbing additions or changes to refugee law that Bill C-31 will usher in if it is permitted to pass.

First, the minister, if he deems it to be in the public interest, may characterize a refugee claimant, or refugee claimants, as having arrived in Canada irregularly. This decision would turn these claimants into designated foreign nationals, which I will subsequently simply refer to as DFNs. Crucially and shockingly this designation as DFNs would subject them to automatic detention.

In contrast to regular refugee claimants whose detention must be reviewed after 48 hours and again in 7 days and then every 30 days thereafter, these irregular claimants could remain for 12 months before there was a first review of their detention. Indeed, for good measure, Bill C-31 explicitly adds a provision saying that review would be precluded before the end of 12 months. Thereafter, their detention would be reviewed in six-month increments.

Little could run further afoul of international refugee law's strong presumption against detention which requires a stringent necessity test to be made out and of the international refugee law's requirement that the necessity of detention be subject to early and then frequent review.

*Government Orders*

Under the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, a refugee claimant has access to a full appeal to a refugee appeal division panel. However, now, under Bill C-31, a designated foreign national, this second-class refugee created by the act, could no longer access the appeal process established in the Balanced Refugee Reform Act. If the first instance decision maker, and that is the Refugee Protection Division, denied the person's refugee claim, not only would he or she have no right of appeal, but he or she would be subject to immediate deportation.

• (1210)

It is true that a DFN refugee claimant still may seek what is known as a judicial review, but it is important to note, in light of the answers being given in the House before the break, that this is not the same as an appeal. It is a much more limited process. It is found in the current law. It removes the automatic stay of deportation found in the current law so that in many, if not most, cases judicial review will occur after a person has been removed from the country.

What if a designated foreign national is successful in the refugee claim and is recognized as a refugee? Surely at that stage one would think Bill C-31 would provide that the successful claimant would be treated like any other refugee, but unbelievably, no. To start with, the designated foreign national who is recognized as a refugee continues to wear that designation as a state imposed badge of dishonour. He or she is subjected to reporting requirements to which other refugees are not subjected.

More atrociously, an accepted refugee who started out as a designated foreign national cannot apply to become a permanent resident of Canada for five years after being found to be a refugee. This could result in the refugee not becoming a permanent resident for six or seven years, assuming there will be processing delays with some applications. Compare this to a regular refugee who is actually required to apply for permanent residence status before 60 days are up.

One might ask, what is the big deal? If a refugee gets to stay in Canada, what difference does it make if the individual has permanent resident status or some sort of refugee status? One huge difference is that the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act requires that a person be a permanent resident before the person is able to sponsor family members, such as the person's spouse, children, or parents, to immigrate to Canada. Thus, under Bill C-31 irregular refugees would have no hope of reuniting with family in Canada for at least five years.

Currently, family class applications in this country are often processed at a snail's pace. It is not uncommon for it to take three years for a child or a spouse to be admitted and sometimes up to six years for parents. It is no stretch to say that a refugee who started out as a designated foreign national may have to wait 10 years for family members to join him or her.

If that is not enough, a designated foreign national refugee will not even be able to travel outside Canada to spend time with family, for example, in a country other than the country of origin which the refugee fears going back to. Why is that? Bill C-31 decrees that such a refugee will not be given travel documents until he or she becomes a permanent resident, that is, until at least five years have passed, despite the fact that the refugee convention requires that travel

documents be issued to refugees once they are "lawfully staying" in the host country. Fortress Canada thus becomes prison Canada for the designated foreign national refugee. If he were still alive, Kafka could not have written Bill C-31 better if he tried.

It does not end there. The DFN provisions apply retroactively to March 2009. After Bill C-31 becomes law, the minister could decide to designate the Tamil refugees who arrived on the *Ocean Lady* in October 2009 and the *Sun Sea* in August 2010 as irregulars. The only part of a DFN regime that does not apply retroactively is the detention regime.

Finally, there is the stunning change in the law with respect to cessation of refugee status. This basically means that after the government applies to have a refugee status removed, that simultaneously removes the permanent resident status, which subjects the individual to being removed from the country.

Time does not permit me to go into many other problems with the bill, such as problematic changes to the safe countries regime, the implications for children, the radical cuts in the time that refugee claimants have to prepare their cases, and the advent of a biometrics regime which comes with no privacy safeguards and allows Canada to share this data with other countries.

There is much in the bill that requires close and exacting scrutiny once it gets to committee. I hope that government members along with the opposition will take the committee process seriously and not back the government in what is ultimately repressive legislation. At some point, MPs have to stand up for their conscience as well as for their constituents in this country.

• (1215)

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his maiden speech.

In some countries, many human rights violations remain undocumented or poorly documented. They may occur in isolated areas beyond the reach of human rights groups, journalists and others. Indigenous groups or racial minorities who represent a small percentage of the population may face serious abuses which are under-reported.

For cultural reasons, victims may be reluctant or even unwilling to report the violations. This may be true for women and girls. They may face stereotypes and taboos which make them fearful of speaking out about gender-based violence, discrimination and other human rights concerns.

Does the hon. member think that the patterns of human rights abuse can and do often change quickly, and that conditions may in fact deteriorate more quickly than the process of government designation could accommodate and respond to, as happened in Kenya in 2008?

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, the preface of the member's question does a great job of setting out the issue underlying the question.

There are at least two aspects of Bill C-31 that come up against the reality the member described. One is the designation of so-called safe countries. The notion that there is a safe country is a problematic concept, but the idea of quickly changing conditions makes it even more problematic. The fact that Bill C-31 removes the notion of a panel of advisers to the minister on determining what countries will be safe makes it even worse.

Under the cessation regime, the minister or the government could apply for cessation, which could be for a period in time when things had changed; the government comes on the scene when it thinks things are safe in order to send some permanent residents back to the country, but then conditions could change again. The idea of changing conditions has to be taken into account.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his inaugural speech, which was very well executed. I look forward to working with the member.

This particular legislation has all kinds of pitfalls. It is difficult to know where to start, but I will start with the children. Under this legislation, when some of the most vulnerable people from around the world come to our shores, we are going to say to them that we are going to put them in detention, basically prison. That is what detention is. People will not have the freedom to move around and will not have travel documents.

We heard the minister explain previously that for children who are under 16 years of age, the parents can choose to relinquish them to the state, to the province, or to keep them in detention. For parents, there is no choice. It is so disturbing that that is where our immigration and refugee policy is going.

What kind of impacts are these detentions going to have on children?

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on her recent appointment as the critic for immigration.

There are numerous implications for children spread throughout Bill C-31, and I cannot touch on all of them.

My hon. colleague referred to one of them, a kind of Sophie's choice situation for the parents, about whether children under the age of 16 will stay with them in detention or be relinquished to the state.

Another issue is the age of 16 years. International human rights law generally, and the convention on the rights of the child in particular, indicates that adulthood starts at 18 years of age. This legislation is particularly problematic in that the age limit of 16 years has been set.

Finally, as I mentioned earlier in my answer about cessation and family reunification issues, when permanent resident status takes five years to achieve, that also is an issue. Often a family member, a child or a parent, will make it to Canada and then will not be able to see other family members for at least five years.

● (1220)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to the importance of Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act. This legislation would improve the Balanced Refugee Reform Act by providing new measures which would ensure a fast and fairer refugee determination process.

Our Conservative government has increased the number of refugees that will resettle every year by welcoming an additional 2,500 people for a total of 14,500 individuals. Canada resettles more refugees than any other G20 nation. The fact is our refugee system is open to abuse and this is undermining Canadians' faith in our generous system. Bill C-31 would put an end to the systematic exploitation of our asylum system and prevent abuse of Canadians' generosity and goodwill. It is in the best interests of all fair-minded, hard-working taxpaying Canadians that this House should pass Bill C-31. Let us examine the reasons this bill is so important.

Bill C-31 would restore the integrity of the Canadian asylum system by enhancing opportunities for bona fide refugees to have their claims addressed in a timely manner. Currently, the number of false claims, namely from democratic countries in the European Union, is overwhelming our system. The sheer volume of claimants precludes officials from focusing their attention on those legitimate refugees who are in true need of our assistance.

It astounds me that in 2011 the number of refugee claims from the EU was greater than the number of claims from Africa and Asia. Indeed, 23%, or almost one-quarter of all claims, now come from EU nationals. Canada's top source country for refugee claims is not a country in Africa or Asia, but Hungary. Moreover, virtually all refugee claims made by EU nationals are abandoned, withdrawn or rejected. These bogus claims cost hard-working taxpaying Canadians an outrageous \$170 million per year. For this reason, Bill C-31 would improve the system by recognizing that there are qualitative differences among countries and their general attitudes toward human rights and the rule of law. The bill responds to the differences by designating some countries as safe.

Under Bill C-31, the factors that would lead a country to be designated as safe would be clearly outlined both in law and in regulations. The most important factors are objective in that they refer to the actual acceptance rates of claims from a given country. In other words, the designation of a country as safe would be based on the results of decisions taken by asylum claimants themselves, such as the rate at which they abandon their own claims as well as the decisions rendered by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board.

*Government Orders*

Unlike the Balanced Refugee Reform Act which has quantitative and qualitative criteria specified only in regulation, Bill C-31 would enshrine these factors in legislation, leaving objectively verifiable quantitative factors to be set out in a ministerial order. As such, the criteria used to prompt a review of a country's designation would become more transparent and accountable than they would have been under previous legislation. For example, quantitative factors would be specified in a ministerial order and include assessments where: 60% or more of total asylum claims from a country are withdrawn or abandoned by the claimants; 75% or more of total asylum claims from a country are rejected by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board. These qualitative factors enshrined in the form of legislation would look to universally accepted democratic principles such as whether the safe country has an independent judicial system, practises basic democratic rights and freedoms and has political and legal mechanisms to redress infringements of those rights and freedoms, and/or allows civil society organizations to exist and flourish.

As I have outlined above, this bill would repair our broken asylum system by stemming the flood of obvious baseless applications and putting in place a process that can ensure a fast and fair determination of legitimate applications simply by distinguishing between safe democratic countries and states with oppressive brutal regimes.

This is also a piece of legislation that respects the rule of law by affording all claimants, including failed claimants from safe countries, the right to judicial review. Every failed claimant would have access to at least one level of appeal. People deemed in need of protection would not be returned to the country from which they fled. Furthermore, under Bill C-31 the majority of refugee claimants would gain access to an additional level of appeal, specifically the Refugee Appeal Division, for the first time.

• (1225)

Canadians pride themselves on being a compassionate society, as well as fair-minded and just, and they would not tolerate repatriation of foreign nationals knowing that persecution and harm would befall them, so the appeal mechanism can respond to uniquely exceptional circumstances. At the same time, this cropping of the current massive applications for appeals would curb the abuse of Canadians' generosity and prevent contempt of our legal system.

Furthermore, under this legislation, Canada would remain a safe haven for genuine refugees seeking asylum. However, claimants who have been involved in acts of serious criminality will not be welcomed into this country. Whereas the current system bases serious criminality on the more arbitrary measure of the length of jail sentence imposed, Bill C-31 rightly bases serious criminality on the specific crime the claimant actually committed, as defined under the Canadian Criminal Code.

This is also in line with the definition of serious criminality under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which states that a serious criminal is a person who has been convicted of a crime which, under Canadian law, is punishable by a jail sentence of at least 10 years. As such, political prisoners are not and will not be barred from making refugee claims.

Reforms to the Canadian refugee system are much needed and enjoy broad-based support. This government has listened carefully to Canadians who seek restoration of a fair and balanced refugee system that protects Canadian values of integrity, compassion and fair play. I submit that the enactment of this proposed bill would go a long way in securing those values.

Let us listen to what others are saying. Our colleague, the former NDP immigration critic from Vancouver Kingsway, has recognized the flaws in the current system. He has spoken of the need to "build a system that has a fast and fair determination process". Indeed, he went further and acknowledged:

And that's something that I'll give [the Minister] credit for. I do think that's what his intention has been all along. And we all want to work towards that.

Furthermore, a *Globe and Mail* editorial dated February 17, 2012 reads:

The legislation rightly focuses on weeding out claimants who are not genuine, and stemming the flow of asylum seekers from countries such as Mexico and Hungary that are democracies with respect for basic rights and freedoms...

Fast-tracking refugee claims from these countries, and ensuring failed claimants are promptly deported, is an excellent way to ensure Canada does not become a magnet for abuse.

In conclusion, I am thankful for being given the opportunity to speak to the merits of Bill C-31. I would like to thank my esteemed colleague, the hon. minister, for introducing this important piece of legislation and for being in the House during this debate. It is in the best interests of legitimate asylum seekers that we should pass this bill to bring much-needed change to our broken asylum system, and it is in the best interests of Canadians as well. I urge all members of the House to join me in giving support to Bill C-31's passage.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has a number of concerns and in fact suggests that there are serious issues with this bill and that it is somewhat fundamentally flawed, which results in a need to bring forward amendments that we hope the government will be sympathetic to.

One of the amendments is in recognition of how important the issue of a safe country list is. At one time the current Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism acknowledged that in order to have a country put on the safe country list, it would be important to have an advisory committee to recommend it. For whatever reason—and many would suggest that it is because there is now a majority Conservative government—the government has decided that the minister no longer needs the advisory committee in order to assign a country to the safe country list.

I am wondering if the member can explain to the House why the government has changed its opinion on having an advisory board made up of professional people who understand human rights to recommend which countries should be on or off the safe country list.

*Government Orders*

• (1230)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member is seeking to deliberately create fear in the immigration system, but simply put, some of the criteria that define safe countries are that they have independent judicial systems, practise democratic rights and freedoms and have political and legal mechanisms to redress infringements of those rights and freedoms.

Basically, the criteria are defined as to what a safe country is and is not, and those are what the minister will operate under. The limits are clearly laid out, and a safe country is well defined.

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member would do us the honour of speaking a bit more on a safe country with respect to the whole question of designating an entire country as safe when we know that in many situations, including examples in eastern Europe that he was relying on, there may be vulnerable populations worthy of receiving refugee status. The situation with respect to the Roma in countries like Hungary is deeply problematic. Gay and lesbian groups within Mexico will tell us that it is not a safe country throughout Mexico for them.

Why has the government removed the possibility of designating only part of a country or sectoral groups and adopted this incredibly broad-brush approach?

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Mr. Speaker, simply put, safe country designation, as it is defined, is pretty clear. Basically, it seeks to stem the abuse of the asylum system. If people from foreign countries want to immigrate to Canada, they are more than welcome to go through that process, but what we are seeing now is that a huge flow of people want to immigrate to this country in a faster way, or maybe through the side door, and we are trying to stem that tide by having the safe country designation.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, as other opposition MPs have mentioned in regard to this question, it really is difficult to designate a country as a safe country, even with the criteria that my hon. friend has put forward. Some countries will have the apparatus that appears to be representing the rule of law, but some populations within that democracy can still be systematically excluded from access to those rights.

I refer to a recent quote from Mr. Justice Hughes in the Federal Court. This was a case that just came down February 22 of this year, *Hercegi v. Canada*, in which Mr. Justice Hughes said:

...the evidence is overwhelming that Hungary is unable presently to provide adequate protection to its Roma citizens.

I ask my hon. friend to comment on this kind of specific problem.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Mr. Speaker, once again, our bill seeks to stem that huge flow that is seeking to abuse our asylum system.

Certainly, as the hon. member mentioned, there are other situations. They can be addressed within a particular act. Just because a country is designated a safe country does not mean they do not have other means to get to Canada. They do. They have other options open to them. It does not mean we are closing the door to them, but it would just be done in a different way.

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last Tuesday some of us in the House—certainly the members of the

Liberal caucus—celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This will be the theme of my remarks today, for it really does provide a context for what is happening with the bill before the House, which at its core is purposely mean-spirited, divisive and anti-Canadian.

Last week Canadians from all walks of life and from all parts of Canada celebrated the anniversary of bringing our Constitution home from the United Kingdom. Canadians support the charter, and for good reason; the charter has consistently protected the rights and freedoms of individuals from an overreaching government, and it has been a source of pride for most Canadians.

Canada has traditionally punched above its weight in protecting our citizens and the human rights and freedoms of all citizens, yet I fear the bill will add to the growing concerns that Canada is turning its back on those in our world who are less fortunate.

The United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees ensures that those who are being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion can seek refuge in regions that will protect their basic human rights and freedoms.

As our world becomes more connected through social media, it is harder to turn away from the plight of our neighbours, yet human rights violations are not always as visible as the ones we are watching in Syria. That is why this bill, which gives the ultimate power to the minister to place countries on safe lists, cannot be supported. No matter what political stripe, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism should not have the power to turn away a person seeking refuge due to his or her country of origin. No matter what their political stripe, the Government of Canada does not have the right to detain those seeking refuge for a year without review.

As a democratic country, we need to ensure that refugees are heard in an efficient manner that protects their basic rights and freedoms. I agree that the system can be improved, but the power to accept or deny someone cannot lie with one person. There needs to be more oversight, and the process needs to be expedited to ensure refugees and their families can begin to integrate into our country.

I stand today urging for a balance between protecting human rights and freedoms and modernizing our refugee system.

We have been leaders in the past and we can be leaders again, but not if the bill is supported in its current form.

I have been proud to stand as a Canadian knowing the key role that the Canadian government has played in the introduction and development of the concepts of peacekeeping and the responsibility to protect, yet the bill signals an abrupt shift away from the spirit and intention of those concepts. As it stands, the bill is not only anti-refugee; it is anti-due process, anti-justice, and violates the charter. I have no doubt that elements of the bill will be struck down by the courts.

The government knows that. It knows that locking someone up for 12 months without due process and all the rights afforded by the charter is unconstitutional.

Section 7 of the charter provides that:

### *Government Orders*

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

Section 8 assures that:

Everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure.

Section 9 gives everyone the right not to be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned.

Section 10 gives rights to those who have been arrested or detained, and the key word is “detained” in the context of this particular piece of legislation. In section 10(c), those rights include the right to have the validity of that detention determined and to be released if the detention is unlawful. It could not be clearer.

• (1235)

The sections of the charter that I have just referenced make it explicitly clear that there are elements of the bill, including the detaining of refugees for 12 months, that are a direct violation of the charter, and the minister knows this. The government knows that the charter applies to everyone, not just some, on Canadian territory, including those who arrive by plane or by boat at our ports, including those in transit in our territorial waters. It is called the rule of law.

It is troubling to witness such behaviour from a government that claims to value the rule of law, what the law governs. Even when we may not like it or we have mixed feelings about a particular law or court ruling, we cannot have a situation where the government picks and chooses the laws it likes and circumvents others with which it does not agree.

I cannot support this bill that would strip a refugee's residency status if the situation in his or her home country stabilizes under section 19. This is not democracy. We should be increasing the protection of the most vulnerable but the government seems to think we should turn our backs on them.

Equally troubling is the talk about freedom and liberty from those who stand fully prepared to take away constitutional rights and usurp the rules of law. We have rules and protections. I am grateful we have the charter that checks the power of government.

The day is coming and it is coming soon when the law will prevail, as it always does. I look forward to the day when Canada is once again respected and is a place that will once again value justice, equality, decency, unity and compassion.

• (1240)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member clearly misunderstands the bill and the proposed new asylum system when he says that we propose to detain asylum claimants for 12 months without due process. That is complete and utter nonsense. We propose to allow for the enhanced detention of illegal migrants who arrive in criminal smuggling operations for that period so that we can identify them, because these people typically come without documents having destroyed them. We have a responsibility to public safety to ensure that we do not admit people whose identity we cannot verify and whether they constitute a risk to Canadian health and safety.

Any of those people who arrive in a designated smuggling event who file an asylum claim would have the same access to the same asylum system as anyone else. Under the accelerated timelines, the IRB will be providing hearings to claimants, including those under detention in a smuggling operation, within about eight weeks time. If they are bona fide refugees, if they are found to have a well-founded fear of persecution, they would be granted protected status within two to three months of the reference of their application.

Would the member care to correct his mischaracterization of the bill?

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Mr. Speaker, I do not accept for a minute that I have mischaracterized the bill. The bill would provide broad-reaching powers to the minister to designate foreign nationals based on their mode of entry. That gives the right to the minister to have the 12 month detention without review.

It also indicates in the bill that the inability to determine the identity of the refugees within a reasonable time also provides that grounds. Therefore, not only do we have the mode of entry into the country, but if the immigration department happens to be too swamped or the officials happen to be too overloaded in order to determine the identity within a reasonable time, that, too, gives the minister that right.

I do not believe for a minute that I have mischaracterized the bill. The bill would provide overreaching powers to the minister. We have called it properly here.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague from Charlottetown to elaborate on Bill C-31.

This bill creates a new category of refugees called “designated foreign nationals”. This seems to go against the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and it gives the minister discretionary power that he did not have before. We have a problem with that. In this case, as in many other cases, we see a number of aspects that show that bills are being introduced to give ever-growing discretionary powers, which remove the possibility of judging cases in a more objective way.

I would like my colleague from Charlottetown to say a few words about the impact that creating this “designated foreign national” status will have on the refugee processing system.

• (1245)

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that creating this third class will absolutely have an impact on refugees.



*Government Orders*

[English]

There is no doubt that there will be a dramatic impact on those seeking refuge and asylum with the creation of this third class. I should point out that a court decision determined that the holding of a refugee for 120 days under a security certificate was cruel and unusual punishment. The fact is that this class now purports to authorize the holding of a designated foreign national for 12 months without review which is four times the amount of time that has already been found to be unconstitutional with respect to security certificates. Undoubtedly, separating these people from their families for such an extended period of time will have an impact.

**Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to have this opportunity to join the debate on Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act, which would further improve Canada's refugee determination system, as well as our immigration system.

I think we can all agree that Canada has one of the most generous and fair refugee systems in the world. In fact, the facts speak for themselves. Canada currently welcomes one out of every ten resettled refugees worldwide. Since World War II, Canada has provided a safe haven to more than one million refugees and our humanitarian efforts have been recognized by the United Nations.

Canadians can take great pride in the openness and welcoming nature of our refugee system. At the same time, few Canadians would disagree that the system is badly in need of reform. As we see time and time again, refugee claimants wait too long for a decision on a claim. This puts in limbo those who are genuinely in need of Canada's protection but it also allows those who are not really in need of our protection to abuse our generosity and take unfair advantage of our country.

Last year, processing times for a decision on a claim before the independent Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, the IRB, could take more than 20 months and, because of the seemingly endless recourses available, it can take an average of four and a half years from the time a claim is made until a failed refugee claimant has exhausted all legal avenues and is removed from Canada. In some cases, it has taken more than a decade.

As one can imagine, these long delays, as well as access to generous taxpayer funded health and social benefits, encourage individuals who are not in need of our protection to use the refugee system as a way to remain in Canada for years on end.

To address these problems, Bill C-11, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, was passed in June 2010. That legislation included a number of improvements to the refugee system to provide for faster protection and faster removals with the aim of deterring abuse.

Bill C-11 provided for faster processing timelines to quickly decide claims. It introduced a designated country of origin policy to further expedite the processing of claims from those countries. It also restricted access to post-claim recourses to allow for faster removals for claimants not found in need of protection.

However, as we proceeded with the implementation of that bill, it became clear that further reforms were needed. We are concerned, for example, that we are receiving a large number of refugee claims

from countries where human and democratic rights exist and which are not typically refugee-producing, such as those in the European Union. If members can believe it, Canada actually receives more refugee claims from the democratic European Union than from Africa or Asia. What is more, in recent years, virtually all European Union claims were abandoned, withdrawn or rejected. If that trend continues, that means that the unfounded claims from the 5,800 EU nationals who sought asylum last year will cost Canadian taxpayers nearly \$170 million.

When we consider that 62% of all asylum claims were either abandoned, withdrawn or rejected by the IRB last year, it becomes clear that too many tax dollars are spent on these claimants and on tax-funded social benefits.

We need to send a message to those who would abuse Canada's generous refugee system that if they are not in need of protection they will be sent home quickly. At the same time, those who truly need our protection will get it even faster, while providing an extra level of appeal to most failed claimants.

That is why the Government of Canada introduced Bill C-31, which we are debating today, which will, if passed, further strengthen the asylum system and deter abuse. I will be very clear about one thing. Under these new measures, all eligible refugee claimants would continue to be entitled to a fair hearing before an independent decision-maker.

To begin, we propose to eliminate the information-gathering interview that was developed under the Balanced Refugee Reform Act and replace it with a basis of claim. This document would be submitted at the same time as the eligibility interview for those who make their claim inland or within 15 days for those who make their claim at the port of entry.

Under the proposed measures, refugee claimants, particularly those from designated countries of origin, would receive a hearing before the IRB more quickly. Hearings at the IRB for claimants from designated countries of origin would occur within 30 to 45 days. Claimants who are not from designated countries of origin would also have their hearing timelines accelerated. It is proposed that these hearings would be scheduled within 60 days of being referred to the IRB.

● (1250)

However, to be effective, faster decisions on refugee claims must be complemented by timely removals. Quick removals would contribute to reducing overall costs associated with Canada's refugee system by deterring abuse. Under a reformed refugee status determination system, the Canada Border Services Agency would place a higher priority on apprehending and removing failed refugee claimants. In particular, the CBSA would remove failed refugee claimants within 12 months following a final negative decision by the IRB.

*Government Orders*

As we know all too well, failed refugee claimants may turn to other options to delay their removal from Canada. That is why limits on other recourse options have been proposed in this legislation.

In closing, let me reiterate, the proposed protecting Canada's immigration system act builds on reform passed in June 2010 as part of the Balanced Refugee Reform Act. These new measures further accelerate the processing of refugee claims for nationals from designated countries which are those that generally do not produce refugees. In addition, the proposals reduce the options available to failed claimants to delay their removal from Canada.

Even after these changes, Canada's refugee determination system would continue to meet our domestic and international obligations.

This is what *The Globe and Mail* had to say about Bill C-31.

Immigration minister's...refugee reforms, aimed at making the process more efficient and decisive, are generally good. If implemented, they will improve an unwieldy asylum program....The legislation rightly focuses on weeding out claimants who are not genuine, and stemming the flow of asylum seekers from countries...that are democracies with respect for basic rights and freedoms...Fast-tracking refugee claims from these countries, and ensuring failed claimants are promptly deported, is an excellent way to ensure Canada does not become a magnet for abuse. The bill will also implement biometric identification, such as fingerprints and photos, for people who apply for visitor's visas. This welcome change will guard against the use of false identities.

I urge all hon. members of this House to join me in supporting Bill C-31 in order to deter abuse of our refugee system, and provide a quicker and more secure beginning for victims of violence and persecution around the world.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Conservative member who just expanded on Bill C-31, for which the time allocated for debate has been limited, yet again.

How does he justify the fact that the detention will violate a number of rights and freedoms of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants? This practice was condemned in Australia, since it is an arbitrary detention denounced by Amnesty International and a number of human rights groups.

Some people, including children, might be imprisoned for a year simply because they arrived by boat, like my parents did.

The government considers this mode of entry into the country to be illegal. How does the hon. member justify this?

[*English*]

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** Mr. Speaker, I think the member would agree that those people are arriving illegally.

An interesting fact that many might not be aware of, with respect to the boats that came in the last few years, is that many of those individuals are actually detained in my riding. I am well aware of how they are treated and the process that they undergo.

The member should also know that it is already within the ability of the government to detain individuals. In this case, it is about protecting the safety of Canadians. As I said, because they are detained in my riding, I receive lots of correspondence and calls. People are primarily asking, if we do not know who these people are,

should we simply let them travel throughout Canada and set up homes wherever they might go? They are encouraging the actions the government is taking in this legislation, and saying that before we do that we need to know their identities and ensure that they are not a threat to the safety and security of Canadians.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about safety in a well-known case. Mr. X worked as a police officer in Mexico and investigated drug cartels and the murders of women. Due to his work, he received death threats. Several officers in his unit were killed. He believed he was next and he fled to Canada. His refugee claim failed, as the judge believed that there was adequate protection in Mexico for those who are targeted by organized crime. However, was it safe for Mr. X?

Bill C-31 would attempt to limit the number of refugees who seek protection in Canada by designating some countries as safe. The minister would have the sole authority to designate these countries. Does the hon. member believe there is a reliable and objective means of distinguishing between safe and unsafe countries when it comes to human rights protection? If so, could he describe it, please?

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** Mr. Speaker, I think the member has misunderstood the legislation if she thinks that individuals from these designated countries would not get an opportunity to make their case when, in fact, they would. It is important as part of our system that we give them the opportunity. However, Canadians would agree that the system should be a bit different in terms of the timelines for these individuals who come from countries that are not generally refugee producing. They would get to make their case, whether from one of those countries or not, before an independent individual. If the outcome were to their benefit then they would be part of our system. So we would be protecting the ones who need protection.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-31. However, I would have preferred that this bill not be introduced at all and that we not debate it. In my opinion, this is an objectionable bill. There are a number of problems with it and it is certainly going to result in legal challenges.

I would like to start by saying that Bill C-31 builds on Bill C-11, which was introduced in the previous Parliament. With a minority government, the Conservatives were unable to pass the strict and severe bills that they wanted. Now, they are taking Bill C-49, which was also from the previous Parliament, and making the necessary changes to complete their biased and discriminatory immigration policy the sole purpose of which is to close our borders for as long as possible to foreigners seeking asylum in Canada.

*Government Orders*

The change in this government's tone on immigration and citizenship is striking. Most of Bill C-31 is practically copied word for word from the former Bill C-49, the short title of which was Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada's Immigration System Act. It was promoted as the bill that would protect refugees and discourage smugglers who were endangering the lives of foreigners trying to enter Canada by boat. Bill C-31, which is pretty much the same, is entitled Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act. The image is eloquent.

The Conservatives are now showing their true colours. The intent of Bill C-31 is no longer to protect refugees, but to protect the integrity of Canada's immigration system against ill-intentioned refugees who abuse the generosity of Canadian laws and who try to take advantage of our country. These comments were made and repeated by the previous speaker.

In the previous Parliament, some immigration bills, especially, Bills C-11 and C-35, were passed after much discussion, debate and compromise by all parties. A compromise was even reached on Bill C-49, the predecessor to Bill C-31. This time, the Conservative government is no longer receptive to amendments. On the contrary, the minister himself said that there are gaps in the Balanced Refugee Reform Act and that Canada needs stronger measures that are closer to the original bill we introduced in March 2010.

This time, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is not honouring the agreements reached by the various parties.

At the time, a number of groups that defend rights and freedoms condemned Bill C-49. Amnesty International, the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Barreau du Québec and Professor Peter Showler, to name just a few, roundly condemned several key provisions of the bill, saying that they represented a serious violation of Canada's international and constitutional obligations.

In fact, this government is still using the pretext of national security to justify its lack of transparency and its desire to keep people in need out of the country, with no regard for Canada's constitutional and international obligations.

Far from having improved his bill in response to the criticisms about humanitarian considerations in previous bills, the minister instead says that he will not give in to the "immigration industry" lobby whose criticisms only reinforce the idea that the government is truly on the right track. It would be hard to be any more arrogant.

In addition to the government's arrogance, its narrow vision and demagoguery must be condemned.

With this bill, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is creating a new category of immigrants and giving himself the power to arbitrarily impose a different processing system for those immigrants than for other asylum seekers. This discretionary power is, in fact, the power to declare the entry of foreign nationals into the country as irregular by using loosely defined criteria based on national security interests, which was probably the genesis for the idea that this power cannot be delegated.

The creation of this category of refugee was specifically designed to block the entry of as many refugees as possible and it completely

disregards the right to equality under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These asylum seekers often come from countries where fundamental rights are denied and where living conditions jeopardize their health and lives.

It is utterly ridiculous, even irresponsible, for a government to arbitrarily punish refugees who arrive by boat on the pretext of wanting to separate the good refugees from the bad as quickly as possible. That makes no sense. A refugee is not a qualified immigrant who can be selected. We cannot select refugees, simply by virtue of their refugee status. According to this government's logic, refugees who are not selected are bad refugees.

● (1300)

The fact that the minister would be able to create two classes of people is unacceptable and downright disturbing. Human beings are all equal, and the minister must never forget that Canada has a legal responsibility toward these people under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and a moral responsibility arising from its international obligations under various human rights treaties.

According to Peter Showler, director of the Refugee Forum and former member of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, concerns about a deluge of illegal refugees are unfounded because both routes to obtaining refugee protection—the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, which targets international refugees as defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Canada's Inland Refugee Protection System for refugees arriving in Canada spontaneously—have historically been responsible for the same number of permanent residents in Canada, around 12,000 per year.

The difference between the two systems is control: control over the number of people coming in, the selection criteria, and the procedures and processing times. This is a legitimate concern, but it should not legitimize the crass justifications that the government is using to block access for people who need help.

For example, the minister claims that Canada is getting more and more claims from certain countries, such as Hungary and Mexico, and that these claims often come from "bad refugees" who do not really need protection. According to Mr. Showler, the Immigration and Refugee Board nevertheless accepts a significant number of claims from those two countries, 17% and 8%, respectively.

The minister also claims that this new bill will enable the board to do some "housecleaning" and shorten the waiting list for "good refugees" who have to wait patiently in refugee camps because illegitimate refugees who arrive by boat bog the system down by using fraudulent documents to get into Canada.

That, according to Mr. Showler, is not true because, on the one hand, not all refugees abroad can reach refugee camps, and on the other hand, the United Nations convention recognizes that it is difficult for refugees to be granted asylum, so it allows them to use fraudulent documents to seek refugee protection.

*Government Orders*

The Conservatives are trying to create an unhealthy climate around immigration, and specifically refugees. The executive of the Canadian Council for Refugees is very concerned about this and stated, “it is very worrisome when the government tries to create an anti-refugee sentiment among the population”. Several statements made by government MPs have promoted that very sentiment.

According to Wanda Yamamoto, president of the Canadian Council for Refugees, “the bill is discriminatory and creates a two-tier system of refugee protection in Canada. It also makes it dangerously vulnerable to political considerations, rather than ensuring a fair and independent decision about who is a refugee. Our refugee system needs to give everyone a fair hearing, based on the facts of their case and regardless of their country of origin.”

Determining refugee status will henceforth be directly controlled by the minister, who now has the power to establish his own criteria. Janet Dench of the Canadian Council for Refugees said, “there is an arbitrary element in this, which the government is exploiting and abusing.”

Politicizing the immigration system is a very dangerous thing to do. The system had found a rather fair balance between security and individual liberties. All of that is now being compromised in the name of national security. From now on, any difficulty identifying refugees will be considered a threat to national security and, as a result, will justify different, more severe and punitive treatment than for all other kinds of refugees.

The Canadian Bar Association stated that Bill C-31 lacks clear qualitative thresholds and raises serious concern about excessive ministerial discretion. Furthermore, given the serious legal consequences that flow from a designation made by the minister, these amendments are overbroad and unsustainable.

Executive officers of the Canadian Bar Association went even further and recommended that implementation of the proposed changes be delayed to allow for immediate and meaningful consultation with all stakeholders.

I have only touched on some of the important aspects that support dropping this bill. We have asked the government many times to drop Bill C-31. This bill fuels an anti-refugee sentiment and exacerbates fears that are often legitimate, but that are being misguided with a bill like this one.

I think it is a shame that we are voting on this bill this evening with yet another time allocation. The NDP cannot vote in favour of Bill C-31.

We will strongly condemn this bill.

● (1305)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder who is writing the notes and doing the research on Bill C-31 for the NDP because they are completely misinformed. For example, the hon. member just said that, under the proposed system, the minister will directly control the determination process. That is absolutely not true.

All the decisions on requests for asylum will be processed by the Immigration and Refugee Board, an independent quasi-judicial agency, in accordance with all the rules of the act and without any

interference by the minister. There will be no change in how the decisions are made. This is what will change: in the refugee protection division, where the hearings will be held and where the decisions will be made, there will be permanently appointed officials instead of members appointed by the Governor in Council. That way cabinet will be less involved in determining who will make the decisions.

The hon. member said there is an anti-refugee sentiment. Is he aware of the fact that our government is increasing by 20% the number of refugees that we will accept as resettled refugees and that we are also increasing the refugee integration assistance program by 20%?

● (1310)

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism hears only what he wants to hear. What cannot be denied is that the bill can give and has given discretionary powers to the minister. It was never a question of the minister making all the decisions. I do not believe that a minister or minister's office can make such decisions. I am quite aware that there are boards and councils.

However, on the specific issue of designated foreign nationals, the minister will have discretionary powers that previous ministers did not have. The Conservative government has a tendency to give itself discretionary powers, whereas previously the boards were free to do their job, with as little interference as possible.

As for the second question about the number of refugees, honestly, it is not the number but the type at issue here. The bill creates different titles, different categories with different rights and processes. That is disgusting. A refugee who wants to go to Canada or any other country will do whatever it takes to avoid often severe persecution. In this case, the process for legitimate refugees such as those from Mexico or Hungary, like the Roma, will be complicated by this measure. It is not about the number of refugees; it is really about the process and about justice and equality for everyone.

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for his very clear and compassionate speech. As he mentioned, Bill C-31 is the incarnation of the former Bill C-49, and it also includes everything that was denounced in Bill C-4 with respect to refugees. Instead of attacking smugglers and those who abuse refugees, this bill directly attacks the refugees themselves. Furthermore, the Conservatives are trying to make the public afraid. They are fearmongering about refugees' lack of identification. These refugees flee their countries and do not have the time to take their papers with them. I would like my colleague to expand a bit on this subject.

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry for her question.

*Government Orders*

When it comes to refugee protection, we have absolutely no problem with tackling human smugglers who mistreat others and take advantage of people's desperation by promising them a better life and a way out of persecution. I think that was clear from the agreements that the government and the opposition parties came to regarding the previous bill. At the time, there was a minority government that had to negotiate, so we reached a compromise. Now that compromise has been kicked to the curb.

This new bill does nothing about human smugglers. It targets refugees who arrive by a specific mode of transportation. Perhaps some of those refugees should be examined much more closely. We can have a procedure for that.

The bill as written punishes refugees who come to Canada via a specific mode of transportation even though that might have been their only option. That is why we feel that this bill is brutal. The opposition will be voting against it.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act. It is so important for us to help ensure the integrity of our immigration system, and the bill would do exactly that.

Immigrants come to Canada seeking a new life and new opportunities for their families and themselves. Our immigration system is the most fair and generous in the world. However, Canadians have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity and take advantage of our great country. Indeed, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to protect Canada's immigration system. We are acting on that mandate through this bill.

Bill C-31 introduces many reforms that would help deter individuals and organizations that would seek to engage in illegal and dangerous human smuggling operations. It would also provide faster protection to genuine refugees, as well as faster removal for bogus claimants. With its introduction of biometrics, it would also bring Canada in line with other countries that already use biometrics in their immigration programs, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, the European Union, New Zealand, Japan and the United States, among others.

Although the bill presents many positive changes to our immigration system, the opposition NDP and Liberals continue to propagate myths regarding it. That is why I will try to explain to them today, as many of my colleagues have attempted to do in the past, exactly how these myths are incorrect.

First, the opposition states that the minister will be able to single-handedly pick and choose safe countries. This is categorically false. What the opposition does not understand is that there are laws and regulations that surround such decisions. The factors that would lead to a country's designation would be clearly outlined. It would be based on the decisions taken by the asylum claimants themselves, for example, through the decision to abandon or withdraw their claims, as well as through the independent Immigration and Refugee Board, but not single-handedly by the minister. In fact, it is clear that the criteria proposed to consider a country for designation will actually be more transparent and accountable than under the Balanced Refugee Reform Act.

Another common misconception put forth by members opposite is that Bill C-31 would prevent political prisoners, such as Alexandre Soljenitsyne, from making asylum claims in Canada. It is quite clear, when one reads the bill, that this claim is absolutely false. Political prisoners are not and will not be excluded from making refugee claims.

As is the case now, the only refugee claimants who are unable to access a refugee hearing are those who have been convicted of a serious crime, suspected of being involved in terrorism, have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity or have been involved in organized crime under Canadian law. This does not include political prisoners who have not been charged or convicted of a crime punishable under Canadian law. In fact, what the opposition fails to understand is that serious criminals who have been convicted of crimes punishable under Canadian law have always been barred from making a refugee claim in Canada, and Bill C-31 does not change that.

● (1315)

However, under the current system, serious criminality is based on the arbitrary measure of the length of a jail term rather than the severity of the crime committed. Under this legislation, serious criminality would instead be based on the severity of the crime, as defined under the Canadian Criminal Code.

The opposition additionally claims that Bill C-31 would include the mandatory detention of everyone who arrives as part of a human smuggling event for a minimum of one year. This claim is entirely false. If the opposition members were to read the bill more thoroughly, they would find that Bill C-31 includes an exemption from automatic detention for minors under the age of 16. Furthermore, adults aged 16 and over would be released from detention as soon as they received a positive opinion on their refugee claim from the IRB. In cases of human smuggling, it would be overwhelmingly irresponsible to simply release those involved in a criminal human smuggling operation before officials were able to confirm their identities and establish whether or not they posed a risk to the safety of Canadians. Those whose identities cannot be established and who have been determined to be threats to the safety and security of Canadians or those suspected of being architects of criminal activity could be held longer under this bill. This is a provision that is entirely fair and should be entirely supported. This government has always been very serious about maintaining the security and safety of all Canadians.

*Government Orders*

The final misconception that I would like to address today pertains to biometrics. Several of my colleagues have spoken out in favour of biometrics in the past and for good reason. They would help expedite identity verification and decision making by officials and would result in shorter wait times. Biometrics would also help prevent the forgery or theft of an applicant's identity to gain access into Canada. However, some members of the opposition choose to say that the government would not adequately protect the privacy of those who provide biometric data. This is simply not true. There are privacy laws in this country and the government plans to follow them. Citizenship and Immigration Canada has been continuously working with the Privacy Commissioner on the implementation of biometrics. Personal information of applicants would be used, retained, shared and disposed of in accordance with Canada's privacy laws. Biometric data would be immediately disposed of when an individual received his or her citizenship. Furthermore, biometric data would not be required of Canadian citizens.

● (1320)

These are but a few misconceptions and myths put forward by the NDP and Liberal opposition. What is not a myth, though, is that the opposition parties are working against a bill that would restore integrity to our asylum system, making Canada's refugee determination faster and fairer in order to quickly provide refuge to legitimate refugees and remove bogus claimants. The NDP and Liberal opposition is working against a bill that would make the asylum system less prone to abuse. The NDP and Liberal opposition is working against a bill that would save the taxpayers millions of dollars every year, would help restore public trust in the immigration system and would ensure that Canada's generosity is only extended to those who genuinely need it.

The government was given a strong mandate to improve Canada's immigration system. In response it has presented Bill C-31, a bill that would help stop those who seek to abuse our generosity.

● (1325)

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member went to great lengths to point out how the NDP and the Liberal Party are opposing the bill, and she has asserted that we are incorrect in that. However, I would like to ask the member what she thinks about organizations that are very expert in this field that have also come out publicly in very strong opposition to this bill. For example, the Canadian Council for Refugees has called for the bill to be scrapped entirely. Amnesty International Canada has said that an earlier version of the bill falls far short of Canada's international obligations under human rights and refugee protection. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the Canadian Bar Association oppose the bill. An expert panel at the Centre for Refugee Studies has called the proposed bill draconian.

What does the member say in response to these organizations? They are not part of the official opposition. They are independent organizations that are experts in their field, and their opinion is that this is a terrible bill. What does she have to say to them?

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon:** Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate the fact that our government is committed to strengthening the integrity of Canada's immigration system and will make our refugee system faster and fairer. Canadians have given us a strong mandate to protect Canada's immigration system. We are acting on this mandate.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could say whether or not she perceives this to be fair. Imagine legitimate refugees who come from a country where their lives have been in danger. They come to Canada and, according to this Minister of Immigration, are deemed irregular refugees. That means these refugees are going to be held in detention for a year. After getting out of detention these refugees are going to have to wait four years before they are able to sponsor someone, such as a son, a daughter, or a spouse. Once they have sponsored that individual, there is another three to five years before the dependant comes to Canada.

Would the member acknowledge that is not fair? To keep the family apart for that period of time is just wrong. Would she not agree with me on that point?

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon:** Mr. Speaker, on February 16, our government introduced Bill C-31, which would restore integrity to our asylum system by making Canada's refugee process faster and fairer, thus resulting in faster protection for legitimate refugees and faster removal for bogus claimants.

Canada's immigration system is known for being the most generous and fair in the world, but we are also vulnerable to abuse. Bill C-31 would work to keep it fairer for everyone.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to share briefly with the House that I used to do some refugee law. I once helped a couple of ship-jumping claimants from Halifax in the days when there was a USSR and the countries that are now former Soviet bloc had people coming to Canada. The experience I had was really heartwarming. The client I helped, Nickola Marcinko, recently called me out of the blue. He is living in Oakville now. He is doing great. He has kids. He has a business. However, when he first came to Canada he was able to work. He was integrated into our community as we waited for his political refugee status to be concluded. He actually was able to contribute to society.

I wonder if the government could give us an estimate of what it would cost if we ceased to have political refugee claimants able to work in communities and support themselves, and if they are deemed irregular entries to Canada, put into a detention facility for up to a full year?

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon:** Mr. Speaker, I know that Bill C-31 would help our government put a stop to those who seek to abuse our generosity. It would help to get immigrants here faster. We would welcome them and be glad to have them work in our system.

● (1330)

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have spoken on this bill before, but we are now debating a reasoned amendment at second reading. I want to thank my colleague for Vancouver Kingsway for putting forward the motion that we are now debating that would eliminate many of the very offensive provisions of this bill.

*Government Orders*

I listened to the government member who spoke before me. Obviously the government is feeling frustrated that yet again it cannot get one of its bills through. It brings in closure and tries to shut down debate. On this particular bill, as with many other bills that we have seen, the concern in the broader community is unbelievable.

I was in my riding over the last couple of weeks, as I know many members were. I heard from people time and again, particularly those working in the refugee settlement system assisting refugees, how worried they are about the bill and the fact that it is going through Parliament. I want to reflect how bad people think this bill is.

I am glad that we are having this debate and that the member for Vancouver Kingsway put forward his motion. It gives us another opportunity to try to expose the grievous flaws in this bill. The bill would hurt people and tarnish Canada's reputation as a place of refuge for refugees. In effect, it would create a two-tier refugee system and that is something we should be very concerned about.

I want to express concern about the discretion that the bill would give to the minister. I heard the minister earlier in his remarks saying that is not true and not something that would happen. However, when one reads it, this is clearly a strong element of the bill. Again, it is a trend that we have seen with the Conservative government. It tends to centralize more and more power in a minister's hands and take away power from experts, panels and the system itself. It raises enormous suspicion among Canadians about the political motivation of the government with this kind of legislation.

We have a specific concern that the bill would make it easier to terminate refugee protection. I was astounded to learn that even once individuals became permanent residents they could have that taken away from them after the fact if conditions changed in their country of origin. This would create incredible uncertainty for refugees who had gone through the process and become permanent residents. In fact, it may even contravene international norms on the treatment of refugees. This is very concerning.

We have already had some debate and discussion on the clause that would prohibit refugee claimants who have been incarcerated in their home country for over 10 years and would not allow for tribunal discretion in the case of political prisoners. I heard the member give an example. What about someone like Nelson Mandela who is now an honorary citizen of Canada? Under the proposed system, he would not have been allowed in Canada. This very broad brush being cast over the system would deny unique and important circumstances of people who have been under political persecution to get the kind of protection they need. This leads me to wonder about the motivation behind a number of these bills.

I hear Conservative members time and again focus on the word "abuse". It seems to me, whether it is the drug bills, bills under the criminal justice system or Bill C-31, that they focus on a number of issues around abuse, make out that it is the norm and then penalize the whole system. They basically take a very hard-line approach on the whole system which penalizes legitimate claimants. I think this is very wrong. It is a pattern that has been emerging with the Conservative government in more and more legislation that has come before the House.

● (1335)

One of the areas of most concern in the bill is the changes to humanitarian and compassionate consideration. I know many of us, in our local constituencies, assist with casework for refugees. In my riding of Vancouver East, my staff and office work very hard. Over the years we have had hundreds of cases in which we have helped claimants with humanitarian and compassionate grounds. It is a very important element of the process.

The fact is the changes being contemplated in the bill mean that while claimants are waiting for an IRB decision, they cannot apply for H and C concurrently. That means claimants have to make a very difficult decision at the beginning as to whether they want to file for refugee status or humanitarian and compassionate consideration. We know that failed refugee claimants cannot apply for H and C for one year following a negative decision and possibly, by that time, they may have been deported.

Why is this important? I know from the casework we have done in our community that many people can have a refugee claim denied, but nonetheless may have a legitimate claim on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. Our belief is that a failed refugee claim should not get in the way of an H and C consideration.

This change in the act will make it more and more difficult and onerous for refugee claimants to actually have options before them, which they now have. It is definitely a hardening of the system. It is a narrowing of the criteria. It is a focus on abuse that now applies system-wide and makes it much more difficult for people.

As a result of these changes, if they do go through, members of Parliament are going to find it very difficult to work with claimants in our local communities and we are going to see a lot of hardship. We are going to see people facing a system that has closed down on them. I am very worried and concerned about the impact the bill will have.

Another concern with the bill is the fact that the minister will have the power to designate a group of refugees as irregular arrivals. Exactly what that means and what the criteria will be is something we will need to find out. We need to find out how this will work. The very fact that it will create two classes of refugee claimants is something about which we should be very concerned.

As many of the experts have pointed out, and I referred to some of the organizations earlier that had voiced their concerns about the bill, this section of the bill is very possibly a violation of charter equality rights and also international conventions. The notion of detaining mandatory detention for up to a year when the minister has designated irregular arrivals is very offensive to us.

I remember reading over the years about the situation that took place in Australia where it had mandatory detention. First, it created a political environment of hatred against refugees and allowed that environment to get stronger. I think that is what we will see here. This is what the Conservative government is apparently motivated by, creating an environment where we can beat up on refugees and say that somehow everybody is abusing the system.

*Government Orders*

The idea of having two tiers of refugees and singling certain people out when they may be legitimate refugees is very problematic.

I am proud that the NDP has stood in opposition to the bill, because there are serious flaws and concerns about it. It should be scrapped. I hope the amendment of the member for Vancouver Kingsway is approved in the House so we can go back to the drawing board and do this properly.

• (1340)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we just heard the kind of speech which indicates how, all too often, members of the New Democratic Party use extreme and irresponsible, in fact, demagogic language. The member just said that the government was seeking to create an environment where we could “beat up refugees”. I would like to give the member an opportunity to retract that outrageous remark. That is disgusting.

This country, under this government's leadership, resettles one out of every ten refugees worldwide. We are increasing the number of convention refugees who we protect in Canada by 20%, the highest per capita number in the world. We are increasing the refugee assistance program to assist them with their integration by 20%. We are creating, for the first time, the Refugee Appeal Division to provide for an additional safeguard for failed asylum claimants to allow them a full fact-based review at an oral hearing on a full appeal. Under the bill, we are going to be giving status to bona fide refugees in two to three months rather than two years.

Reasonable people can disagree reasonably about aspects of this bill, but to suggest that this government, which is according to the United Nations High Commissioner the world leader on refugee protection, is beating up on refugees is an outrageous slur that is beneath that member and her party. I ask her to retract.

**Ms. Libby Davies:** Mr. Speaker, I wonder why every organization that has expertise on this issue has voiced its strong opposition and concern about the bill. The fact is that when we read the bill and see how power would be vested in the minister's office, how it would create a two-tiered system, how it would focus on abuse, how it would be punitive across the board, we have every reason to believe it is fundamentally flawed and would be harmful to refugees overall. That is why every major organization in the country that is an expert on this issue has come out publicly and said just that.

I would like the minister to respond to those criticisms rather than to stand, with self-righteousness, and pretend that somehow the bill would move us forward when it would do just the opposite.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member. I want to follow up with regard to the safe country list.

I understand and appreciate that the minister has made a decision that would ultimately give him and his ministry more power to determine which country would be deemed as a safe country. However, the legislation passed a couple of years ago allowed for the safe country designation to be determined by an advisory committee made up of experts, for example, individuals who dealt with human rights issues and so forth.

Does the NDP still support, and would it support, an amendment that would allow us to have an advisory committee make recommendations to the minister with regard to what would be a safe country designate?

**Ms. Libby Davies:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments and question from the hon. member. It is correct. Under the former bill, Bill C-11, there was a panel of experts, including human rights experts, that could make decisions about a safe country. This would now be put into the hands of the minister. It is just further evidence of the concerns we have about the bill, which focuses more decision making and power, in a political sense, in the minister's office other than through an independent expert advisory situation.

What we had before was far superior to what is now contemplated in the bill.

Why would we have a minister making those determinations about what would be a safe country when we could have reliable, independent experts doing that and giving reasonable advice? Again, it is further evidence that the bill is fundamentally flawed and we should not approve it.

• (1345)

**Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today in support of Bill C-31, the protecting Canada's immigration system act.

Since Bill C-31 was tabled earlier this year, we have had the opportunity to debate its provisions on a number of different occasions in the House. I have listened to all sides of the debate and my hon. colleagues have made their points with conviction and often with passion.

I remain convinced that Bill C-31 is legislation that will improve our country's immigration system in a number of important ways, including, of course, cracking down on the lucrative business of human smuggling.

Human smugglers are criminals who operate around the world, charging large amounts of money to facilitate illegal migration. This is an important national issue because the actions of human smugglers undermine the security and safety of Canadians.

In some parts of the country, such as British Columbia, there is also an important global issue. It was on Vancouver Island in B.C. where the drama of human smuggling played out most prominently in recent years, in the cases of both the *Ocean Lady* in 2009 and the *Sun Sea* in 2010. It was these two incidents, more than any other, that demonstrated that this was not a theoretical problem in the country. It is a real problem.

Last summer, another human smuggling ship, the MV *Alicia*, carrying almost 90 Sri Lankan Tamils bound for Canada, was intercepted in Indonesia. In January another 200 Tamils seeking to come to Canada were duped by smugglers and left stranded in the small west African country of Togo.

Just a few weeks ago, the SV *Tabasco 2*, sank off the coast of Nova Scotia. The captain was killed, three crew members are missing and five survivors are requesting refugee status in Canada. The Minister of Public Safety has suggested that this could be another case of human smuggling.



*Government Orders*

All of these incidents underline the need to take action.

Bill C-31 would help to do so in a number of ways. It would enable the Minister of Public Safety to designate the arrival of a group of individuals into Canada as an “irregular arrival”. It would establish a mandatory detention for those individuals for up to a year in order to determine their identity and admissibility, including whether they had been involved in any legal activity. Mandatory detention would exclude those designated foreign nationals who were under the age of 16. Also, once an individual's refugee claim had been approved, that individual would be released from detention.

The bill would make it easier to prosecute human smugglers and would impose mandatory minimum prison sentences on those convicted of human smuggling. It would hold shipowners and operators to account when their ships were used for human smuggling. It would reduce the attraction of coming to Canada by way of illegal human smuggling by limiting the ability of those who would do so to take advantage of our generous immigration system and social services.

Cracking down on human smugglers is an important element of protecting the integrity of our immigration system. That is why these provisions have been included in Bill C-31.

Aside from human smuggling, the bill aims to strengthen Canada's immigration system in two other very specific ways. The bill would further build on the long needed reforms to the asylum system that were passed in Parliament in June 2010 as part of the Balanced Refugee Reform Act. These new measures would further accelerate the processing of refugee claims for nationals from designated countries that generally would not produce refugees. They would also reduce the options available to failed claimants to delay their removal from Canada.

It may surprise some of my hon. colleagues to know that Canada receives more asylum claims from countries in Europe than from either Africa or Asia. Last year alone, almost one-quarter of all refugee claims made in Canada were made by European Union nationals. That should give us pause for thought.

• (1350)

EU countries have strong human rights and democratic systems similar to our own and yet they produced almost 25% of all the refugee claims in this country in 2011. That is up 14% from the previous year. At a time of economic uncertainty for most people, this state of affairs comes with a large price tag for Canadian taxpayers.

In recent years, virtually all EU claims were withdrawn, abandoned or rejected. In 2010-11 alone, this was the case for 93% of European Union claims. If this trend continues, that means that the unfounded claims from the 5,800 European Union nationals who sought asylum last year will cost Canadian taxpayers nearly \$170 million.

The refugee reform measures in Bill C-31 would help prevent abuse of the system and would ensure that all of our refugee determination processes are as streamlined as possible. This would be accomplished without affecting the fairness of the system and

without compromising any of Canada's international and domestic obligations with respect to refugees.

Finally, the bill would enable the introduction of mandatory biometric collection for screening temporary resident, visa and study and work permit applicants, which would strengthen our immigration program in a number of ways.

This component of the legislation and its corresponding regulations that would follow would allow the government to make it mandatory for temporary resident visa applicants to Canada to have their photographs and fingerprints taken as part of their temporary resident visa applications.

Because biometric data is more reliable and less prone to forgery or theft than documents, these measures would strengthen immigration screening, enhance security and help reduce fraud.

It is no surprise to me that this important bill has received widespread support. This is what immigration lawyer, Julie Taub, had to say:

I'm an immigration and refugee lawyer in Ottawa, and a former member of the Immigration and Refugee Board. I can tell you from theory and practice that the current refugee system is very flawed, and cumbersome, and definitely needs an overhaul. It takes up to two years to have a claimant have his hearing. And there are far too many bogus claims that clog up the system, and use very expensive resources at a cost to Canadian taxpayers.

I also like the fact that he is going to fast-track these claims, so they do not clog up the refugee system for genuine claimants. I have clients who've been waiting since 2009, early 2010 to have their hearing, and I represent many claimants from, let's say Africa, the Mid East countries, who base their claim on gender violence or Christian persecution in certain Middle East countries, and they have to wait, because the system is so clogged up with what I consider to be unfounded claims from citizens of safe country of origin.

As Canadian parliamentarians, we should all be committed to maintaining Canada's generous and fair immigration system, which is the envy of the world. We need to ensure that such an important system is always operating in our national interest and as effectively and efficiently as possible. That means that we need to preserve what works well in the immigration system and improve the system in areas where there are shortcomings.

The measures in Bill C-31 are necessary to protect the integrity of our immigration system. I support Bill C-31 and I encourage all of my colleagues in the House to join me in doing so.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to comment on the process by which Bill C-31 was drafted. For previous bills, the opposition parties and the government specifically agreed to, among other things, the creation of an advisory committee to define a “safe third country”. The government went back on those agreements and came up with Bill C-31.

*Statements by Members*

What does my colleague think of the fact that bipartisan or multi-party agreements in the House can result in reasonable compromises that everyone is happy with, and of the fact that this process led to Bill C-31, which is totally unacceptable and violates all of the previous agreements? Can the member justify the government's decision and its dismissal of reasonable arguments put forward by the NDP and the other opposition parties?

• (1355)

[English]

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Mr. Speaker, a lot of work did go into the former Balanced Refugee Reform Act but the reality is that much has changed and the changes are a drain on our system. That act was never intended to be a static act, nor should the law be static. When things change we should be prepared to look at why change is necessary.

Twenty-three per cent of the total refugee claims in 2011 came from the European Union and 18% of total refugee claims came from Hungary. These are safe countries. They are countries like Canada. There is no reason for refugees coming here from those countries. The reality is that by implementing this bill we would save our taxpayers \$1.65 billion over five years.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member says that it is because things have changed. I would ask the member what specifically changed that caused the government to change its opinion and say that the minister will now be responsible for the decision on safe country designations as opposed to an advisory committee.

At the time when all four political parties in the House supported the idea of having the safe country designation list, that list was supposed to be assigned by an advisory group, not the Minister of Immigration. What specifically changed to cause the government to make that decision and give the minister that authority?

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the minister has no power to arbitrarily designate a safe country. Factors that would lead to a country being designated safe would be clearly outlined in both law and regulations. I will give an example. In a specified ministerial order there are quantitative factors that clearly identify that 60% or more claims from the country are withdrawn or abandoned. If 75% or more are rejected by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board, that would be considered reasons for a country to be designated as a safe country.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member spoke at length and in-depth about the issue of responding quickly in terms of regulation and what the bill would do to designate safe countries. Based on the riding that he is from, I would like him to comment on the input he has received from his community on the issue of designated safe country and the response from his community in terms of its support for this bill.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Mr. Speaker, being a border community, Sault Ste. Marie deals with a lot of immigration issues but the number one issue seems to be the length of time to process applications. This bill would speed up that process. Needless to say, the cost-saving measures in the bill, \$1.65 billion over five years, would be money that could be more adequately used in other areas.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we know this bill would deprive some refugees of the right to apply for permanent residence for five years and, therefore, the reunification with their families, including their children. Why on the earth would the government be blocking family reunification, which has always been a very important element? This bill would actually be a roadblock to family reunification. I would ask the member what the justification is for putting a further obstacle to family reunification.

• (1400)

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the premise of that comment. If that is a concern, then that is something that can be discussed fully in committee. I have great respect for the members on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and if that is a legitimate concern it will be addressed.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

### BLAINVILLE-BOISBRIAND ARMADA

**Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am truly proud to rise in the House today to commend a hockey team in my riding, the Blainville-Boisbriand Armada, and the terrific season they have had.

From the beginning of the season, the Armada surprised and enchanted fans, the public and sports commentators alike through their remarkable climb and final rank among the best teams of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. The team even won the western division title with 20 point more than the other teams. The players, coaches and entire staff are all responsible for their tremendous success, which should inspire us all, and I would like to sincerely congratulate them.

Tomorrow afternoon, because of a bet I made with my hon. colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, I will wear an Océanic jersey, since Océanic beat the Armada in the quarter-finals, but it was no cakewalk. I would like to congratulate the Rimouski Océanic, who also worked very hard this season.

I would like to tell my hon. colleague, however, that his time will come, because I know that next year, he will be the one wearing the winners' jersey, and it will be the Blainville-Boisbriand Armada.

\* \* \*

[English]

### STANLEY CUP PLAYOFFS

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Zack Smith is living the dream of every kid who put on skates and picked up a hockey stick. The 24-year-old from Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, plays centre for the Ottawa Senators. Today he is preparing for game six in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. Zack played for the Swift Current Broncos. In 2008, he was drafted by the Senators. The road to the NHL came through Manitoba and Binghamton. This season, he signed a two-year contract and played 81 of 82 games, contributing 14 goals and 26 points.

*Statements by Members*

I watched Zack as a young hockey player when he and my son played together and against each other. It is great to see how far he has come.

Senators coaches call him a big, solid forward who plays hard, is physical and will do the dirty work. Zack has a blue-collar lunch-bucket work ethic, a great Saskatchewan trait he learned from his parents, Dean and Colleen. Dean recently told an Ottawa newspaper, "I have had scouts tell me that guys who make it to the NHL on talent alone are about 5%. The other 95% is desire".

Desire, hard work and humility have made him a success. I congratulate Zack and wish him good luck.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**EARTH DAY**

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, April 22 is Earth Day around the world. In Canada, community groups, not-for-profit agencies, individuals and private sector companies participated in environmental projects and events, as was the case yesterday in Montreal at the march that drew 250,000 participants.

At the same time, at La TOHU in my riding, I had the opportunity to take part in one of these initiatives, the environmental forum organized by the C-Vert team. As the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, I am proud to support initiatives to improve this planet for future generations.

One of the best ways to influence people is to lead by example. That is why I encourage people to do their part every day in order to ensure that Canada resumes its place as a leader in the environmental movement to protect our planet.

Earth Day reminds us that we have to improve the environment every day by applying lessons learned. Together we can build a better future.

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[*English*]

**THE BUDGET**

**Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it has been a busy two weeks visiting groups in Mississauga—Brampton South, highlighting the economic action plan 2012. Great local employers like Baylis Medical benefit from our R and D investments. Weston Forest Products and Gray Tools both benefit from our low corporate taxes and the development of new international markets for their products.

The students at Philip Pocock, Derry West and St. Pio were enthused, optimistic and engaged about our nation's future. Their families are keen to see us focus on job creation, growth and long-term prosperity.

At seniors' homes and legions, seniors shared nostalgic memories and thanked our Conservative government for income-splitting provisions. That single fiscal policy change provides more money and improves the quality of life for Canada's seniors.

At the Sunnybrook veterans' wings, residents lauded the compassionate care they receive. I had a great experience joining in their music therapy on the drums.

At the Mississauga Board of Trade, where I delivered a comprehensive overview of the economic action plan 2012, employers were very supportive of our small business plan and our budget as a whole.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

**LÉONARD OTIS AND GILLES ROY**

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the success of the Océanic or thank my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville for her presentation, but instead I am pleased to highlight the commitment of two staunch supporters of rural life in eastern Quebec.

Léonard Otis and Gilles Roy have defended crucial causes, not just on behalf of their region, but also on behalf of all rural regions across the country. They have influenced the development of our region by working to keep villages alive and fighting for the forestry community, which has allowed people living in the Lower St. Lawrence to reap the benefits of this industry.

Léonard Otis has been a leader in land occupancy and sustainable development in eastern Quebec. Gilles Roy has been involved in all these causes, and everyone in the Lower St. Lawrence region remembers him as the leader of Operation Dignity I, II and III.

Next Saturday, April 28, Léonard Otis and Gilles Roy will receive the Université du Québec à Rimouski medal in recognition of their contribution to the development of the Lower St. Lawrence region.

Congratulations to Mr. Otis and Mr. Roy. You are models of civic engagement.

I would also like to thank UQAR. The awarding of this medal ensures that the dedication and work of Léonard Otis and Gilles Roy will never be forgotten.

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[*English*]

**TRANSCONA CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**

**Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I want to bring to the attention of the House the centennial celebration of Transcona.

*Statements by Members*

Transcona is celebrating 100 years as a community, from its roots of being founded as a repair centre for the transcontinental railroad to its diverse economic base today. Although Transcona was incorporated into the City of Winnipeg in 1972, Transcona residents still have a great sense of independence and pride in their community.

On April 12, I was proud to participate in the kickoff event for the centennial celebrations hosted by the local legion. I invite everyone to join us June 1 to June 3 in downtown Transcona to celebrate at the annual Hi Neighbour Festival.

Thanks are due to all those who have given up their personal time to prepare these events, especially the centennial committee under the able leadership of co-chairs Peter Martin, Murray Rougeau, and Barb Culbertson. I offer my congratulations. It is the passion of our residents that makes our communities flourish.

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**COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS BY FIREFIGHTERS**

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if we wake up to the sound of a fire alarm, Canadians know that help is only three digits away, at 911.

Today I want to honour the contribution of firefighters to our communities. Few of us would rush into a burning building to save a stranger, but these heroes do. They isolate the danger to protect neighbours and extinguish flames to protect property, and they are also often first on the scene for a medical emergency. Most importantly, they risk their lives for us.

The largest fire department in Kitchener—Conestoga belongs to the City of Kitchener but also supports volunteer departments in the townships of Wilmot, Wellesley and Woolwich.

Last year 230 staff, of whom 198 are front-line heroes, responded to almost 10,000 calls. That is more than one every hour on average. Whether a firefighter as a professional or a volunteer, they share one common trait: heroism.

I ask all members of this House to join me in honouring Kitchener firefighters Jeff Noble and Steve Jones, and all other heroes across Canada for their service and their willingness to sacrifice.

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**HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY**

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today many of my colleagues and I will walk with a Canadian Holocaust survivor on this national Holocaust Remembrance Day.

I shared in the same honour last Thursday, remembering with Windsor's Jewish community at our local ceremony. The Holocaust refers to a specific genocide event, the state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945.

Jews were the primary targets and victims—six million were murdered—but targets also included gypsies, the handicapped and Polish citizens because of racial, ethnic and national reasons. Homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war and

political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

It is our nation's obligation to break down the walls of indifference and to shatter the conspiracy of silence. As an international community, we must stand together and act to prevent future genocide, not stand idly by and intervene when it is too late.

Today, by reflecting on this annihilation, we break that silence and honour the memory of the victims.

As Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, said:

...I swore never to be silent whenever human beings endured suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

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● (1410)

**AWARDS FOR BRAVERY**

**Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today to recognize three constituents of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry who have been awarded medals from His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada.

I would first like to recognize Corporal Eric Monnin, who has been awarded the medal of military valour for courageous and selfless actions under enemy fire while rendering first aid to two wounded soldiers in Afghanistan.

I would also like to recognize Constable Michael Allan Biron of the Akwesasne Mohawk Police, and Yves Soumillon, who have been awarded medals of bravery. These medals were awarded in response to their bravery when they witnessed a vehicle burst into flames after being struck by a speeding car. They both desperately tried to open the doors of the vehicle, but unfortunately were unable to pull the victims out before the flames became too strong.

It is constituents like these brave, courageous individuals who make me so proud to be the member of Parliament for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

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**PLAST**

**Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I join with the entire Canadian Ukrainian community in commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Ukrainian scouting organization, Plast.

Officially founded by Dr. Oleksander Tysovsky on April 12, 1912, in Lviv, Plast is a Ukrainian youth organization that fosters not only leadership and teamwork skills but also a remarkable connection between youth and Ukrainian values, culture and history. For a century now, Plast has motivated Ukrainian youth around the world, including here in Canada.

Ukrainian-Canadian *plastuny* and *plastunky* will be celebrating this important milestone all year, including at summer camps and jamborees this August.

*Statements by Members*

As the chair of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group, I am proud to celebrate the invaluable contributions made by the Plast scouting organization and the Ukrainian community as a whole to building our country.

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**FOOD INSPECTION**

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we witnessed over the last couple of weeks an insurmountable number of new announcements from the Minister of Agriculture regarding the CFIA and CBSA, otherwise known as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Canada Border Services Agency.

We have watched as the CFIA has actually declined in numbers in real terms when it comes to inspection services, as well decline in budget. The minister's response was to just send it over to CBSA. What happened at CBSA? They shrank that budget too; however, today we see another announcement from the minister saying that the government will actually put some money back in, and folks can use a sort of check-off system and look after their own food security and safety.

That is not good enough. Canadians expect that their food will be safe no matter where it comes from in the world. As we know, it comes from many places around the world. In fact, over 80% of the food we consume comes from places other than our country.

What we need to do is ensure that all our food, no matter who it is for, is safe at all times, and we need to make sure that we have a robust inspection system no matter where the food comes from.

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**NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT**

**Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as we commemorate the Armenian genocide tomorrow, I remind the House that it has been almost 18 years since the ceasefire in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh was reached, when the Bishkek protocol was signed on May 5, 1994. At the time of the signing, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe created the Minsk Group as a venue to broker a final, lasting and peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

I am proud that Canada has stood in steadfast support of the OSCE Minsk process and believe that dialogue through this process is the primary way to resolve the conflict. A balanced and objective approach on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh and support to the regional and global peace and security are important.

We, as friends to both peoples, call upon all sides to peacefully continue the negotiation process through the Minsk Group and come to a mutually acceptable, solid and lasting solution.

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●(1415)

**CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS**

**Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our nation was born of many different occasions, dates and events across the years that have formed the country we live in today. On April 17, Canadians celebrated one of the most significant milestones in our

history, the 30th anniversary of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the patriation of our constitution.

Since 1982, our country and our national identity have been shaped by provisions of the charter that are now common in our day-to-day vocabulary. The charter sets out that we are equal regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation, ensuring all Canadians are equal under the law. We saw the establishment of fundamental freedoms of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association.

An entire generation has come of age in an era when the values of fairness, compassion and equality are enshrined among our founding documents and are now ingrained in our character.

We look forward to the next 30 years, to decades of progress, fairness and protection for all Canadians.

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**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday Canadians celebrated Earth Day. Canada's national heritage binds us together, and Earth Day highlights the importance of each individual taking personal action for protecting this precious gift.

Our government has also taken strong action to protect Canada's biodiversity and preserve its natural heritage. We have moved to protect an additional 150,000 square kilometres of parkland, a 54% increase to the existing lands and waters administered by Parks Canada. Also, we have established three new wildlife areas in Nunavut.

We will continue to move ahead on our commitment to engage Canadians in developing a national conservation plan, a coherent national framework for Canada's conservation efforts, and in budget 2012 we announced funding for the creation of Canada's first urban national park in the Rouge Valley in Ontario.

The Government of Canada congratulates Canadians who participate in Earth Day for their passion toward conservation and the long-term sustainability of Canada's environment.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise here today to denounce certain government MPs' attempts to criminalize abortion.

Of course, they know that their approach is extremely unpopular with women, who hate it when men try to tell them what to do with their bodies.

That is why these members are drawing inspiration from the Republican Party and using roundabout ways and bogus motions that are based on pseudo-science.

Let us be clear: this will not work. Canadian women have a right to access abortion, and this backwards-thinking government cannot take that away from them.

### Oral Questions

Our party has always defended women's rights and we will continue to do so. It is unfortunate that we cannot say the same for this government, which has let Motion M-312, moved by the member for Kitchener Centre, in by the back door in order to attack women directly.

It is not enough to answer on behalf of the government that it has no intention of reopening the abortion debate because—here is a reality check—Motion M-312 has already opened it. We must close it immediately.

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### HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

**Mr. Chris Alexander (Ajax—Pickering, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Holocaust Remembrance Day took place last week. It is up to all of us to remember the victims of that genocide, the millions of men, women and children killed brutally and mercilessly.

[English]

It also provides us with a moment to remember the soldiers who displayed uncommon courage and often made the ultimate sacrifice in defence of freedom, because when those Canadian and Allied forces liberated the death camps, they came face to face with unimaginable horrors. They saw first-hand the toll exacted by a terrible state-sponsored brutality.

That dark chapter of history serves as a constant reminder to us all to remain vigilant in opposing inhumanity and intolerance, wherever in the world they may occur, lest history repeat itself.

I hope all hon. members and all Canadians will join us in pledging never to forget.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

### GOVERNMENT SERVICES

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are increasingly aware of the negative impact of the Conservative budget on their lives. What exactly does “cuts to direct services” mean? It means making our borders more porous and less secure. It means less income for future retirees. It means slower employment insurance claims processing.

Why did the government choose to cut direct services to people to fix a deficit that it created by cutting corporate taxes?

● (1420)

[English]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government recently set out a path forward for economic growth for long-term competitiveness. We realize that we have to return to balanced budgets so that public services can remain affordable for Canadians. That is why we have announced some small reductions overall. Of the \$280 billion the government will spend, there will be some \$4 billion or \$5 billion of reductions over the next three years.

However, we are protecting those programs that are most important to Canadians, programs like health care and education. That is why our economy is becoming more competitive. That is why we have seen the creation of nearly 700,000 net new jobs since the end of the recession.

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance announced in December, without discussion or debate, a \$31 billion reduction in the health care projected transfer. Do not talk to us about protecting health care.

The Conservatives are creating an incredible economic, social and ecological debt that future generations will have to bear, but Canadians are not taking it lying down. Yesterday I was with 250,000 other Canadians in Montreal who are saying no to the Conservatives' dismantling of our protection in matters of the environment. That is why we ask the government, why do Canadians have to bear all the environmental risks while the Conservatives' friends benefit from the subsidies and lax environmental enforcement?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to health care, no government has shown more support for doctors, nurses and hospitals than this government has shown. Every year since this Conservative government has been in power we have increased the transfer to provinces by 6%. That is an unparalleled level of commitment to health care in this country. We are very proud of that.

With respect to the environment, maybe the member could stand in his place and explain to Canadians why, when he was minister of the environment in Quebec, he cut his budget by \$179 million. Maybe he could stand and tell us about that right here and right now.

\* \* \*

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a \$31 billion cut in health care, unannounced, no debate, no discussion—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair:** Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are so cynical that they have taken it upon themselves to approve projects that experts have turned down. Now, if a project is bad for the environment and human health, all it needs to go ahead is a nod from a Conservative minister. There is a reason that a quarter of a million people rallied yesterday for Earth Day.

Why are the Conservatives undermining credible, independent environmental assessment? How far will they go to keep their polluting pals happy?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, every year since coming to power, this government has increased provincial and territorial transfers by 6%. According to the budget that the Minister of Finance introduced, we will do the same this year, next year and the year after that. That is a very good thing for the health system.

## Oral Questions

## NATIONAL DEFENCE

[English]

With respect to environmental assessments, what we are saying is one environmental assessment per project. I would like the member opposite to stand and say why he will not trust the Government of Quebec to do a proper environmental assessment. Why will he not respect the joint responsibilities the federal and provincial governments have in environmental assessments? What does he have to complain about in working with the provinces constructively?

[Translation]

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are doing away with environmental assessment processes by making cuts to various departments and agencies. Fisheries and Oceans Canada is no longer involved in the protection of the marine environment, and communities that depend on the fishery must rely on the advice of ministers—this government's ministers—rather than scientists, and that does not even include the elimination of the oil-spill response centre.

Why does the minister want to do away with the scientific dimension of environmental protection?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Environment Canada's and our government's key objectives have not changed at all. We remain focused on providing Canadians with an environment that is clean, safe and sustainable.

However, like other departments and agencies, Environment Canada is doing its part to assist in deficit reduction. We will do this by streamlining our operations and by eliminating or reducing low-performing programs that do not contribute directly to the department's mandate.

● (1425)

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see the Minister of Natural Resources has passed along his speaking notes to the Minister of the Environment.

This week the world is gathering in Montreal for the International Polar Year 2012 Conference. In addition to top scientists from around the world, this year also features government babysitters assigned to follow Environment Canada scientists and record their conversations. Is this 1984 or 2012?

Why is the minister putting a gag order on Canadian scientists?

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Environment Canada will be sending between 30 and 40 scientists to the conference in Montreal. They will be involved in the presentation of papers and question and answer periods, which the media will attend.

There is nothing new in the email that was sent to attendees. It is established practice to coordinate media availability. In fact, many of our younger scientists seek advice from our departmental communications staff. Where we run into problems is when journalists try to lead scientists away from science and into policy matters. When it comes to policy, ministers address those issues.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on page 27 of his recent report, the Auditor General graphically demonstrates how the government was keeping two sets of books on the F-35s, one for its own internal use and the other, with false totals, for use publicly. The government did not tell the truth about the costs or the lack of competition or the fact that it never had the contract it claimed to have.

Now that opposition parties have forced a parliamentary committee to hear this matter, will the government guarantee there will be no restrictions on witnesses to be called and no secret meetings behind closed doors?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it will not come as a surprise to the member for Wascana that I do not fully accept the premise of his question.

Committees are the masters of their own domain. The member knows that.

With respect to the F-35, let me be very clear. Canada has not signed a contract. We have not spent any money acquiring the F-35. We will not proceed with the purchase until the seven steps that we outlined are completed and developmental work is sufficiently advanced.

The government has clearly communicated the budget that we have to replace Canada's aging CF-18s. We will stay within that budget.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government mocked the Parliamentary Budget Officer, but now he has been vindicated by the Auditor General.

While Conservatives were calling the PBO's figures flawed, they knew full well their own totals were very close to his.

For that \$9 billion allegedly frozen for airplane acquisition, what will Canada actually get? How many planes? Will they have engines? Will they have retarder parachutes and night vision? Can they land in the Arctic? Is pilot training covered? Are replacement planes, parts and new technology included? What exactly will Canada get?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I hope we will get a much better acquisition than when the Liberal Party bought used submarines. That was a disaster for the Canadian people.

What we will not do is go to a garage sale to buy equipment for the men and women in uniform. What we will do is follow the seven steps this government has laid out and ensure that those seven steps are followed so that we can provide our men and women in uniform with the best equipment to do the job the Canadian people and the Government of Canada ask of them.

*Oral Questions*

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is not just the fighter jets. This government has made a mess of all military procurement since 2006. Whether we are talking about the F-35s or, more recently, armoured vehicles, whether we are talking about the Chinook helicopters—the price of which continues to skyrocket—search and rescue aircraft or military trucks, this government has completely botched all military procurement.

What exactly are the Minister of National Defence and his procurement officer doing?

[*English*]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a little rich for the Liberal Party to talk about the acquisition of equipment for the men and women in uniform. When the Liberals were in power we saw a decade of darkness. It is not a Conservative Party member who said that. That was said by General Rick Hillier, whom the Liberal Party appointed as Chief of the Defence Staff.

We are working diligently to ensure that we provide the men and women of the Canadian Forces with the equipment they need to get the job done. What we will not do is turn the clock back and go back to the dark days when the Liberals decimated our men and women in uniform and our armed forces. We will not do that.

• (1430)

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is now clear that the defence minister was fully aware two years ago of the true cost of the F-35s but chose to keep Canadians in the dark. He spent the last two weeks making up bogus excuses for his mishandling of the fighter jet procurement, further confirming that the government has lost all credibility on the file.

Will the minister stop hiding the truth from Canadians and finally take responsibility for this fiasco?

**Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, far from being a fiasco, this procurement is moving ahead on the basis of a plan that was identified in the House repeatedly. Canada has not signed any contract. It has not spent any money on acquiring a replacement aircraft for the CF-18s. We will not proceed with such a purchase until the seven steps outlined by us over the course of recent weeks, as the member opposite knows full well, are completed and developmental work has sufficiently advanced. We have communicated a budget for replacing the aging CF-18s and we will stick to it. Our numbers cover the acquisition costs for replacement as well as the operating costs for this aircraft.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that is funny. The Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence both said they had a contract.

Here is what the defence minister said on the cost of the F-35s in 2011, and I quote. “Many figures have been circulated on the cost.... I have no idea where [they’re] coming from. They’re simply made up — or they’re guessing.”

Was the Auditor General guessing in his report when he showed it was the defence minister repeatedly misleading costs for months on

end? Was the Parliamentary Budget Officer simply making things up when he accurately estimated the costs?

When will the government stop making excuses for deceiving Canadians?

**Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we do not apologize for the fact that Canada is following its laws and policies on procurement in securing a replacement for the aging CF-18s. There will be an independent review of the costs. The funding envelope is frozen. A new secretariat is being established. We are going to continue to identify opportunities to participate in an important developmental program. We are going to provide annual updates to Parliament and continue to evaluate options, and the Treasury Board Secretariat will review the sustainment costs of the F-35 to ensure full compliance with the procurement policies of this government. We make no apologies for any of that.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, underestimating the total cost of the F-35s by \$10 billion is not an accounting error; it is ministerial incompetence.

The Conservatives have hidden information and mismanaged the file, and now they are refusing to take responsibility for this fiasco.

Even worse, history is repeating itself, but this time it has to do with close combat vehicles. Changes might be made to the procurement process and the initial cost of \$2 billion could increase.

When will the Conservatives start showing some transparency when it comes to military procurement?

[*English*]

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the close combat vehicle procurement, this procurement is going forward exactly as it should. We always try to engage fairness monitors to ensure that the procurement is happening in a fair and transparent manner. I have taken the advice of the fairness monitor and the advice of deputy ministers of National Defence and Public Works, and a decision will be communicated to the bidders shortly.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it looks like Public Works has a new role in military procurement: re-rigging rigged procurement processes.

Witness the F-35 secretariat. Now that it has been caught rigging the replacement for the CF-18s, it is re-rigging it all over again in Public Works this time. As for the latest one, the close combat vehicle, we learned from the fairness monitor, I mean monitor, that it got rigged too.

Why can they not hold open and transparent procurement processes? Are the Conservatives addicted to rigging?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we make a habit at Public Works, as the contracting authority for the government when we do military procurements, to engage fairness monitors, and they are there for exactly this reason.



They are monitors, not monsters. They do a very good job on our behalf, and we look to them for good, sound advice to make sure that the process is being followed in a transparent, open and fair manner.

As I said, I have taken the advice of the fairness monitor and also the advice of our legal team and deputy ministers from Public Works and National Defence, and the bidders will be communicated to shortly.

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● (1435)

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it looks like this tendency to make it up as one goes along is spreading along the front benches on the other side.

Last week we learned the Conservatives are shutting down two prisons as well as the Ontario Regional Treatment Centre, but they have no plan for where the inmates will go. Thousands of the most dangerous offenders in this country, including those with serious mental illnesses, are supposed to be moved to facilities that are already full.

We can always tell when the Conservatives are trying to hide their mismanagement. They start holding crime photo ops.

Will the Minister of Public Safety instead table the documents he has based this decision on in the House, or are these reckless cuts simply a result of making up policy on the fly?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what irony coming from the NDP that wants to release all these prisoners right onto the street. Why are they worried about prisoners in prisons?

Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. The thrust of our legislation is ensuring that we keep dangerous and repeat offenders behind bars where they belong.

We are not creating new criminals, merely stopping the revolving door. We have not and will not build any new prisons. In fact, due to a lack of new prisoners, we are closing prisons to save taxpayer money.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are adding 2,700 new cells to existing prisons. So much for saving money.

Leclerc prison just underwent a costly renovation project over the past three years. Since December 2011, over 60 new correctional officers have been hired. This closure smacks of improvisation. It is as though this decision has been made on the back of a napkin, completely in haste, in order to distract from the Conservative scandals.

Why are the Conservatives going ahead with this closure, after having renovated the facility and hired new staff?

[*English*]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am puzzled. First of all, the critic says there is no plan. Then the

#### Oral Questions

other member gets up and says we are constructing 2,700 new cells. In fact, they cannot even get their stories straight. Do they want prisons? Do they not want prisons?

All we know is that the NDP wants prisoners out on the street. We want them safe and secure, protecting Canadians.

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#### ELECTIONS CANADA

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, speaking of criminals, let us talk about the robofraud investigation that has moved to Conservative Party headquarters.

The RCMP and Elections Canada are going over the Conservative database to find out who had access with Pierre Poutine, but a funny thing happened. The database has been altered. It seems that key records have been deleted. Holy Watergate, Batman.

Before the member for Peterborough gets up with his usual bizarre countercharge, will he comment on the fact that it is usually the cover-up, not the original crime, that gets one caught in the end?

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again we see the member opposite doing exactly what the Chief Electoral Officer told him not to do, which is jump to crazy conclusions.

Let us be clear. We have indicated from the get-go and from the outset that we were fully participating in supporting Elections Canada in its work and its research in this regard. We regard any effort to suppress a vote as being completely unacceptable.

What we do know in addition to that is that the NDP does not co-operate with Elections Canada. It has not co-operated in the investigations into the NDP with respect to its own conventions, where it took illegal donations from unions. Why will it not co-operate?

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#### ETHICS

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, he will not get a \$16 orange juice from the minister of international development with lousy answers like that.

Let us talk about the government's lack of accountability. Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce the minister of international development, who would not stay in a five-star hotel in posh London because it was not good enough for her. Now she has had to pay the money back.

This is a woman with a long history. Do members remember the thousand-dollar limo joyrides she used to take through the streets of Toronto or the fact that she slashed international development funds so she could live like a queen? Is someone over there not embarrassed by her behaviour? Will someone stand up and apologize to the hard-working Canadian taxpayers? She is living like a queen off their backs.

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government believes very much that all ministers must respect taxpayer dollars. The minister, of course, has repaid the costs in question.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay asked a question earlier that perhaps the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North would have something to say about. I understand that NDP member will now sit as an independent member because he is tired of having his votes suppressed by his leadership.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there is nothing too good for the working class. The Minister of International Cooperation refused to stay at a five-star hotel in London and chose instead to stay at the luxurious Savoy Hotel. The price of her hotel room could have covered the cost of vaccinating 140 children living in poor countries. Instead, the minister treated herself to a marble bathroom.

Is she going to use the same sleeping bag defence as the minister responsible for conflicts of interest?

As long as she is wasting public funds, did the minister at least take the shampoo samples from the room?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, our government expects our ministers to use taxpayers' money properly. The minister reimbursed the cost of changing hotels.

[*English*]

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, during a trip to London, the minister for CIDA attended a five-star hotel where the conference was being held, but that was not swanky enough for her. She wanted to go down to the Savoy Hotel and more than double the costs. She was carried the two kilometres from her hotel at the conference in a limo that cost \$1,000 a day, while she sat back and sipped orange juice at \$16.00 a glass. Ironically, her department suffered almost \$400 million in cuts.

Let us get to the real reason why she switched hotels. Will the minister stop ripping off taxpayer dollars because she could not get a smoking room and stop living like a millionaire on the taxpayers' dime?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, anybody who has looked at the expense disclosures of Liberal ministers when they were in government would know what swanky living was. The difference is this government respects taxpayer dollars, and we expect all ministers to do so. That is why the minister in question has repaid the expenditures in question.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of International Cooperation attended a conference in London, a room was reserved for her at the conference site at a luxury hotel, but the minister insisted on being treated even more like a queen at another hotel at a much higher cost.

Will the minister confirm the name of the hotel and say whether it would be appropriate to recommend that hotel to the hon. members of the House of Commons?

[*English*]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think I have answered this question thoroughly. Of course, our government has been very focused on respecting taxpayer dollars in every regard, including ministers' offices. In fact, over the last three years, ministers' offices' budgets have been reduced by 18% by this government. That is what Canadians want to see. That is real leadership. That is what the Liberals never gave. That is why they are over there.

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**ELECTIONS CANADA**

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, every news story on election fraud brings more scandal and corruption closer to the Prime Minister. First, incriminating access logs to the Conservative database were deleted. Now it is revealed that a high-level staffer in the Conservative war room has been named as having calls under investigation traced to him.

However, government denials so far sound familiar to the in-and-out scandal, where the Conservative Party had to pay fines and return \$300,000 stolen from Canadians.

Why will the Prime Minister not come clean and implement a royal commission into this scandal, or is this issue just too close to his office?

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure that Canadians would always entertain receiving a cheque from the Liberal Party for the missing \$43 million from the sponsorship scandal that the member forgot to mention.

However, as we have indicated from the get-go, unlike the Liberal member for Guelph who had to get caught for a phony call, using a phony number and a phony name, we have actually been participating with Elections Canada, assisting it as we could in this matter.

As we said earlier, we have nothing to hide in this. The Conservative Party played absolutely no role in any of the allegations that the member has just indicated. However, what I can say is that we will continue to assist Elections Canada. Will the Liberal Party?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***SEARCH AND RESCUE**

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Official Languages has published a scathing report on the closing of the Quebec City marine rescue sub-centre. He states that the Trenton and Halifax centres cannot respond to distress calls in both official languages. There is no guarantee that people in distress will receive the essential services to which they are entitled.

Why is this government playing with the safety of Canadians by not guaranteeing that francophones in distress will have adequate services in French?

*[English]*

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as stated many times before, these changes will not affect the availability of search and rescue. Certainly, the provision of bilingual services is critical to the operation of those sub-centres. The Coast Guard will continue to provide the same level of bilingual services to Canadians following the consolidation.

The Coast Guard has already identified some of the issues identified by the Commissioner of Official Languages and is implementing a plan to address those issues.

•(1445)

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Official Languages' report is clear: it is difficult to maintain the quality of one's French in Trenton and Halifax, where less than 5% of the population is francophone.

The only way to maintain adequate services in both official languages at all times is to keep the Quebec City marine rescue sub-centre open permanently. I would like to remind the Conservatives that it is an essential service that ensures the safety of people in distress. They cannot take chances with that.

Will the Conservatives take note of this report and reverse their decision to close the Quebec City marine rescue sub-centre?

*[English]*

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is exactly why we identified the need to have a phased-in approach in the Quebec sub-centre. We felt that because of the bilingual issue, it was the best way to ensure we have the capacity. The phased-in approach will take approximately a year for the Quebec sub-centre, and we will have the capacity in place to address any safety issues.

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**AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the 10% cut to the Agriculture and Agri-Food budget is a cut to front-line food safety. Just last week, we learned that 100 front-line food inspectors will be cut with no justification. It was these kinds of blind cuts that led to the Walkerton tragedy in Ontario. There are members of that cabinet who know what happened and the result of that. These cuts will put Canadian food safety at risk.

Will the government agree to public hearings and will it finally come clean on the impact of these unnecessary cuts?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, like all government departments, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and CFIA are identifying efficiencies and the most effective use of taxpayer money. I can assure the member opposite that none of the efficiencies we have identified will in any way affect the top-quality food that Canadians enjoy every day or the safe food that our inspectors have across their desks every day.

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we must not make cuts to food safety services, which prevent crises such as the listeriosis outbreak.

In addition to making cuts to services that ensure the safety of Canadians, the Conservatives are also cutting funding for the rural and co-operatives secretariat, even though 2012 is the International Year of Co-operatives. It is an important service for Canadians who live in rural areas.

Why are the Conservatives cutting services to rural areas and farmers?

*[English]*

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague to the agricultural file. I know she will enjoy serving producers and processors across this great country, some of the most inventive and innovative people we have in this country. I know she will enjoy her role and I welcome her to it.

When it comes to food safety, this government has been all about rebuilding the food safety system after years of neglect under the Liberals. We have reinvested hundreds of millions of dollars in food safety. We have put 730 new front-line inspectors on the food safety list. We continue to do that in spite of her and her opposition party voting against those government initiatives.

\* \* \*

**JUSTICE**

**Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government received a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. We are committed to ensuring criminals are held fully accountable for their actions and that the safety and security of law-abiding Canadians and victims come first in Canada's justice system. We have made the concerns of victims a priority and we will continue to make meaningful changes for victims of crime.

*Oral Questions*

The recent passage of the Safe Streets and Communities Act is just one example of how we put victims first. Would the Minister of Justice please inform this House about the latest action our government has taken to support victims of crime?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to inform the House that this week is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. Today, our government announced increased funding for the victims fund, an additional \$7 million over five years, and much of it will be directed toward the creation and enhancement of child advocacy centres across Canada. This builds on the Prime Minister's recent announcement of income support for parents of missing children.

Supporting victims also includes passing tougher sentences for those who engage in crime. When it comes to standing up and supporting victims of crime across this country, Canadians know they can count on this government.

\* \* \*

● (1450)

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 500,000 good manufacturing jobs have been lost since the Conservatives came to power. Instead of building an EI system that supports those laid-off workers, the Conservatives are wasting money on an employment insurance financing board whose advice they continue to ignore.

Why have the Conservatives wasted millions of dollars on the EI board instead of using that money to improve EI benefits for hard-working Canadians who lost their jobs through no fault of their own?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the hon. member to her new file and I look forward to working with her. We have been able to work together successfully in the past, but she does need to get some of her facts right. I am happy to give her any briefing that she needs to get up to speed on the file because, during the recent global recession we did add significantly to EI benefits. We gave all claimants an extra five weeks' worth of benefits and we invested significantly in training programs to help people get back to work.

The CEIFB is doing its job, but we want to ensure that employers are limited in how much they have to pay.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that is not an answer and it does nothing to reassure the thousands of workers who have lost their jobs, workers like the ones at Aveos who still do not have work to pay their bills.

We are asking the government to invest in public services instead of making cuts. The government created the Employment Insurance Financing Board of Canada to the tune of millions of dollars that did not go to help the unemployed.

Why waste money on a financing board that is not being used, when essential services for the unemployed are inadequate?

[*English*]

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome that member to her file as well, but she needs to understand that business needs to be competitive, which is why we need to ensure that we keep the increases in EI premiums limited. We do need to balance the EI account over the long term, but we need to keep those costs limited to create jobs, because that is the best way to overcome poverty and that is the best way to help Canadian families. It would be nice if the NDP for once would support us in our effort to help Canadian families.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**SENIORS**

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, after scandals and ethical problems, this government refuses to be transparent about old age security. Even though thousands of Canadians are worried about their golden years, the minister continues to turn a deaf ear. She refuses to say how much this government will save on the backs of the most vulnerable seniors by pushing the age of eligibility from 65 to 67.

Will the minister finally stop hiding information and start telling the whole truth about this unacceptable measure?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the truth is that no senior will feel the effects of the changes to the old age security program because the changes do not start until 2023.

[*English*]

Changes to OAS are all about the long-term sustainability of that particular program.

**Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps trying to confuse the issue and divert attention away from the fact that the Conservatives are raising the age for OAS. This is a move that will only punish the poorest seniors, the most vulnerable. However, the minister is silent on how much money will be unfairly taken away from tomorrow's seniors.

Canadians of all ages are wondering why the government is hiding the numbers. Will the minister stand up and tell Canadians exactly how much this punitive measure is supposed to save?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the changes to OAS are not part of the deficit reduction program that this government is bringing in now to ensure we get back to a balanced budget in the near future. We are talking 10 years out or more before these changes come into effect. We need to face the fact that Canadians are living longer. Where life expectancy used to be 68, it is now closer to 85. Many Canadians are working longer by choice. We want to ensure the old age security system is there when they retire and for future generations.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, for decades, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and the National Energy Board have been arm's-length organizations that use consultation and science to ensure a balanced approach to energy projects, the environment and the health and safety of Canadians. Now Canada's environmental system is in shambles and cabinet will get the final say over decisions made by the NEB.

Would the minister explain why political expediency is more important than science and the health and safety of Canadians?

•(1455)

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, nothing can be further from the truth. Our government is focused on jobs, growth and prosperity for Canadians. We will focus on four major areas as we review the environmental process for major economic projects. We want to make the review process more predictable and timely. We will reduce duplication and regulatory burden. We will be strengthening environmental protection and we will enhance consultation with aboriginal people.

I wonder why the member opposite is so opposed to timely reviews, protecting the environment and consulting with aboriginal communities.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH**

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, unbelievably, the Minister of Health has made aboriginal health the number one target for cuts in her department. She has cut programs for diabetes, youth suicide and aboriginal health human resources. She says that she is protecting front-line services. Does the minister really believe that disease prevention and health promotion are not front-line services?

A minister has choices. Could the minister explain to the House why her cuts target the population with the worst health outcomes in Canada, the aboriginal people of Canada?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as an aboriginal person I take that type of line of questioning to be unacceptable.

Our government has ensured that we have protected the front-line services of all health care services across the sector. Our government takes first nations health seriously. There were a number of funding

initiatives in budget 2012 to improve water systems on reserve. We are funding \$30 million annually for aboriginal health research. Last year, we invested \$2.2 billion in first nations and Inuit health programs. Why does the member not support that?

\* \* \*

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the F-35s and the prisons agenda are not the only places that we are seeing wild improvisation from the government. The Conservatives have decided to hit the delete button on the files of 300,000 people in the federal skilled worker program. In that group are potential new Canadians who followed the rules and are simply being punished because of years of government inaction and inadequacy.

What happened to fairness when it comes to our immigration system, and why this colossal betrayal of trust?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I commend the member on her appointment as the immigration spokesman for the official opposition. I look forward to working with her, although I suspect from time to time I will not agree with her.

On this matter, we simply have to move beyond the legacy backlogs that the Liberal government left.

**An hon. member:** That you created.

**Hon. Jason Kenney:** No, Mr. Speaker. When we came to office, 840,000 people were waiting up to eight years in the backlog, thanks to a decade of Liberal mismanagement.

We are fixing the problems we inherited and, thanks to this difficult but necessary decision, within 18 months we will have a real-time immigration system whereby we will be admitting applicants within months rather than years.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that is far from a satisfactory answer. All these people have put their lives on hold and spent thousands of dollars to file their applications. When it comes to immigration, the Conservatives improvise or change the rules in the middle of the game. That is not the way to reduce the backlog of files, which will increase under this government.

What kind of message are the Conservatives sending to the entire world? How will this unfair decision bolster people's confidence in our immigration system?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** I congratulate the hon. member on being reappointed as immigration critic for the official opposition.

It was not in the interests of Canada or of potential immigrants to wait for seven or eight years because of backlogs or processing times.

The system was broken. It did not work. We have to reform the system in order to accept applicants within a few months rather than several years, and in order to have a system that works for the Canadian economy and guarantees the success of newcomers.

\* \* \*

• (1500)

[English]

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has a massive resource potential. We are an energy power superpower, with the third largest oil reserves in the world. Canada is also leading the world in mining of numerous minerals. Indeed, there are \$500 billion in potential investments in our resource sector over the next 10 years that will create hundreds of thousands of jobs and economic growth.

Could the parliamentary secretary please inform the House how we are helping to unleash this investment potential?

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the opposition wants us to continue Canada's ineffective system of duplication and delay.

We have a plan to streamline the regulatory system. We want to continue to protect the environment. We want a one project, one review process, with set timelines. We want to put in place new measures to increase tanker and pipeline safety. We want to enhance consultation with our aboriginal peoples.

While the opposition continues with its job-killing, anti-resource policies, our plan will increase opportunities for Canadians in the resource sector, the manufacturing sector and the services sector. This is good news for families and workers across Canada.

\* \* \*

**YOUTH**

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when my colleague from Papineau asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages about the fate of Katimavik, he was met with derision, with ridicule, with sarcasm and with some lessons on how to box.

For good measure, the minister said to the House that it was one of the easiest programs he had ever had to cut. In other words, the minister does not believe in Katimavik, even though it has helped 30,000 young Canadians to do community service across this great country of ours, to learn a second language and to help thousands of community organizations.

Katimavik is a great nation-building program. What does the minister have against it?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I suppose one of the responses would be, if Katimavik is so great, why did the Liberals cut it by over \$2 million?

We are going to continue supporting youth programs that are effective. In fact, just this morning we announced a three-year funding agreement with the Forum for Young Canadians. We have a three-year funding agreement with Encounters with Canada. SEVEC is another great program.

We are going to continue supporting youth programs that are responsible, effective and get results. Katimavik is not one of them.

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**GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS**

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is more interested in pork patronage than listening to Aveos workers.

The latest is the appointment of Elmer Derrick to the Prince Rupert Port Authority, or should I say pork authority. He signed a pipeline deal against the wishes of his own community. Derrick is not alone.

Tory donors Jennifer Clarke, Pierre Rivard, Andrew Paterson, Gary Valcour, Tim O'Connor all got plum jobs. Is taking care of party hacks, failed candidates and bagmen the latest Conservative jobs plan?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the individual in question is of course a distinguished aboriginal leader who also happens to be very qualified for the post. He happened to be a member of the board at Ridley Terminals Inc., giving him expertise in the area of ports. He was a regional economic development officer with the British Columbia government. He has been a professor of political science and first nations studies at Northwest Community College and the University of Northern B.C.

These are the kind of people who we are pleased are willing to put themselves forward for public service.

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**INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with one in five jobs in Canada generated by trade, our government understands the importance of trade to Canada's economy. That is why we are currently undertaking the most ambitious trade expansion plan in our country's history.

Could the hard-working Minister of International Trade please update the House on a key element of our government's broad and ambitious pro-trade plan?

**Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a key part of our pro-trade plan is a trade agreement with the European Union.

I am pleased to announce that, today, Canada and Denmark, which currently holds the EU presidency, have issued a joint communiqué reaffirming our shared commitment to an ambitious conclusion to our negotiations. Canadians will be hearing a lot more from us in the months to come on how a Canada-EU trade agreement will benefit businesses, workers and their families across the country.

I want to thank the member for Kelowna—Lake Country for his hard work and great question.

\* \* \*

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, service groups, not-for-profits and small businesses in northern Ontario are taking stock of the local initiatives program that has been pulled out from under them. This program was about putting small communities on the map and spurring economic development.

Cuts to Atikokan tourism and the Heart of the Continent Partnership are just two examples of where these cuts will be felt in my riding.

Why is the government cutting back on local economic development initiatives at a time when they are needed the most? I know the minister believes he should not be cutting this, otherwise all I can surmise is that the government does not care about northern Ontario.

• (1505)

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have to correct the record on that. This government is fully supportive of economic development, more jobs, more growth, more opportunity in northern Ontario. We have an excellent program through FedNor which focuses on job creation activities, new businesses, new activities throughout northern Ontario, including in the hon. member's riding, I might add, and including his former seatmate's riding as well.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, there were hundreds of thousands of us marching in the streets all over Quebec yesterday.

In Montreal, Matane, Rimouski, Maria, Mont-Joli, Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, Amqui, Alma, La Sarre and everywhere in Quebec, Quebecers sang and rang bells and demonstrated their commitment to the environment and sustainable development. There were hundreds of thousands of us marching because we support the Kyoto protocol.

#### Routine Proceedings

How many marchers will have to march, how many bells will have to ring, how many questions will we have to ask, for the government to hear the people of Quebec and show some respect for the environment, once and for all?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday was indeed Earth Day, and 2012 will be remembered as the year when we reported in our greenhouse gas inventory that we had levelled off and were 48 megatonnes lower than our 2005 emission megatonnes.

A year ago we estimated that we were about one-quarter of the way toward meeting our Copenhagen commitments. We are now well past that and moving toward fulfillment of our goals.

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#### PRESENCE IN GALLERY

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of a parliamentary delegation from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, led by Ms. Helen Jones, MP.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

\* \* \*

#### POINTS OF ORDER

##### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I refer to the sitting of the House on the afternoon of Wednesday, April 4, just before the Easter break. As *Hansard* shows, the House was engaged in a pretty heated debate about the F-35 issue at the time. In that record, there is a brief remark attributed to me at about 3:15 p.m., which makes reference to the Speaker.

Given my high regard for the important office of the Speaker and in the interests of maintaining the House's functionality, I want to withdraw that reference that in any way reflects upon the Speaker.

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for that.

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#### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

#### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 100 petitions.

*Routine Proceedings***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in relation to its study of drugs and alcohol in prisons. Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

## PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 18th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I move that the report be concurred in.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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● (1510)

**WAYS AND MEANS**

## NOTICE OF MOTION

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1), I wish to table a notice of ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012, and other measures.

I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of the motion.

\* \* \*

**PETITIONS**

## YOUTH SUICIDE

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have in my hand a petition signed by a number of Canadians primarily from Alberta who want to draw the attention of the House the fact that suicide is a major issue affecting youth across our country.

The petitioners want to draw the attention of the chamber to Bill C-297 and Bill C-300 currently before Parliament.

## OLD AGE SECURITY

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I stand to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of Canadians, but particularly from people in Newfoundland and Labrador, about the decision of the government to raise eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67.

I listened to the minister today when she say that people were working nowadays until they were 85 years old. That is fine if that is by choice. However, when people work in very difficult work environments, whether in a fish plant, on the ocean, on an oil rig, the fact is these people need to be able to retire when they are 65 and not have to wait until they are 67.

## ABORTION

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to present a petition on behalf of residents of Chilliwack, Abbotsford and Langley calling on Parliament to speedily enact legislation that restricts abortion to the greatest extent possible.

## PENSIONS

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, like my colleague from Newfoundland, our whip, I would like to present a petition signed by many Canadians, most of them from my riding, also strongly objecting to the government's proposal to raise the age from 65 to 67 for old age security. As was already commented, this is grossly unfair to those people who have had hard physical labour and grossly unfair to the most vulnerable in our society. It is on these grounds that constituents have signed this petition.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues from Newfoundland and Markham have said, people from across Canada are signing petitions in regard to old age security. In opposition, Canadians are sending a very clear message and they are signing petitions like the one I am tabling today. The message is that the Conservative government is wrong to increase the age from 65 to 67. If the government were wise at all, it would look seriously at reversing that decision. Maybe then we would see a bit more calm in regard to the very real uproar, as seniors sign petitions across this country.

## CANADA CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY ACT

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to present many pages of petitions from across the country, but primarily from B.C., concerning the fact that every year hundreds of thousands of dogs and cats are brutally slaughtered for their fur in a number of Asian regions and that these animals live in deplorable conditions. Canada should join the U.S., Australia and the European Union in banning the import and sale of dog and cat fur. The petitioners point out that Canada is the only developed nation without such a ban and that it should be mandatory that all fur products imported into or sold in Canada be properly labelled and identify the species of origin. They also call on the Government of Canada to support a private member's bill that would bring in this legislation.

\* \* \*

● (1515)

**QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 466, 473, 474, 477, 484, 489, 493, 494, 498, 501 and 509.



*Routine Proceedings*

[Text]

Question No. 466—**Mr. Scott Andrews:**

With regard to the government's plan to forgive a portion of Canada Student Loans for new family physicians, nurse practitioners, and nurses, practicing in under-served rural or remote Canadian communities: (a) when will individuals begin to receive loan forgiveness; (b) how many individuals are projected to qualify for loan forgiveness in fiscal year 2012-2013; (c) what is the projected value of loans that will be forgiven; and (d) what will the process be for individuals to apply to have their loans forgiven?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), (b), (c) and (d), Canada Student Loan, CSL, forgiveness for family physicians, nurse practitioners and nurses is on track for implementation in 2012-13, subject to regulatory approval. Individuals will begin to receive CSL forgiveness starting in 2013.

Question No. 473—**Hon. Denis Coderre:**

With regard to the trip by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to New Zealand and Thailand in July and August of 2011, who were all of the staff and guests who accompanied the Minister?

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Chris Mahon, executive assistant to the minister, accompanied the minister throughout the trip. Kate O'Brien, immigration program manager, IPM—Canberra, participated in some of the Wellington events, then travelled by air with the minister and Chris Mahon from Wellington to Auckland. Micheline Aucoin, area director for Southeast Asia and IPM—Manila, participated in the Thailand program.

Question No. 474—**Hon. Mark Eyking:**

With regard to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' (DFO) planned modernization of fisheries management: (a) how many jobs will be lost and/or relocated due to the move to an online web-based license renewal and payment system; (b) what offices will be affected and where are they located; (c) does the government have a plan in place to assure that every fisher in every fishing community, including those who live in predominantly rural areas of the country, many of whom do not have access to high-speed internet, will have equal service standards; (d) what is the government's plan to provide equal service to those fishers who do not and will not have access to the internet; (e) how will services be affected for those who do not and will not have access to the internet; and (f) what is the government's plan to allow fishers who do not and will not have access to the internet to make the kinds of last minute changes in their files that could previously be made by telephone?

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), it is estimated that 42 positions will be eliminated as a result of the department's modernization from paper-based to electronic-based systems.

With regard to (b), positions affected are located in Vancouver, Nanaimo and Prince Rupert, BC; Whitehorse, YT; Quebec City, Sept-Îles and Gaspé, QC; Charlottetown, PE; St. George, Moncton, Richibucto and Tracadie-Sheila, NB; Yarmouth, Dartmouth, Sydney and Antigonish, NS; and St. John's, Mount Pearl, Grand Bank, Corner Brook, Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Grand Falls-Windsor, NL.

With regard to (c), Fisheries and Oceans Canada is developing a web-based system that will have equal service standards and provide consistent services to harvesters across the country. It will be more efficient and effective and will be available on a 24/7 basis.

With regard to (d) and (e), alternate service delivery procedures are being developed for those who do not and will not have access to the Internet. For example, the web-based system will allow harvesters to delegate licensing responsibility to other persons who have access to the Internet. Where the Internet is not available locally, alternate service delivery procedures will be developed for these situations.

With regard to (f), there will be staff available at local fisheries offices to assist licence holders in exceptional circumstances when needed.

Question No. 477—**Ms. Judy Foote:**

With regard to the one-time projected closing costs of the Maritime Rescue Sub Centre in St. John's (MRSC St. John's) and the consolidation of MRSC St. John's to Joint Rescue Coordination Centre Halifax (JRCC Halifax) and Joint Rescue Coordination Centre Trenton (JRCC Trenton), what is the total cost of: (a) consolidating MRSC St. John's to JRCC Halifax and JRCC Trenton; (b) new training at JRCC Halifax and JRCC Trenton, including language training and overtime hours for replacement employees while employees are being trained; (c) relocation to JRCC Halifax and JRCC Trenton; (d) upgrades required to JRCC Halifax and JRCC Trenton; (e) benefits paid to employees who choose to leave the public service as a result of the consolidation; (f) recruitment of candidates to replace services provided by MRSC St. John's; (g) travel for personnel and project managers between JRCC Halifax, JRCC Trenton, MRSC St. John's and Ottawa as a result of the consolidation; (h) project management, including the replacement and supplementing of the Regional Superintendent of Search and Rescue to assist with consolidation logistics; and (i) other work force adjustments obligations, including reasonable job offers to affected employees?

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a) and (b), a net annual and ongoing cost savings of \$1,000,000 in salaries will be realized through a reduction of positions. Annual total overhead costs for telecommunications and informatics services and training, travelling and exercising will not change and will be transferred from the maritime rescue sub-centres, MRSCs, to the joint rescue coordination centres, JRCCs. The total ongoing cost of consolidated JRCCs is not yet finalized. One-time costs to implement the consolidation are dependent upon various factors, including the specific training and relocation requirements of each new hire and the scope of required upgrades to JRCC Halifax and JRCC Trenton.

With regard to (c), as of March 12, 2012, no MRSC St. John's and Quebec employees have elected to relocate to JRCC Halifax and JRCC Trenton.

With regard to (d), renovation/upgrade costs for the JRCCs are under review, as there were several pre-existing renewal/upgrade projects under way at both JRCCs before the government announcement of this consolidation, including phone system upgrades, software and hardware upgrades, and renovations).

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With regard to (e), costs for any potential benefits paid to employees who choose to leave the public service are determined on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the union collective agreement. Should employees accept other employment within the public service, these costs will be avoided.

With regard to (f), the recruitment process is ongoing at all JRCCs. A final cost will not be available until recruitment is completed.

With regard to (g), final travel costs will only be available when consolidation is fully implemented.

With regard to (h), the project management duties have been carried out by existing Coast Guard employees within its salary envelope.

With regard to (i), the workforce adjustment process is still under way, and all affected employees will be subject to workforce adjustment processes based on their negotiated collective agreements and Government of Canada policies. Final costs for each affected employee will not be known until the completion of this process.

**Question No. 484—Hon. John McKay:**

With regard to the three project profiles located on the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) webpage, one for each of Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, entitled "Promoting Effective Corporate Social Responsibility", for a total of twenty million dollars: (a) what are the executing agency and partners for each of the projects; (b) how much funding has been allocated for each project, (i) how much of the allocated funding has been spent, (ii) when was funding for each project first spent, (iii) what specific activities and expenses has the funding been spent on, (iv) in what specific area of each country has this funding been spent; (c) are there Canadian or other mining projects in these areas; and (d) do these three projects correspond to CIDA's Andean Regional Initiative?

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the response to this question is based on the profiles available on CIDA's project browser for the following sub-elements of the project called "Promoting Effective Corporate Social Responsibility", project A034537: A034537-001, Promoting Effective Corporate Social Responsibility—Bolivia; A034537-002, Promoting Effective Corporate Social Responsibility—Colombia; A034537-003, Promoting Effective Corporate Social Responsibility—Peru.

With regard to (a), at this time no executing agency or implementing partners have been selected to undertake activities related to this project. An executing agency will be selected through a request for proposal on the Government of Canada's MERX system for two components of the project. This request for proposal is currently under preparation. In addition, local implementing partners will be selected through local calls for proposals in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru.

With regard to (b), for A034537-001, Bolivia, the amount was \$6,591,667; for A034537-002, Colombia, it was \$6,591,667; and for A034537-003, Peru, it was \$6,591,667.

Funding for this project is currently allocated equally to each country, as demonstrated above and on CIDA's project browser. However, an estimated amount of \$5 million of total project funding is currently budgeted for two regional components that will build the capacity of local governments to implement sustainable development

projects and promote knowledge-sharing on CSR. The remaining funding will be allocated equally to three local funds that will foster partnerships with the private sector for sustainable development projects in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru.

With regard to (b)(i), for A034537-001, Bolivia, the amount was \$18,391; for A034537-002, Colombia, it was \$0; and for A034537-003, Peru, it was \$27,125.

With regard to (b)(ii), for A034537-001, Bolivia, it was 2011; for A034537-002, Colombia, not applicable; for A034537-003, Peru, it was 2011.

With regard to (b)(iii) and (b)(iv), for A034537-001, Bolivia, it was for a local CSR coordinator in La Paz, Bolivia; for A034537-002, Colombia, not applicable; for A034537-003, Peru, it was for a local CSR coordinator in Lima, Peru.

Expenses to date have covered local administrative costs related to project start-up. CIDA anticipates that initiatives funded through the local calls for proposals process will become operational starting in fiscal year 2012-13. This is particularly the case in Peru, where a local call was launched in summer 2011 and is in final stages of approval and contractual arrangements. Proposals received include initiatives on technical vocational education and training and socio-economic community development.

With regard to (c), expenses to date were for administrative purposes only and were related to the expenses of CSR coordinators in La Paz, Bolivia, and Lima, Peru. CIDA anticipates that initiatives supported through the local fund components of this project will be in regions where extractive activities are taking place. None of the proposals currently under consideration are in the direct operation zone of a mining project, Canadian or otherwise.

With regard to (d), yes, the three profiles on CIDA's project browser correspond to and are the main elements of the Andean regional initiative for promoting effective corporate social responsibility, which was announced by the Minister for International Cooperation on September 29, 2011.

**Question No. 489—Mr. Guy Caron:**

With regard to the plan to modernize Canada's Employment Insurance program and the 2011 decision to consolidate Employment Insurance processing centres: (a) what were the selection criteria for determining where the six processing centres in Quebec would be located as part of the call for tenders; (b) which criteria resulted in Thetford Mines being chosen over Rimouski for the location of a processing centre; (c) in terms of the selection criteria, what were the results for each location that submitted its candidacy; (d) what is the estimated or anticipated itemized cost of moving the processing centre from Rimouski to Thetford Mines; (e) what are the estimated or anticipated itemized cost savings, on an annual basis, of moving the processing centre from Rimouski to Thetford Mines; and (f) when was the final decision made to move the processing centre to Thetford Mines?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), the Government of Canada is committed to delivering programs and services that are efficient and effective, aligned with the priorities of Canadians and financially sustainable over the long term.

These are challenging economic times, and the Government of Canada is working hard on behalf of Canadians towards eliminating the deficit, returning to balanced budgets and improving the services we deliver.

To achieve these savings, the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, HRSDC, needs to change the way it currently does business. This includes moving forward with the consolidation of employment insurance, EI, processing and moving from smaller, more costly sites to larger regional centres made up of 22 sites.

National and regional perspectives were taken into consideration in the selection of the final EI growth sites. This is a national program, and many factors were considered, such as existing labour force, skill availability, bilingual capability, and real estate.

It is important to note that while the 22 sites have been selected, the physical buildings and lease arrangements are not finalized in all cases.

As in the past, Service Canada will work with Public Works and Government Services Canada, PWGSC, to ensure real property regulations and guidelines are followed as the department moves forward with consolidation. This phase of the process includes soliciting bids through MERX if new lease arrangements are required.

With regard to (b), Thetford Mines was not chosen over Rimouski for the location of a processing centre. As indicated in response (a) above, both national and regional perspectives were taken into consideration.

With regard to (c), locations did not submit proposals. EI growth sites were chosen by a combination of criteria that identified ideal end-state locations and assessed risk factors related to negative impacts associated with reducing federal presence in communities.

With regard to (d), no dates have been set to formally close the existing EI processing centres. The overall transition, including the allocation of resources, will be business-driven, aligned with Service Canada's automation agenda.

With regard to (e), the member may refer to response (c) above.

With regard to (f), the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, HRSDC, announced the EI modernization initiative on August 19, 2011. This included the decision on the future 22 EI processing growth sites.

As indicated above, this announcement was not in regard to moving processing centres from one location to another; rather, it was about which locations had been identified as future EI growth sites.

Modernizing our services will mean changes to the way we currently do business, but ultimately it will provide Canadians with greater access to an increased range of information and services no matter where they live.

**Question No. 493—Mr. Scott Andrews:**

With regard to the Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Natural Resources and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador concerning the Muskrat Falls project, given that the government has already stated that, within eight weeks of its receipt of the data room and detailed representations of credit rating agencies for the entire project as defined by the Muskrat Falls Generating Station, the transmission lines, Island link and Maritime link, and a terms sheet for engagement of the capital markets will be completed, and given that the government

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has already stated that it is working with partners and that the Memorandum of Agreement remains in place; (a) has the government now received the relevant data room and detailed representations from credit rating agencies; and (b) has the term sheet for engagement with capital markets now been completed and, if so, have the capital markets been engaged in the process?

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is fully committed to support the Lower Churchill River hydroelectric projects as set out in the August 2011 memorandum of agreement, MOA.

The Lower Churchill River hydroelectric projects consist of the Muskrat Falls generating station, the Labrador transmission assets, the Labrador-island link and the maritime link.

With regard to (a), the Government of Canada has received access to data rooms for the Muskrat Falls generating station, the Labrador transmission assets, the Labrador-island link and the maritime link. The Government of Canada has also received the analyses and representations by credit rating agencies for the Muskrat Falls generating station, the Labrador transmission assets and the Labrador-island link projects. Detailed analyses and representations for the maritime link are expected.

With regard to (b), the term sheet has not yet been completed.

The Government of Canada continues to work with its financial adviser, the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Province of Nova Scotia, Nalcor Energy and Emera to meet the federal commitment as set out in the MOA.

**Question No. 494—Ms. Jean Crowder:**

With respect to the Canadian Coast Guard Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) program and, more specifically, to the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary training in the Pacific region: (a) how many full-time and part-time volunteers worked in the Pacific region from 2008 to 2010, and what are the seasonal variations of full-time and part-time volunteers; (b) how many maritime SAR incidents, classifications M1 to M4, have occurred in Nanaimo—Cowichan from 2008 to 2010; (c) what is the amount spent by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on work with the Coast Guard Auxiliary in the Pacific region; (d) was there an analysis of the impact of cuts to the SAR in the Pacific region, and, if so, what is the result of the analysis; and (e) what was the SAR budget in 2008-2010, (i) what is the projected Coast Guard budget for the Pacific region for the next three years?

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), there are approximately 1070 volunteer members of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, Pacific region, who provide search and rescue services year round. There is no seasonal variation with respect to these volunteers.

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With regard to (b), the Canadian Coast Guard does not track specific statistics for the Nanaimo—Cowichan area. The maritime SAR statistics from the broader SAR areas that include the Nanaimo—Cowichan geographical area, Victoria and part of the Juan de Fuca Strait indicate that annually there are an average of 11 M1, 29 M2, 115 M3 and 63 M4 maritime cases.

With regard to (c), Fisheries and Oceans Canada provided \$1,003,000 in funding to the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, Pacific region, in fiscal year 2011-12 through a contribution agreement for reimbursement of SAR operations, training, membership costs, administration expenses and recruitment costs.

With regard to (d), there were no cuts to the SAR program's Pacific region budget.

With regard to (e), the SAR program's Pacific region budget was \$6.29 million for 2008-09, \$6.21 million for 2009-10, and \$6.44 million for 2010-11. The projected budget is \$6.69 million for 2012-13, \$6.69 million for 2013-14, and \$6.69 million for 2014-15.

**Question No. 498 —Hon. Gerry Byrne:**

With regard to directives governing communications by Senators, Members of Parliament, and their respective staff, with officials of government (with the exception of communications that involve Ministers of the Crown or ministerial staff): (a) what instructions, protocols or other guidelines are in place regarding such communications for each government department, agency, Crown Corporation, board, and other government body; (b) what was the issuing authority for each such directive; (c) what was the date on which the directive that is currently in effect was issued; (d) are the directives on communications that were referenced in sub-question (a) applicable to all Senators, Members of Parliament and their respective staff regardless of political affiliation; (e) are there any directives on communications that apply specifically to Members of Parliament from the government party and that differ from those directives that apply to Senators, Members of Parliament and their respective staff from opposition parties, and, if so, what are those directives and how do they differ; and (f) has a government-wide directive on such communications been issued to government departments, agencies, Crown Corporations, boards, and other government bodies, and, if so, (i) what does that directive say, (ii) who issued the directive, (iii) when was it issued, (iv) to which bodies does it apply?

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Privy Council Office responds that the provision of information to parliamentarians by public servants is done on behalf of ministers in support of ministerial accountability to Parliament and in a manner consistent with public service values and ethics.

Public servants recognize that elected officials are accountable to Parliament and that a non-partisan public sector is essential to our democratic system. Thus, public servants are expected to carry out their duties in a non-partisan and impartial manner and to support ministers in their accountability to Parliament and Canadians.

These principles are reflected in the government-wide guidance on provision of information to parliamentarians that is provided to public servants in the following documents: "Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State", 2011; "Accounting Officers: Guidance on Roles, Responsibilities and Appearances Before Parliamentary Committees", 2007; "Guidance for Deputy Ministers", 2003; and "Notes on the Responsibilities of Public Servants in Relation to Parliamentary Committees", 1990. The first of these documents sets out the Prime Minister's expectations and guidance for members of the ministry and, by extension, the public servants who support them. The remaining

documents were prepared by the Privy Council Office as guidance to public servants.

The primary method by which public servants provide information to parliamentarians is through appearances before the open all-party forum of parliamentary committees. As the guidance documents describe, public servants appearing before committees do so on behalf of their ministers and must endeavour to maintain public service impartiality and non-partisanship. Specifically, the guidance indicates that the information provided by public servants should consist of non-partisan, factual explanations of government policies and programs; that confidential information should not be disclosed; that questions of a political nature or that engage policy debate or disagreement should be referred to the minister; and that appearances should be coordinated with the minister's office.

As indicated in "Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State" and "Guidance for Deputy Ministers", deputy ministers and other departmental officials may, in addition to committee appearances, be asked by their minister to provide factual briefings to parliamentary caucuses on, for example, the technical details of legislation that the government intends to introduce. Such briefings may be initiated by the minister or come in response to a request from a parliamentary caucus. In either case, the guidance makes clear that briefings organized for one caucus are to be made available to other caucuses and that the leaders or House leaders of the parties should be kept informed. The conduct of such briefings is subject to the same general guidance described above with respect to appearances before parliamentary committees.

Departmental officials may also sometimes receive requests for information from individual parliamentarians of all political affiliations. As described in "Guidance for Deputy Ministers", responses to such requests should be coordinated with ministers' offices and respect the principles of ministerial responsibility and public service impartiality.

The guidance described above is consistent with the "Communications Policy of the Government of Canada", which is issued by the Treasury Board and applies to all departments and agencies. The policy encourages departmental officials to communicate openly with the public about the policies, programs, services and initiatives they are responsible for, in a manner that is non-partisan and consistent with the principles of parliamentary democracy and ministerial responsibility. As noted in the policy, ministers are ultimately accountable for the presentation and explanation of government policies, priorities and decisions to the public and are the principal spokespersons for the Government of Canada and its institutions.

To the extent that individual departments, agencies or crown corporations adopt particular practices to coordinate the provision of information to parliamentarians, these are expected to conform to the guidance described above.

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 501—Ms. Laurin Liu:**

With regard to the \$291.5 million provided by the government to the International Financial Corporation (IFC) as part of its 2010-2011 commitment under the Copenhagen Accord: (a) for each disbursement of those funds to private sector entities, (i) when was the money disbursed, (ii) how much money was given, (iii) what is the name of the recipient of the funds and the purpose of the funding; (b) what are the conditions that were placed on the IFC by the government with regard to the 2010-2011 funding; (c) has IFC complied with each of the government's conditions; (d) what is the total value of funding provided for adaptation activities and the total value of funding provided for mitigation activities; (e) what is the total value of funding that was provided in the form of grants; and (f) what is the total value of funding provided as loans?

**Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada provided the International Finance Corporation, IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, with \$285.7 million to be used as concessional financing for a broad portfolio of clean energy projects in developing countries as part of Canada's commitment to support mitigation efforts.

In addition, \$5.8 million in grant financing was provided to support IFC's advisory services to help remove barriers to private clean energy investment and build technical expertise. For example, this grant financing will support advice to financial institutions to strengthen their capacity to identify, assess and structure loans to energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

Canada's investments will support greenhouse gas abatement opportunities and will be deployed to catalyze private sector financing for clean energy projects. Canada will work with the IFC to track the amount of private investment directly mobilized by Canada's public finance contribution to the IFC, as well as the emissions reductions achieved. This type of innovative approach will be key to achieving long-term financing and mitigation goals.

Canada's contributions are being managed by IFC's financial mechanisms for sustainability group, which deploys donor funds on concessional terms alongside IFC investments, as well as providing grant financing for technical assistance and capacity-building.

To be eligible to receive concessional or grant financing from Canada's contributions to IFC, a project must satisfy IFC's standard criteria and due diligence. For more information, the investment and advisory services page on [www.ifc.org](http://www.ifc.org) should be consulted.

**Question No. 509—Mr. Gordon Brown:**

With regard to the Bomber Command memorial being built in London, United Kingdom: (a) will the government contribute to the memorial; (b) are there plans to assist Canadian veterans of Bomber Command to attend the commemoration of the memorial; and (c) is there a Canadian delegation planned for that event?

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), Veterans Affairs Canada is contributing \$100,000 to the Bomber Command Association in support of the construction of the memorial.

With regard to (b), Veterans Affairs Canada is working closely with the Department of National Defence, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and the Air Force Association of Canada to assist veterans who wish to attend the June 28, 2012, unveiling of the Bomber Command Memorial in London, England.

With regard to (c), the Minister of Veterans Affairs will be leading an official delegation of Bomber Command veterans who will attend

the dedication of the Bomber Command Memorial in London, England, on June 28, 2012.

\* \* \*

[English]

**QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, furthermore, if Questions Nos. 467, 470, 471, 472, 476, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 486, 487, 488, 490, 492, 496, 497, 499, 500, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508 and 516 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

**The Speaker:** Is it agreed?**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Text]

**Question No. 467—Mr. Scott Andrews:**

With regard to aboriginal communities: (a) how many audits or evaluations were initiated or completed between January 1, 1990, and December 31, 2010, inclusive, concerning grants, contributions or other transfers from any government department or agency, or concerning the financial management or operations, of (i) the Innu nation of Labrador, (ii) Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, including the former Sheshatshiu Innu Band Council, (iii) Mushuau Innu First Nation or Natuashish First Nation, including the former Davis Inlet Band Council and Utshimassits Band Council, (iv) the Innu Healing Foundation, (v) Mamu Tshishkutamashutau - Innu Education Inc., (vi) Innu Business Development Centre, (vii) Innu Development Limited Partnership, (viii) Innu Recreation Complexes Inc.; (b) which department or agency conducted each audit or evaluation referenced in subquestion (a); (c) what was the date of each audit and evaluation; and (d) what are the internal file or reference numbers associated with each audit and evaluation?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 470—Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:**

With regard to the office of Ambassador for Fisheries Conservation, between January 1, 2007, and March 31, 2011, inclusive: (a) for each of the Ambassador's trips made in connection with his duties, what were the (i) dates, (ii) destinations, (iii) total expenses; and (b) for all meetings convened or attended by the Ambassador in connection with his duties, what or who were the (i) dates, (ii) locations, (iii) participants?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 471—Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:**

With regard to government real property: (a) what have been the total expenditures, in each fiscal year since the government acquired the property, for the maintenance, renovation, or other work performed in or on the former Embassy of the United States on Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario; and (b) what are the details of all such work?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 472—Hon. Carolyn Bennett:**

With regard to Attawapiskat First Nation: (a) how many visits have been made by employees of the government to Attawapiskat First Nation since January 2010; (b) what are the names and positions of the employees who made these visits; (c) what was the purpose of these visits; and (d) did these employees issue any official reports or communications about Attawapiskat First Nation, and, if so, what were the contents of these reports or communications?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 476—Hon. Mark Eyking:**

With regard to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' (DFO) cuts to the Aquaculture Collaborative Research and Development Program (ACRDP): (a) how many jobs will be lost due to this cut and in what regions will any and all job losses occur; (b) what, if any, similar resources are available to small and medium sized businesses in the aquaculture industry for research and development; (c) what has been the total budget allocated for the ACRDP over each of the past ten years; (d) what is the total breakdown of all money spent by DFO on the ACRDP over the past ten years; (e) what companies has the ACRDP worked with and where are they located; and (f) what tangible benefits have arisen from research done by the ACRDP?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 478—Ms. Irene Mathysen:**

With regard to all Governor in Council appointments: (a) what criteria are used to determine the suitability of appointees; (b) have any organizations with appointed directors adopted a gender-parity policy for their boards of directors; (c) is there a government policy on gender representation on boards appointed through Order in Council; (d) has the Privy Council Office designated responsibility for monitoring gender representation on boards appointed through Order in Council; and (e) what percentage of all appointments made since February 6, 2006, were of female appointees, broken down by organization and by year?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 479—Mr. Rodger Cuzner:**

With respect to the Canadian Revenue Agency's (CRA) searchable charity database, and providing a detailed justification for any information that is not supplied: (a) when was the database created; (b) what was the initial cost to create the database; (c) how many staff were initially required to administer the database; (d) have there been any major upgrades to the database since it has been created, and, if so, (i) when, (ii) for what reason, (iii) at what total cost; (e) what is the annual cost to run and administer the searchable database, including, (i) staffing costs, (ii) technology costs, (iii) general administration costs, (iv) any other major costs for the fiscal years 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011; (f) to administer the database in fiscal year 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011, how many (i) staff positions were required, (ii) total employees were required; (g) how many charitable returns were filed with CRA for the fiscal years 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011; (h) what is the aggregate amount of all transactions and all disbursements, or book value in the case of investments and assets, in excess of \$5,000 made by the CRA with respect to the functioning and administration of the charitable database, broken down individually by (i) name and address of payer and payee, (ii) purpose and description of the transaction, (iii) specific amount that has been paid or received or that is to be paid or received; (i) for all of the transactions referenced in subquestion (h), what is the breakdown of these transactions according to (i) disbursements for education and training activities, (ii) disbursements for general overhead, (iii) disbursements for administration, (iv) disbursements to employees and contractors including gross salary, stipends, periodic payments, benefits (including pension obligations), vehicles, bonuses, gifts, service credits, lump sum payments, and other forms of remuneration; and (j) what is the description, cost, book value, and price paid for all investments and fixed assets associated with the functioning and administration of the database?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 480—Ms. Irene Mathysen:**

With regard to infrastructure spending since 2008-2009: (a) how much project funding has gone to non-Canadian firms by (i) year, (ii) country, (iii) government program; and (b) how much project funding has gone to public-private partnerships by (i) year, (ii) country, (iii) government program?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 481—Mr. Pat Martin:**

With regard to all payments made by the government to RackNine Inc. and Matt Meier in the last five years, has the government, including the Prime Minister's Office, all government departments and agencies, minister's offices and crown corporations, made such payments, and, if yes: (a) what was the total amount paid in each of the last five years; (b) what was the amount paid by each department, agency and crown corporation in each of the last five years; and (c) for each payment, (i) who made the payment (e.g., the Prime Minister's Office, a department or agency, a minister's office, a crown corporation, etc.), (ii) on what date was the payment made, (iii) what services were procured through the payment?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 482—Mr. Pat Martin:**

With regard to all payments made by the government to Responsive Marketing Group Inc. in the last five years, has the government, including the Prime Minister's Office, all government departments and agencies, minister's offices and crown corporations, made such payments, and, if yes: (a) what was the total amount paid in each of the last five years; (b) what was the amount paid by each department, agency and crown corporation in each of the last five years; and (c) for each payment, (i) who made the payment (e.g. the Prime Minister's Office, a department or agency, a minister's office, a crown corporation, etc.), (ii) on what date was the payment made, (iii) what services were procured through the payment?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 483—Mr. Pat Martin:**

With regard to all payments made by the government to Campaign Research in the last five years, has the government, including the Prime Minister's Office, all government departments and agencies, minister's offices and crown corporations, made such payments, and, if yes: (a) what was the total amount paid in each of the last five years; (b) what was the amount paid by each department, agency and crown corporation in each of the last five years; and (c) for each payment, (i) who made the payment (e.g., the Prime Minister's Office, a department or agency, a minister's office, a crown corporation, etc.), (ii) on what date was the payment made, (iii) what services were procured through the payment?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 486—Ms. Hélène Laverdière:**

With respect to financial assistance issued by Export Development Canada (EDC): (a) for the fiscal years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, what is the total value of general corporate purpose loans; (b) what is the due diligence procedure regarding general corporate purposes loans; (c) what standards are used to assess the potential adverse environmental, social and human rights impacts associated with corporate activities that are funded through general corporate purpose loans; (d) what sources of information are used in order to assess the compliance standards referenced in subquestion (c); (e) what is EDC's process for monitoring ongoing compliance by its clients with the standards referenced in subquestion (c), and what steps are taken in the event of non-compliance; (f) for all debt relief initiatives designed to reduce sovereign debt for each of the fiscal years from 1999-2000 to 2010-2011, (i) how many payments were received from the Government of Canada, (ii) what is the amount of payment, (iii) what countries received debt relief; (g) what is the total value of loans, lines of credit, guarantees and insurance provided by EDC to companies incorporated in tax havens as defined by the OECD in 2009, 2010 and 2011; (h) for all loans, lines of credit, guarantees and insurance to companies for exploration, extraction, transportation and processing of oil, gas and coal, for the fiscal years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, (i) what is the name of the client for each transaction, (ii) what is the value of each transaction, (iii) what is the country of operation for each transaction; and (i) for all credit facilities and loans to Talisman Energy Inc. since 2006, (i) what is the dollar amount of each transaction, (ii) what is the description of each transaction, (iii) what is the country of investment for each transaction, (iv) are any applications currently being assessed?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 487—Mr. Charlie Angus:**

What is the total amount of government funding since fiscal year 2010-2011, up to and including the current fiscal year, allocated within the constituency of Timmins—James Bay, specifying each department or agency, initiative, and amount?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 488—Mr. Charlie Angus:**

With respect to the third-party management (TPM) of First Nations by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) over the last 12 years: (a) how many First Nations reserves have been operating under co-management or TPM, (i) for how long, (ii) which reserves have been so designated; (b) for each of the reserves under co-management or TPM, (i) who acts as their third-party manager, (ii) under what authority have they been placed under TPM, (iii) on what date did each co-management or third-party management agreement come into force, (iv) what was the amount of debt they held at the time, (v) what debt repayment plan was put into effect for each, (vi) what was the debt when the co-management or TPM ended, (vii) what is the current amount of outstanding debt held by each band council; (c) what requirements must be met by a band council to get out of TPM, (i) who determines those requirements, (ii) how many bands have met those requirements and when; (d) how many audits has AANDC, or its designated proxies, undertaken with respect to third-party managers and their direction of First Nations bands, (i) on what date were such audits prepared, (ii) by whom, (iii) with respect to the management of which bands, (iv) what were the key findings of each audit, (v) what recommendations were implemented, (vi) has any audit resulted in the termination or non-renewal of the contract between the TPM and AANDC, and, if so, which ones and why, (vii) has any audit warranted a police investigation, and, if so, which ones and what was the outcome; (e) according to each community operating under TPM, (i) what management or other fees were charged, on a monthly and annual basis, (ii) what were the fees charged for, (iii) have any third-party managers received extra commissions, bonuses or any other financial reward for their work, and, if so, when was the money awarded, for what, and to which third party managers, (iv) what percentage of each band's operating budget do such costs represent, on a monthly and annual basis; (f) what individuals, legal or otherwise, have been awarded contracts for co-management or TPM, (i) how many contracts were awarded, (ii) what was the amount of each contract, (iii) when was the contract awarded, (iv) what were the intended services; (g) what legal or professional requirements does a company have to meet to be awarded a contract in (i) co-management, (ii) third-party management; (h) what tendering process is followed in the awarding of co-management and TPM contracts; (i) do AANDC staff have any discretionary powers in awarding a co-management or TPM contract, and, if so, who has that power and under what circumstances; and (j) what evaluations has AANDC conducted of TPM either systematically or of individual cases, including titles and dates of publication?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 490—Mr. Scott Simms:**

With regard to government procurement, for each of the following companies or individuals, namely, (a) RackNine; (b) RackNine Inc.; (c) RackNine Canada; (d) 2call; (e) 2call.ca and (f) Matt Meier of Edmonton, Alberta, what are the particulars of all and any government contracts for services provided, including (i) the time period covered by the contract, (ii) the nature or purpose of the service provided, (iii) the amount paid to the company or individual for their services, (iv) whether the contract was awarded through a competitive bidding process or was sole-sourced, (v) which government department or agency contracted with the company or individual, (vi) under which budgetary allocation was the company or individual paid for the service provided, (vii) the associated file or reference numbers for each contract?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 492—Ms. Megan Leslie:**

With regard to the government-organized pan-European oil sands advocacy retreat held in London, England, in February 2011: (a) what was the total cost of this event; (b) what was the total spending on (i) hospitality, (ii) accommodations, (iii) travel, including both air and ground transportation, (iv) gifts, (v) meals, (vi) presentation materials; and (c) which officials from departments within the government attended this event, and what was their mandate?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 496—Ms. Jean Crowder:**

With regard to the government's role in reducing poverty by implementing measures such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB): (a) does the government intend to increase the annual amount of the CCTB, as it was recommended in the 2010 report on poverty presented by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA); (b) does the government plan to amend the Income Tax Act to make the Disability Tax credit a refundable credit as it was recommended in the 2010 report on poverty by HUMA; and (c) does the government intend to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, as it was recommended in the 2010 report on poverty by HUMA?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 497—Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:**

With regard to the Enabling Accessibility Fund – Mid-sized Project Component: (a) what is the total budget of this fund; (b) how much money is left in this fund; (c) what projects were selected; (d) from what federal electoral riding did the accepted projects come; (e) is it an ongoing program; (f) who evaluated the application of the Centre Jean-Bosco in Maniwaki, Quebec; and (g) why was the application from the Centre Jean-Bosco not selected?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 499—Ms. Mylène Freeman:**

With regard to the pipeline between Vallée-Jonction, Quebec, and Black Lake, Quebec: (a) from which program did it receive funding; (b) where did the funds for this program come from; (c) how much funding did the government provide toward this project; (d) what criteria were used to determine that it would be funded; and (e) what environmental studies were carried out?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 500—Ms. Mylène Freeman :**

With regard to the funding of pipelines: (a) how many pipeline projects have been funded by the government since 2005; (b) under what funds were these projects funded; and (c) what criteria were used to determine which pipeline projects were funded?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 502—Ms. Laurin Liu:**

With respect to Environment Canada's vehicle fleet: (a) how much was spent on vehicle purchases from fiscal year 2006-2007 to 2011-2012; (b) what is the policy on purchasing new vehicles; (c) what vehicle models were purchased and what was the cost per vehicle purchased from fiscal year 2006-2007 to 2011-2012; (d) what is the current state of the vehicle fleet (number of vehicles, model, model year, purchase price); and (e) how much was spent on fuel for the vehicle fleet from fiscal year 2006-2007 to 2011-2012?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 503—Hon. Carolyn Bennett:**

With regard to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), breaking down each response by individual First Nation: (a) how many First Nations communities were under third-party management in each of the years from 2006 to 2012 inclusive; (b) how long has each of these First Nations been under third-party management; (c) what is the total amount of contribution funding to First Nations by AANDC that has been spent on third-party managers in each of the years from 2006 to 2012 inclusive; (d) what is the total level of debt for each First Nation under third-party management in each of the years from 2006 to 2012 inclusive; and (e) what specific measures has the government taken to support capacity development and re-establish sustainable program and service delivery in First Nations that are under third-party management?

(Return tabled)

*Privilege***Question No. 504—Hon. Carolyn Bennett:**

With regard to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and Health Canada, breaking down each response by First Nations or Inuit community: (a) what was the number of registered First Nations or Inuit clients with a prescription for OxyContin under the Non-Insured Health Benefit (NIHB) Program in each of the years from 2006 to 2012 inclusive; (b) how many requests for Suboxone treatment were received by NIHB after it was listed on December 7, 2011, and, of these (i) how many were granted, (ii) what was the reason given for requests that were refused, (iii) was an alternative treatment offered to those clients whose requests were refused, (iv) what measures were taken to measure the health outcomes of clients whose requests were refused; (c) is there a doctor, nurse or other health professional trained in drug treatment in the community; (d) is there a healing centre in the community, and, if not, what is the location of the closest or most-readily accessible healing centre; (e) what sort of culturally-appropriate psychosocial aftercare services are available in the community for clients who have completed a detoxification program; (f) did the government conduct evaluations of the level of substance abuse during the period 2006 to 2012, and, if so, (i) how has the rate changed over time, (ii) what is the extent of abuse of legally-obtained prescription drugs, (iii) what is the extent of abuse of illegally-obtained prescription drugs; (g) what was the amount of funding for drug prevention and drug treatment in each of the years from 2006 to 2012 inclusive, and what was the amount of funding dedicated specifically to prescription drug abuse, obtained both legally and illegally; and (h) what was the amount of funding for the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program in each of the years from 2006 to 2012 inclusive, and what was the amount spent on (i) prevention activities, (ii) intervention activities, (iii) aftercare activities?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 505—Hon. Carolyn Bennett:**

With regard to the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's Additions to Reserve (ATR) Policy, breaking down each response by individual First Nation, during the period from 2006 to 2012, did the community have an active ATR proposal, and, if so, for each proposal (i) when was the proposal first made, (ii) when was the proposal approved?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 506—Mr. Gordon Brown:**

With regard to the awarding of medals, decorations and awards for present or past members of Canada's Forces: (a) since 2006, were meetings organized by a committee within the government, a department, or an inter-departmental entity to consider such awarding, and, if so, (i) when, (ii) who attended, (iii) who chaired those meetings, (iv) were minutes taken, (v) were the minutes made public, and, if not, why not, (vi) was Rideau Hall involved in these meetings, and, if so, what was the nature of their involvement; and (b) did Ministers of the Crown take part in any of these meetings with respect to decorations for Canadian members of Bomber Command, and, if so, did they participate (i) directly, (ii) in writing, (iii) orally, (iv) by way of a representative of their office, (v) if no representation occurred, why?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 507—Mr. Gordon Brown:**

With regard to particular military theatres in which Canada has been involved, what decisions about medals for the Canadian military in these theatres have been made since 2000 and what committees, advisory boards, groups or inter-departmental units have been involved in these decisions?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 508—Mr. Gordon Brown:**

With regard to all theatres in which military service has been recognised by Canada, what were the known and official casualties experienced by Canadian forces, broken down by theatre?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 516—Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:**

With regard to the Investment Cooperation Program (INC) managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, for fiscal years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012: (a) what is the total budget of the program; (b) what is the total

number of projects funded under the program; (c) what is the total number of applications made under the program; (d) for each approved project, what is the (i) name of the client, (ii) description of the project, (iii) duration of the project, (iv) country where the project is located, (v) total cost of the project, (vi) amount of contributions by the government to the project; (e) for each approved project, (i) was the project selected for formal audit, (ii) was this project selected for formal evaluation, (iii) has a report of results been submitted for this project, (iv) was a gender analysis of this project completed; (f) what criteria and guidelines do companies have to meet with regard to human rights, labour and environmental standards to be eligible under the INC program; (g) what is the due diligence process to ensure clients are complying with the contribution agreement; (h) is compliance monitored for the life of the investment; (i) what are the penalties in cases of non-compliance, once support has been given; (j) what information is available to the public regarding projects; and (k) where can information available to the public be found regarding projects?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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**PRIVILEGE**

NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wanted to rise to supplement my initial submission in response to the question of privilege that was raised by the hon. member for Toronto Centre on April 5.

The essence of the interim Liberal leader's argument is twofold. He suggested that because ministers have taken a posture different from that originally taken by bureaucrats, in respect of chapter 2 of the 2012 Spring Report of the Auditor General of Canada, Parliament is being misled. Alternatively, because the government has agreed with the conclusions of the Auditor General, he alleges that ministers are agreeing that Parliament has been misled. Neither is the case here. Indeed, I will argue that there is neither substance nor procedural grounds to find a prima facie case of privilege in the circumstances.

On the first point, I offered some immediate comments in the House before the Easter adjournment on the position taken, and articulated in the House, by ministers of the crown and how that is distinct from earlier views of officials in the departments concerned.

I invite the Chair to take a comprehensive and complete reading of chapter 2 of the Auditor General's report. From that, one will see that it contemplates a distinction between the departments and their officials on the one hand, being National Defence and Public Works and Government Services, and the government or ministers on the other.



*Privilege*

For example, if you look at exhibit 2.3 of the chapter, which spans pages 12 and 13, you will see entries such as, “National Defence sought government's decision...”, and “Officials in National Defence and Public Works and Government Services Canada signed decision documents for government consideration.” One can find similar concepts and wording throughout the chapter, such as in paragraphs 2.32, 2.33, 2.34, 2.35, 2.39, 2.43, 2.45, 2.51, 2.54, 2.55 and 2.72. It sounds like I am my parliamentary secretary answering questions.

To assure you that it is not simply a matter of semantics, I have found a fact sheet published by the Auditor General which might be useful in this case. The following quotation comes from a document entitled “Bringing Performance Audit Results to Parliament and Canadians”, published on the website of the Office of the Auditor General. It is found halfway down the first page. It reads as follows:

During the audit, the Office deals only with public service officials, giving them an opportunity to check facts, provide additional information, and respond to recommendations. Once the report is final, and shortly before it is tabled, the Auditor General offers to brief ministers whose organizations are included in the report.

Before moving on to addressing the second branch of the hon. member's argument, I would be remiss if I did not highlight the fact that the interim leader argued just one day earlier, on April 4, about the exact same issue.

Mr. Speaker, you ruled, at page 6903 of the *Debates*:

If the member for Toronto Centre feels that statements need to be re-addressed, he can bring it up at a future question period, but question period is now over, and I have not heard anything that leads me to believe that it is a question of privilege.

Now I want to turn to the spurious idea that the hon. member has advanced. He stated:

If...it is true that the government accepts the conclusions of the Auditor General's report, the Government of Canada is admitting that for a period of 21 months it misled the Parliament of Canada.

I challenge the hon. member to quote to you a part of that 35 page report which says that ministers intentionally misled Parliament.

Let me quote from the operative part of the Auditor General's report at paragraph 2.76, which states:

We also have significant concerns about the completeness of cost information provided to parliamentarians.

Nowhere there does it say that the House was intentionally misled.

Mr. Ferguson's report then goes on to mention specifically the public response of National Defence to the March 2011 report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Immediately following that paragraph, the Auditor General then offers up his sole recommendation in chapter 2, which respects the refining, updating and publishing of life cycle costs for the F-35. This was a recommendation with which the government, ministers and officials agreed.

I want to read the department's response as printed in the Auditor General's report. It states:

Agreed. National Defence will continue to refine its full life-cycle cost estimates for the F-35 capability and commits to making the estimates and actual costs of the F-35 available to the public.

On the question of whether Parliament was intentionally misled, the hon. member for Toronto Centre is seeking to put conclusions into the mouth of the Auditor General. I am afraid that is what he is seeking to do.

The Auditor General appeared as a witness at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on April 5, less than 48 hours following his report being tabled here. Let us take a brief moment to look at what was said there.

I first want to make the point that in response to a question about whether the audit revealed that any money was misspent, the Auditor General replied unconditionally, “No, we didn't.”

● (1520)

According to page 5 of the evidence of the meeting, the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas asked, “Do you agree that the minister did not fulfill his responsibility in informing parliamentarians of the cost of the project?” to which Mr. Ferguson replied:

We identified that after the Parliamentary Budget Office presented its estimate of costs, that was the opportunity National Defence should have taken to bring forward the full costing information to Parliament...The way to respond to what the Parliamentary Budget Office came out with was their full estimate of the cost over the full life cycle of those replacement jets.

In short, the Auditor General did not say that Parliament was intentionally misled. He did, however, point to shortcomings to the approach used in responding to the Parliamentary Budget Officer in 2011.

The different accounting approaches can be gleaned from exhibit 2.6 of the Auditor General's report. The suggested shortcomings turn on whether at least 20 years' costs for operating expenses and Royal Canadian Air Force personnel, as well as contingency reserves, should have been built into the government's purchasing cost estimates.

I want to use an analogy to demonstrate my point. Being the father of a young family, I dare say, Mr. Speaker, you might own a minivan and could relate to this example. When it comes time to replace your minivan, are you itemizing and calculating the cost of gas, oil changes, insurance, car washes, new tires and wiper fluid over the lifespan of the vehicle when you are looking at the sticker price in the car lot? Probably not, since those are routine expenses you have already budgeted for. They are being incurred for your current minivan and you would continue to face them regardless of which vehicle you purchased.

To apply this approach to the situation now before us, a pilot's salary, a gallon of jet fuel and tarmac patching are all expenses which are being incurred today for our current fleet of CF-18s and would continue to happen for any successor aircraft, such as the F-35s.

As we can see, this issue boils down not to whether Parliament was deliberately misled about the costs of the F-35, as the leader of the third party might like us to believe, but to the best way to account for the costs of purchasing replacement equipment. The Auditor General has offered his recommendation on calculating life cycle costs. We agree with it, and we are doing more than just its bare implementation. The Government of Canada has announced a seven point action plan in response to the Auditor General's report, including providing annual reports to Parliament and offering technical briefings as needed.

### *Government Orders*

I want to interject here that the Auditor General advised the public accounts committee that in respect of these things, "At first glance, some of the items that you have mentioned appear to be steps in the right direction...."

The arguments advanced by the hon. member for Toronto Centre do not rise to the threshold of rhetoric fitting good political theatre, let alone a finding of a prima facie case of privilege. Nonetheless, I would like to take a moment to look at a procedural aspect prior to concluding.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member in making his submissions quoted two rulings from your predecessors which suggested that, in cases of "doubt" or "to clear the air", discrepancies as to facts should be referred to a committee to examine. However, there are no discrepancies as to the facts here, as I outlined earlier, so the precedents are not really at all on point.

There is a different ruling that I believe the Chair should consider, that given by Speaker Milliken on February 25, 2004, at page 1047 of the *Debates*. In that case, Mr. Speaker, your immediate predecessor was asked to find a prima facie case of privilege in relation to a report of the previous auditor general wherein she offered damning remarks related to, among other things, a department's report on plans and priorities, including pointed conclusions about Parliament having been misled and bypassed.

Although the current issue we are dealing with does not venture into that territory, the approach taken by Speaker Milliken would, I submit, be applicable here, in the alternative. In his ruling he said:

I must conclude that the requirements for showing that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred have not yet been met in the present case.

As I mentioned earlier, this matter is currently the subject of a study being carried out by the public accounts committee. The investigation of issues raised by the Auditor General in her reports forms a key part of the mandate of that committee as set out in Standing Order 108(3)(g).

A report from the public accounts committee may present the House with evidence that certain individuals provided information in a deliberate attempt to mislead the House. If that proves to be the case, it would certainly constitute grounds for the raising of a question of privilege at which point it would be possible for hon. members to deliberate in full possession of the committee's findings.

That is the end of that very lengthy quote from the Speaker's ruling.

Just as in that earlier case, the Auditor General's report, which was tabled on April 2, was automatically referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts by virtue of that same Standing Order 108(3)(g). All reports of the Auditor General are referred in that same fashion automatically.

• (1525)

As I mentioned earlier, the Auditor General appeared before the committee less than 48 hours after his report was tabled to discuss his findings. The committee adopted a motion at a meeting last week to pursue a study and to start planning it at its meeting tomorrow. We should let the public accounts committee do its important work.

I am not surprised at all that the interim leader of the Liberal Party did not offer up this 2004 precedent. After all, it pertains to the sponsorship scandal, one of the most egregious abuses of taxpayers' dollars that we know, which happened under the Liberal Party's watch and guidance.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, there is neither substance nor procedural grounds in this particular case to justify a prima facie finding of breach of privilege which the hon. member for Toronto Centre has invited you to find.

I would like to reserve the right to respond, if appropriate, to the submissions which will be forthcoming from the official opposition containing rebuttal which the hon. member for Toronto Centre might offer.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Mr. Speaker, we will be making a submission in due course. We first wanted to hear the government's response to the hon. member for Toronto Centre. It is an intriguing submission, one on which we will have several points to debate with my friend across the way.

**The Speaker:** The Chair looks forward to further submissions on this question.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### PROTECTING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, the Marine Transportation Security Act and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

**Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it was very interesting to hear the government House leader say that a committee should be allowed to complete its work before decisions are made. That is the situation on Bill C-31 with respect to biometrics. A committee was engaged in a study to discuss the facts and meet with experts and witnesses in order to reach a decision on biometrics. However, the Conservatives just shot that out the cannon and are now proceeding with this bill before the committee's work is done.

Of course, it is always a pleasure to stand in this House, but I wish we were debating a bill that I would be able to support.

The title of Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act, is an improper and inaccurate title because rather than protect it, it would do damage to Canada's immigration system legally, socially, morally and internationally.

New Democrats strongly oppose Bill C-31 because it would punish refugees instead of ensuring a fast and fair refugee system.

This is not the first bill this Parliament has seen that targets the wrong group. I would point to Bill C-4, which I spoke up about several months ago, which has now been rolled into this bill.

I would like to sincerely thank my colleague, the member for Vancouver Kingsway, for his hard work and leadership on this file.

I want to talk about the omnibus nature of the bill which, from a structural point of view, is something that is a disturbing recurring feature of the Conservative government's legislation.

*Government Orders*

Bill C-31 is an omnibus refugee reform bill that combines the worst parts of former Bill C-11 from the last Parliament with Bill C-4 from this Parliament.

We saw this strategy before, when the government put nine separate pieces of serious and complex crime legislation into one omnibus bill, which it then put out for discussion and debate, thereby denying parliamentarians the opportunity to properly debate the merits of each individual bill.

Now the minister is combining two separate major pieces of legislation, as well as another serious issue, that of biometrics, into one unwieldy bill.

For Canadians who may be watching the debate, I want to explain what those bills are.

Bill C-11 was introduced in the last Parliament. It was debated, went through committee, was amended and passed in this very House. It went through all three readings in the other place, passed, received royal assent and was waiting to be implemented in June. Now, by introducing this bill, the minister has stopped that bill from being implemented. That bill was geared toward reforming Canada's refugee system.

When speaking to that bill on Tuesday, June 15, 2010, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism stated:

We have, in good faith, agreed to significant amendments that reflect their input, resulting in a stronger piece of legislation that is a monumental achievement for all involved.

These amendments, I am happy to say, create a reform package that is both faster and fairer than the bill as it was originally tabled.

The minister has now gone back to the original bill and thrown out all the wonderful hard work done by parliamentarians and the amendments that he lauded as faster and fairer than the original bill, the very bill he said was inferior to the amendments that were made by all parties in the House. It baffles me that the minister has yet to explain his reasoning behind this.

One of the first bills the Conservatives introduced, and one of the first pieces of legislation that I spoke to was Bill C-4. Now the minister has wrapped that bill into Bill C-31. There is no explanation as to why he would do that to a bill which had already been introduced and was moving through the system. This slows the bill down and puts it back at the start of the legislative process.

As I am opposed to the original bill, I do not necessarily mind that it will take longer before it becomes law, but it is certainly a waste of our time and taxpayers' money.

Bill C-4 has been plainly condemned by virtually every group and stakeholder involved in the immigration system in this country: lawyers, refugee groups, churches, immigrant settlement services across the board, and, I might add, a great number of my constituents.

The government has rolled everything into one bill and has added one more controversial issue that deserves its own debate. The government has added the issue of biometrics to the bill.

● (1530)

The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration held meetings and was in the middle of an important study on biometrics when the government introduced this legislation that steps on the very thing it is supposed to be studying. Sadly, it is no great surprise to me that the Conservatives moved on this before the facts were in and the work was completed. It is a little haphazard and half-baked like a lot of things they propose.

What does this say about the government's view of the work of standing committees and the experts and witnesses who appear before committees when the government reaches conclusions before the committee members have heard all the evidence? We would not accept it in a court room and we should not accept it here. That is one among many of the problems the government has.

One of my major concerns is the excessive power that the bill gives to the minister. The minister has the discretion to designate countries of origin or safe countries, to designate a group as an irregular arrival and determine what conditions would be placed on those designated refugee claimants. The designations have serious consequences and there should be oversight in making these determinations. Designated countries of origin would be countries that the minister believes do not produce legitimate refugees, usually because they are developed democracies.

The minister has thrown out the panel of experts to advise him, and I ask why. If the minister is so confident that he can choose which countries are safe countries, why would he not want the benefit of advice from experts in human rights? He praised this very idea as a good one 18 months ago. He still has not explained himself.

The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism may have great faith in his own judgment, but to have one person make such important determinations as to which country is safe or not, which country is or is not capable of producing refugees, and who is an irregular arrival is extremely troubling and sets a dangerous precedent. That is too much power for one person to have. It sounds to me that he is creating his own little PMO of control in immigration. We should build in checks and balances. That should be the case no matter who the minister of immigration is, even a New Democrat after we form government in 2015. I do not know who would make the argument that the system is not better served by having that kind of check and balance in place.

With regard to the DCOs, the bill removes the requirement that a determination be made by a panel including human rights experts. By concentrating the power to designate a country in the minister's hands, it opens the prospect that decisions could be made for political and/or foreign policy reasons and considerations. Thus, these designations by the minister create two classes of refugees.

*Government Orders*

Refugee claimants from DCOs would face a much faster determination process and faster deportation for failed claims. An initial form must be filled out and submitted within 15 days of the claim. DCO claims submitted in Canada would be decided within 30 days, DCO claims submitted at a port of entry would be decided within 45 days. All others would be decided within 60 days. Failed DCO claimants could be removed from Canada almost immediately, even if they have asked for judicial review. In other words, a person could be removed before the review is even heard and that is unacceptable to me and to the members on this side of the House.

Furthermore, DCO claimants have no access to the new Refugee Appeal Division. Herein lies what is fundamentally backward about the bill. The accelerated timelines make it difficult for people to get proper legal representation. This could lead to mistakes and subsequently a negative decision. Legal experts have warned that these accelerated timeframes and restricted access to the Refugee Appeal Division would create an unfair system. The effect of the accelerated deportation would mean that people would already be removed from the country before the legal process had run its course. We know that once people have been removed it is much more difficult to get them back here if they are legitimate claimants.

● (1535)

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague made a very informative and polite speech. I want to ask him about one specific aspect of Bill C-31.

We have a Minister of Public Safety who tells Canadians that if they are not with a particular piece of legislation then they stand with child pornographers. We have a Minister of National Defence who cannot give straight answers on a massive procurement. We have a Minister of Industry who is getting his hands slapped for cozying up to big business. We have a President of the Treasury Board who shovels money out the back door. How can we really trust the Conservative government to put more power into the hands of a single minister without proper oversight?

I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that part of the bill.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Mr. Speaker, that is the crux of it. At the end of the day, even without all of these ethical and potentially other breaches that we have seen from the government, as parliamentarians it would not be right to put that much power to decide the fate of tens of thousands of claimants into one person's hands.

Citizenship and immigration backlogs are now being cleared off by simply eliminating everybody who has applied, including individuals who applied six years ago to come here as skilled workers. A person who applied when single and is now married with a family is finding out that his file is going to be thrown out the door and shredded. This individual is going to have to apply again at the same time as somebody who decided yesterday to come here as a skilled worker.

These are the kinds of decisions being made by the minister, and they give us absolutely no faith whatsoever that he will be able to make the kinds of decisions that are going to be fair to the people coming to Canada seeking a better life.

**Mr. Andrew Cash:** Mr. Speaker, the bill as it stands would create desperate situations for many people in my city of Toronto and in many cities across the country. Like my colleague, I am happy to

serve the city of Toronto as a member of Parliament. Could he tell me how the restrictive elements of this legislation would impact some of his constituents?

● (1540)

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Mr. Speaker, the restrictive elements are going to affect a number of people in my riding. Fully 50% of my riding of Scarborough Southwest is made up of immigrants and new Canadians. This change and all the other changes coming down the pipe, as well as those that have already happened, affect my constituents negatively on a daily basis.

It occurs with the moratorium on parental sponsorships. People who have come here and have started a family cannot get their parents over to help act as caregivers and therefore do not have enough money to go out and work or to attend school or language training classes. The cuts to settlement services that have happened time and time again in our city are affecting these individuals. These cuts negatively impact the economy as well as individuals.

The Conservative government talks about the economy incessantly. It says that it is the best with respect to the economy, that it is on the right path; it is absolutely on the wrong path. The government is damaging a generation of new Canadians and immigrants who have come here.

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to comment on the Bill C-4 section in particular. The government has taken great pains and made great noise about how the long gun registry turned innocent long gun owners into criminals even though they had not done anything.

I would like my hon. colleague to comment on the likeness that this bill brings forward in treating people who are trying to either remove themselves from dangerous situations or economically strenuous situations by coming to Canada, which we proclaim to be a free and open country, and being treated like criminals before something happens.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for joining me and the member for Beaches—East York as members of the new parliamentary friendship association between Canada and Bangladesh. We would sincerely like a member of the government to show up to one of these meetings.

There are many parallels. We just need to look at the gun registry. The government said the registry criminalizes people, yet its own folks admitted that over 4,000 stolen firearms were re-registered through the gun registry. The government had no answer as to what it would do about going after that.

Bill C-4 criminalizes refugees rather than the folks who are bringing them here through human smuggling. They already face huge fines; this legislation would put people and families and children in prison, and it is unconscionable.

*Government Orders*

**Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in support of Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act. This legislation will provide a quicker and more secure beginning for victims of violence and persecution around the world.

As a Canadian, I am very proud of our compassionate tradition of providing a safe haven to refugees. Since World War II, Canada has provided protection to over one million refugees. It is clear that the government is committed to continuing this proud tradition, and that is why we will uphold Canada's commitment to resettle more refugees. By 2013, Canada will resettle up to 14,500 refugees, an increase of 2,500 since 2010. Canada welcomes one of the highest numbers of UNHCR-designated refugees. Bill C-31 will not change that.

What Bill C-31 will do is make our generous immigration system faster and fairer. It is no secret that Canada's immigration system is open to abuse, but when people come to Canada to abuse our immigration and refugee systems, it undermines public confidence in our immigration programs. It is that true people have taken notice of our country's compassion; the fact that Canada now receives more refugee claims from Europe than from Africa or Asia shows there is something wrong with the refugee system.

The simple fact of the matter is that we spend far too many taxpayer dollars on applicants who are not in need of protection. Last year alone, bogus refugee claimants cost Canadian taxpayers over \$170 million.

Bill C-31 continues to give all refugee claimants, including those who arrive by way of human smuggling, the right to file a claim for refugee protection with the independent Immigration and Refugee Board. We will, therefore, not refuse any eligible person access to our asylum system. As such, this legislation will allow Canada to maintain one of the most generous refugee systems in the world; however, it will speed up the processes for deciding on refugee claims. This will allow us to provide protection much more quickly to those who are truly in need of it.

Under the UN convention on refugees, our obligation is clear: we have an obligation not to turn away people who have a well-founded fear of persecution, regardless of race, nationality, religion, et cetera. The fact that we will continue to grant access to our asylum system to all eligible claimants and that they will get an oral hearing before the independent Immigration and Refugee Board means that we will continue to meet these obligations. In fact, under Bill C-31 we will continue to exceed both our international and domestic obligations.

While all refugee claimants would continue to be able to ask for refugee protection, claimants from designated countries—that is, those that generally do not produce refugees—would have limited access to the recourse mechanisms that currently enable them to delay their removal from Canada for many years. This means that claimants from designated countries who receive a negative decision from the IRB would not have access to the Refugee Appeal Division. They would continue to be able to ask the Federal Court to review the negative decision.

The United Nations has long praised Canada for the generosity of our current refugee system. As I said, all eligible applicants,

including those from designated countries of origin, would continue to have access to our current refugee system.

The problem is that the current system is far too slow. On average it can take up to 4.5 years from the time an initial claim is made until a failed claimant is removed from Canada. During this time, claimants can access our taxpayer-funded health care and claim social assistance for several years while their claim is still pending. Long wait times mean greater costs to Canada taxpayers.

Similarly, the system is also too slow for people who need our protection. People in genuine need of our protection now wait about 20 months for a decision on their claim. This is unfair. As a result, the current response to genuine claimants is “Sorry; we know you need our protection, but you have to wait two years before we can even let you know whether you will get it.” This is entirely the wrong message that we should be sending to genuine refugee claimants.

● (1545)

These people need our protection, and we owe it to them to let them know whether we can provide it within a reasonable amount of time.

The reality is that instead of waiting patiently to come to Canada through an immigration process, too many people are trying to use our asylum system as a back door to gain entry into Canada. All the while, these claimants clog our refugee system and make those who legitimately need it wait far too long. While there is no question that Canada is a generous nation that seeks to provide protection to those in need, we must place limits on our generosity when others blatantly seek to abuse it.

This is what immigration lawyer and expert Richard Kurland had to say about Bill C-31, in part:

Finally someone recognized that the open wallet approach of the past, offering free education, free medicare, and a welfare cheque to anyone who touched Canadian soil making a refugee claim was not the right thing to do.

He continued:

We were just taken for a ride by a lot of people for a long time. Today that loophole is dead, and I really hope the word gets out to the smuggler community and back to source countries to not try it.

What is more, both the former NDP immigration critic and the current Liberal critic have stated publicly that they support the principles behind Bill C-31. The former NDP immigration critic said:

Well, I think what we need to do is build a system that has a fast and fair determination process. And that's something that I'll give [the minister] credit for. I do think that's what his intention has been all along. And we all want to work towards that. We don't want endless dragging on of this stuff because refugees, when they come here, you know, they do qualify for basic sustenance...it is at the cost of the Canadian taxpayer. So we do have an interest in making sure there's a quick determination that's correct and fair and get these people into our communities....

He continued:

*Government Orders*

We want a fast, fair system where we can give a sanctuary to people who need it quickly and we can weed out the people who don't have valid claims, get them through a fair process. And if they're not valid at the end of the day, deport them out of Canada swiftly.

Yet both the NDP and the Liberals have decided to vote against this important piece of legislation. They have decided to vote against providing Canada's protection to genuine refugees in need and they have decided to vote against hard-working Canadian taxpayers.

We need to send a message to those who seek to abuse our generosity that if they are not in need of our protection, they will be sent home quickly. Alternatively, the message we should be sending those who genuinely need our protection is that if they need our protection, they will now get it more quickly.

It is only by fixing our refugee system that we can effectively increase the generosity of our system. With the passage of the Balanced Refugee Reform Act in June 2010, we made some progress toward that goal, but the fact is that gaps remain in the new system. In introducing Bill C-31, our rationale is simple: by focusing the resources of our system on providing protection to those who genuinely need it, we improve our ability to help those people in need.

● (1550)

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the comments of the hon. member were a reasoned argument based around the theme of generosity. I am having trouble following some of the logic, and I wonder if she can help.

Once a person is designated a foreign national and then is found to be a genuine refugee, a person in need of protection, the rest of the bill then goes on to treat them in a way completely different from regular refugees. They have to wait five years for permanent residence, they cannot sponsor their families as a result of that, and they do not get travel documents for five years. This is a radically different approach from that provided to normal refugees, yet the system has found them to be refugees. What conceivable basis is there for treating refugees in this different way?

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Mr. Speaker, it is very clear in this legislation, and I encourage my colleague opposite to read the details.

What we have right now is a system that is slow, rigid and very reactive. The system we need and that we are working toward giving Canadians is one that is rapid and flexible and proactive. The changes that the member speaks of will be very effective in helping the Canadian government to provide more effective and efficient service to all claimants.

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in her speech, the member opposite recognized that the Liberals also have the view that the refugee system can be improved so that it is faster, fairer and better. However, she then took issue with the fact that the Liberals disagree with some of the details of how the government proposes to do this, such as going back on amendments already adopted on Bill C-11, and criticized the Liberals as working against the interests of the taxpayers of Canada.

I would like to know whether the member sees room in the process of parliamentary debate for members to bring forward their

ideas as to how the actual details of the bill do not meet the test of the principles that we are supporting.

● (1555)

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Mr. Speaker, I need to provide some information for my colleague opposite that she may not be aware of. First, it is an absolute given that I welcome parliamentary debate. That is why we are all here.

However, the point that may have eluded my colleague is that the current system is crushingly expensive for the Canadian taxpayer to bear. It is the Canadian taxpayer who is currently funding the inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of the system. The proposal in Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act, is to make it more just, more fair and much more responsive to the needs of all Canadians, whether they are new or currently reside here.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when all is said and done, Canada accounts for 0.5% of the world's population and 10% of the refugees taken in to any country. The only country that takes in more than us in numbers is the United States. Given those numbers, I wonder if my colleague could comment on the position that Canada plays in the world in the refugee situation overall.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that very important clarification and question because Canadians are proud to welcome so many refugees. Quite frankly, our track record has been noted throughout the world. As I said in my remarks, the United Nations has singled us out for our generosity in refugee retention and acceptance.

The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism was recently in Winnipeg at an event to discuss the new bill. He spoke at length about how Canada opens its arms to new Canadian refugees. We are proud of the government's record and we will continue it with a more efficient and effective system.

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to enter the debate on Bill C-31. The Liberal Party believes that it is very reasonable to review, consult on and update refugee and immigration laws from time to time in order to address ways in which they may no longer meet the public interest, address issues that have come up since the last revisions and make improvements. The Liberal Party supports that, but Bill C-31, unfortunately, has some very serious flaws.

[*Translation*]

The fact that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is the only person who will decide what countries of origin are safe will mean that there is no accountability and no recourse available, and the refugee system will become dangerously politicized.

[*English*]

We see that playing out from accounts in the media about the immigration minister himself and funds potentially being used to organize partisan fundraising from immigrant communities. It is a very dangerous precedent.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

The goal is to give one person in this country the power to determine which people will be eligible to claim refugee status and which people will not.

[English]

That is dangerous.

[Translation]

This bill will allow the Minister of Public Safety to decide which groups of people are irregular arrivals, and thus gives him too much discretion but no accountability.

The elimination of an appeal process for people who come from a country on the safe country list or for people designated as part of an irregular arrival does not guarantee that the law will be applied uniformly.

Our party opposes long-term detention without warrant, and opposes an unfair review process where the first examination is not held for 12 months. The proposed policies amount to cruel and unusual punishment.

• (1600)

[English]

It is clear that, while supporting improvements to make the laws more timely, more fair and more effective, there are many ways in which these are dangerous changes that put unaccountable power in the hands of ministers who have, allegedly, been abusing that power.

The Liberals believe that creating two classes of refugees is not acceptable and that the bill undermines the compassion and support Canada has historically provided to those seeking refuge from situations of risk, danger and abuse in their home country. It punishes selected refugees both by branding them in negative ways as security risks when, in most cases, that is not the case, and by locking them up for long periods of time and treating them much more harshly. This punishing of refugees is an unacceptable way of reforming our system and very likely open to charter challenges.

I will talk about two parts of the context of this.

My daughter was in Sri Lanka seven years ago at the time of the tsunami, which was a humanitarian disaster of massive proportions in Sri Lanka. She was, fortunately, not harmed. She was part of a convoy of aid that citizens had pulled together to drive down in trucks to the areas most affected. What she told us when she came back was that it was extremely dangerous. There were huge security measures that the group needed to take. These convoys of aid were at risk of being hijacked by government forces and by Tamil forces at various times. It was a dangerous situation where there was a civil war and the Tamil citizens were victimized by forces in their own country.

A few years later, the civil war came to a head. There were reports in 2009 that 10,000 citizens were killed and that 280,000 Tamil citizens were displaced in their own country and living in refugee camps. That is the framing for the arrival in British Columbia.

As the member for Parliament for Vancouver Quadra and a British Columbian, I was aware of the humanitarian disaster leading to

people leaving the country and coming as refugees to Canada at that time. One boat arrived in October 2009 and a further boat arrived shortly thereafter.

I have an interesting analysis of the arrival of the boat bringing Tamil community members whose lives had been at risk, whose family members had been probably killed by either the government or Tamil rebel forces and who literally were the kind of humanitarian asylum seekers who Canada has a responsibility to accept and to support and has done so successfully in the past.

I will read a couple of sentences from the abstract of the analysis in the Canadian Journal of Communication, No. 4, 2011, by Ashley Bradimore and Harald Bauder of Ryerson University. This analysis looks at 32 articles. It does a careful analysis to ensure that this is a representative sample of the articles in the *Vancouver Sun*, *Toronto Star* and *National Post*. It analyzes the framing, representation and identity in these articles, showing that there was an overall negative representation of the Tamil refugees. The press emphasized issues of criminality and terrorism and constructed the refugees as being a risk. The sentences read:

The discussion established security—rather than human rights—as a focal point and portrayed the immigration system as both “failing” and “abused” by “bogus claimants”.

This security-oriented framework provided a discursive background for the refugee reform Bill C-11, Bill C-11, which has been replaced by Bill C-31.

We see a context in the discussions across national discussions that are not talking about the humanitarian issue or the situation with people arriving from Sri Lanka in these Tamil boats. The discussion centres on illegality and a lot of negatives. In fact, the analysis of the news articles at the time showed that some 66% of the articles sampled had negative terms in the headlines to describe the events, such as “terrorism”, “suspected”, “illegal”, “apprehended”. That is how between 50% and 67% of the headlines characterized the situation of the Tamil refugees coming to British Columbia.

Why was it characterized so negatively? Was that just the media portraying refugees from a known n country where there had been abuses and humanitarian tragedies? Was the media just being negative or was there a government hand in all of this?

It turns out that, in this analysis of articles, between 50% and 68% of the quotes and references in these articles were either from government sources or the police. The government sources were very widely quoted in these articles. What is the significance of that? It turns out that the immigration minister of the day came out very early on with some very negative comments. For example, the minister signalled, “there should be no rush to unconditionally embrace as refugees the 76 men, believed to be from Sri Lanka”. Another one reads, “We obviously don’t want to encourage people to get into rickety boats, pay thousands of dollars, cross the oceans and come to Canada illegally”.

Another one reads:

Without prejudice to this particular group of people, [...]

*Government Orders*

We want to ensure that we don't end up with a two-tier immigration system, one tier for legal law-abiding immigrants who wait patiently to come to Canada the legal way, and another that [encourages] false refugee claimants to come through the back door.

•(1605)

These comments played a significant role in changing the discourse in the media from what was once centred on the humanitarian to talking about illegality, the bogus and queue jumping. That then becomes the basis for putting forward Bill C-31, which is an attack on refugees. First the Conservatives lull the public and then they attack the refugees, perhaps with impunity. However, the Liberals will be speaking out against it.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech, which expressed great humanity, as always.

She referred to injustices. All we see in this omnibus bill that my colleague has talked about, and which Bill C-4 has been rolled into, is a double-standard system.

That is the bit that I react to most strongly, given that there are two classes of refugees: those who arrive by land and those who arrive by boat. We are also talking about other unfair aspects, given the powers that are put into the hands of the Minister of Immigration, and we are also talking about violating the rights of refugees by using arbitrary detention, where children can be detained for a year or be separated for a year from their parents who are detained so their identity can be verified.

Refugees are criticized for having no identity papers, when they are already in shock. They are fleeing precisely because they are in danger. They do not have time to think about bringing papers with them. These are all injustices. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

**Ms. Joyce Murray:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comment.

The combination of the two elements she just mentioned is exactly what is so disturbing. On the one hand, there are injustices toward refugees, and on the other, more powers are being given to Canadian ministers.

•(1610)

[English]

It is a toxic combination when the government takes these unilateral powers that would affect the lives of people in Canada and their families abroad. It politicizes and creates tremendous risk for intimidation and abuse of the immigrant communities by the government through fear.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, can my esteemed colleague tell us how Bill C-31 blatantly violates the Canadian charter and several international treaties? I would like her to summarize the most obvious violations.

**Ms. Joyce Murray:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[English]

Certainly there are elements in the bill that would be violations of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but that is not the key issue here. However, a second key issue is the absolute lack of consultation, such as when Bill C-11 came forward.

[Translation]

Groups affected by this were not consulted.

[English]

There were some big mistakes in Bill C-11. Some consultation was then done and those things were changed. However, under Bill C-31, the amendments were rolled out again. Therefore, this is a very similar process as with many of the other bills that the government has put forward.

[Translation]

The Conservatives have shown that they are not interested in the public good or the best interests of the people, because they did not consult groups in such a way as to ensure a good bill. They drafted it without consulting anyone because they want more power over immigrant and refugee groups.

[English]

**Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to offer my contribution to this vital debate about the future of Canada's internationally renowned immigration system.

I am sure all hon. members in the House can agree that it is crucial to Canada's national interest that our immigration system functions fairly, effectively and with integrity.

If enacted, the measures in Bill C-31, otherwise known as protecting Canada's immigration system act, would help ensure that the immigration system would continue to function in a just way.

Let us not mince words. Our immigration system is one of Canada's greatest assets. It is one of the reasons we have the great country we do today.

I think of my own riding in Barrie, Ontario, and of some of the people from Barrie who have come to Canada recently. They represent some of the best values to which we could ever aspire.

I think of Beethoven Crasco who, when he first came here, was working two jobs to support his family and still found time to volunteer at our local hospital.

I think of Tahir Nawaz who, within a few years of coming here, organized a large fundraiser for the Red Cross, as he wanted to give back and be engaged in the community.

I think of Aaron Sureshkumar who, after coming from Sri Lanka and working tirelessly, managed to not only find a job, but created and opened his own factory producing hot tub covers, which are now being sold all across North America. Coming here with very little, he now employs dozens in Barrie and is opening an expansion.

That type of work ethic embodies the Canadian spirit unequivocally.



*Government Orders*

I know most MPs go to citizenship ceremonies. We can never have better example of why we appreciate immigration than those ceremonies. I remember going to my first one when I was on city council 12 years ago and seeing a new Canadian cry at the thought of getting her citizenship. It really is inspiring. It reminds us of why we live in such an amazing country.

Immigration has brought countless newcomers and their descendants to our shores, immigrants who have brought immeasurable benefits to Canada's development, have contributed to the richness and diversity of our country and have helped make it the free and prosperous society it is today. Therefore, it is our duty as legislators to ensure that we enact laws that protect and ensure the strength of our immigration system.

The measures in Bill C-31, once enacted, will do exactly that, so I am happy to support this legislation.

I would like to speak today about one of the important pieces of the protecting Canada's immigration system act. The measures in this legislation will enable the introduction of biometric technology for the mandatory screening of temporary resident applicants.

As members know, Bill C-31 would also help carry out long needed reforms to the refugee system and would help crackdown on human smugglers who may try to abuse Canada's generous immigration system.

Regarding biometrics, the Montreal *Gazette* had this to say in a recent editorial on the bill we are debating today. It wrote:

The collection of biometric information is a sensible security precaution that will be a valuable tool in preventing people from slipping into the country with false identities.

I agree with this analysis. I would go even further and echo the words of our Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, who has described the implementation of biometric screening of visa applicants as a "historic" development in Canada's immigration system.

Under our current system, when individuals make immigration applications, in most cases they only need to initially provide written documents to support their applications. A modern immigration system can do a better job in ensuring security. How? Let me provide an explanation of how this new system would work.

Essentially, the legislation under consideration today, and the regulations that will follow, will allow the Government of Canada to make it mandatory for travellers, students and workers from prescribed visa-required countries and territories to have their photographs and fingerprints taken as part of their temporary resident visa study permit or work permit applications.

That is it in a nutshell. It will simply mean the photos and prints will be collected as part of a standard visa application process. For overseas applicants, they would be collected before the applicant arrives in Canada. This will help with processing visa applications and later with confirming the identity of visa holders when they arrive at our borders.

• (1615)

The introduction of biometrics as an identity-management tool and our immigration and border control system is a welcome

development that has been a long time in coming and long overdue. It is also something that will bring Canada up to speed with what is quickly becoming the international standard in this domain. Many governments around the world have already introduced biometric collection in their immigration and border programs. Here are some examples: the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, New Zealand, Japan, the European Union, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia and Malaysia to name a few.

Although it is a long time in coming for Canada, the fact that so many other countries have already adopted biometrics brings a side benefit. Many visa applicants to Canada will already be familiar with the process. This will make for a very smooth transition to the system. Also, because other countries have already gone through the transition to biometrics, we already know that there is normally only a small, short-term drop in application volumes following the implementation of biometrics.

It would be difficult to argue that what I am describing here is anything but efficient, effective and a straightforward process. In terms of the security of the immigration system, implementing biometrics will help stop known criminals, failed refugee claimants and previous deportees from using false identity to obtain a Canadian visa.

Biometrics will help improve the integrity of our immigration system and will bolster Canada's existing measures to facilitate legitimate travel by providing a fast and reliable tool to help confirm identity. This will greatly help our front-line visa and border officers to manage high volumes of immigration applicants and the growing sophistication in identity fraud. It will provide great benefits to the Canadian officials making visa applications and border entry decisions.

At the same time, it will be beneficial to applicants because in the long run the use of biometrics will facilitate entry to Canada by providing a reliable tool to readily confirm the identity of applicants. For instance, in cases where the authenticity of documents is uncertain, biometrics could expedite decision making at Canadian points of entry. Using biometrics could also protect visa applicants by making it more difficult for others to forge, steal or use an applicant's identity to gain access into Canada.

Finally, Canada has committed to the exchange of biometric information with the United States beginning in 2014. This will help both Canadian and U.S. authorities spot failed refugee claimants, deportees, previously refused applicants and applicants using fraudulent identities before they get to North America. This initiative is part of our two countries' action plan on perimeter security and economic competitiveness, which provides a practical road map for enhancing security, while speeding up legitimate trade and travel across the Canada-U.S. border.

Let me give a few practical examples of why biometrics is fundamentally necessary in Canada. Let us take the example of Esron Laing and David Wilson, who were convicted of armed robbery and forcible confinement. They returned to Canada on three different occasions. In fact, they are known as the "Yo-Yo Bandits" because just like a yo-yo, they kept coming back.

*Government Orders*

I know that three times does not seem like a high number, but I am sad to say that many serious criminals are deported and manage to return to Canada many more times than that. For example, Anthony Hakim Saunders was convicted of assault and drug trafficking. He was deported on 10 different occasions. That is right, an astonishing 10 different times. Just like the “Yo-Yo Bandits”, he kept returning.

Edmund Ezemo was convicted of more than 30 charges, including identity theft and fraud. He was deported and returned to Canada eight times.

Dale Anthony Wyatt was convicted of trafficking drugs and possession of illegal weapons. He was deported and returned to Canada on at least four separate occasions.

Unfortunately this is only a tiny sample of the examples I could use to illustrate the number of people who are not eligible to come to Canada but do.

The many benefits of introducing biometric technology for screening visa applicants makes it a welcome and historic development for our immigration system. Furthermore, the use of biometrics is increasingly becoming the international norm. By passing Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act, we will be ensuring that Canada keeps up with the many other countries in the world already using this system.

For this reason and many others, I will be supporting the bill wholeheartedly. I encourage all members of the House to do the same.

● (1620)

**Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Barrie spoke a lot about biometrics, and there is good and bad to that. There was a parliamentary committee researching the issue of biometrics. It was hearing witnesses and receiving expert testimony.

Why does the member and his government think the *Montreal Gazette's* opinion is more important on this than actually letting the parliamentary committee finish its work before introducing legislation on the subject?

**Mr. Patrick Brown:** Mr. Speaker, I am glad my colleague in the House has referenced the *Montreal Gazette*. The *Montreal Gazette* and dozens of other papers and professionals in the country shared the opinion our government had that it was long overdue. Obviously, the parliamentary committee had ample time to study all aspects of this legislation.

If we look at where Canada is, we see we have already waited too long. If we look at other countries that have already done this, we see that on most occasions Canada is a leader in security issues, a leader on the field. However, in terms of biometrics, as I mentioned in my speech, there are dozens of examples of other countries that have already implemented this as a no-brainer, as a necessary aspect of the immigration system. We are already behind the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, New Zealand, Japan, the European Union, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia and Malaysia, which have already implemented it. It is necessary for Canada's security and for maintaining the integrity of our immigration system.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Barrie for his excellent speech and his in-depth understanding of some of the content within Bill C-31. I also want to compliment him as chair of the Canada-India Parliamentary Association. He has done an outstanding job of reaching out wherever necessary, both in his riding as a representative and in the city of Toronto as a liaison for the South Asian community.

From his meetings and discussions with that community, I wonder if he could comment on what its support or comments on the bill have been and what direction the committee could take from them in terms of moving this bill forward.

● (1625)

**Mr. Patrick Brown:** Mr. Speaker, I might add that I do not think anyone has been more hard working on improving Canada's immigration system than the member for St. Catharines and he does an incredible job in the House of Commons.

I attended the Canada India Foundation annual dinner on Saturday night, and one of the topics was that this was long overdue. It is a sense in many new Canadian communities across Canada that it is a needed reform. For people who have worked hard, waited a long time and invested in coming to Canada, the last thing they want to see is cracks in the immigration system or loopholes where people can cheat, abuse or sneak their way into Canada. It is essentially jumping the queue ahead of the people who have waited so long for the chance to live in the best country in the world. Those I spoke to at the Canada India Foundation unequivocally support this legislation.

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way likes to talk about international situations and how we are following the good lead of other countries, but he must know that on the issue of smuggling, Australia put temporary protection visas on their books for many years and it did not stop anyone. In fact, we know that mandatory minimums do not actually form a deterrence. There is already a maximum life sentence for smuggling. There is no convention for smugglers.

I want to know from the member opposite if he really believes that smugglers are suddenly going to listen to the Conservatives' new rules and stop their egregious behaviour.

**Mr. Patrick Brown:** Mr. Speaker, of course they will, because the profitability will be taken out of the system. I was with the Prime Minister in Thailand last month, where we had a one-day session on human smuggling. This is a real issue around the world, and we need to do everything possible to make sure those who profit from human smuggling do not have an avenue to do it in Canada. It takes advantage of the most vulnerable.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Research and Development; the hon. member for St. John's East, Justice; the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry, Health.

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, human smugglers are not profiting from human smuggling here in Canada. They are profiting from it in the countries in which they ply their trade. We need to be clear on that, and I do not think the government is.

However, I am honoured to be here in this place today, as I am every day that I am here, to represent the people of my riding of Davenport, in which we have a very diverse community. More than 50% of the people in my riding were not born in Canada, and in fact we have refugees living in our riding.

I want to tell the House a little story about some of the people in my riding. There is one gentleman, and I cannot name him, but he came into my office. He runs and owns a bakery; in fact he owns two. He owns a house, his kids go to the local school, he is involved in volunteer activity and he is involved at his local church. He came to my office because he is living in fear. He applied for refugee status, his claim was denied and he is awaiting a decision under humanitarian and compassionate grounds. However, under this bill he has lost all his protection. He is very worried that he is going to go back to the country of his birth and face the situation for which he left in the first place.

The government likes to talk about scammers of the system. We need to realize that people who essentially take their lives into their own hands and flee their home countries are doing it because they absolutely have to. This member of my community is a strong part of the fabric not only of the riding of Davenport, but this is an example we could talk about right across the country. This is one reason and this is an example, a human story.

I would challenge any members across the way, if that were one of their constituents, that they would not be going to bat for that constituent. In fact, if the members across the way had those stories coming into their office, how could they not respond? As we have heard from the government many times today, it has a proud tradition, an internationally lauded position on human rights and immigration. However, the government does not seem to like to remind Canadians that it is all in the past. Today it is a very different reality.

I know the government does not like to listen to experts. We know that, but I get this time and I am going to talk about expert opinion, and one of the beauties of this place is that government members cannot stop me.

The Justice for Refugees and Immigrants Coalition consists of Amnesty International Canada, the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the Canadian Council for Refugees. It supports an immigration system that is fair, independent of political considerations and affordable. In its view, Bill C-31 is unconstitutional, undermines our humanitarian traditions and violates our international obligations and it should therefore be withdrawn.

One has to wonder if the government ever chose to consult expert opinion. I know that it gets out the white pages, phones some lawyers and gets some juicy quotes, but does it really speak to the organizations that have dedicated their lives? I have met many

people who work in these organizations. They could be pulling in six figures on Bay Street, but they are there in the trenches working with refugees.

• (1630)

Refugees today are Canadian citizens of tomorrow. I started my speech off with the example of the constituent in my riding who has a business, has a family and has bought a house. His family in his home country is constantly under threat of violence and he is worried sick that he is actually going to have to pull up roots and go back.

It is one of the enduring ironies of the government. It loves to go on and on about the whole idea of family values, and yet it has crafted legislation here that is going to pull families apart. A family is a family is a family. It does not matter where it comes from or how it got here. It is incumbent upon us, here in this place, if we want to talk about family values, to try to keep kids with their parents, notwithstanding all the other issues that the government and others bring up around immigration.

I also want to remind the members opposite of something, because I think some of them occasionally forget this. I remember a minister of education in the government of Ontario years ago, and I am sure he is a good friend of many members across the way. In fact, he served closely with many of them in the cabinet of the government of Mike Harris. The education minister said we have to create a crisis and then we can blow the thing up. He did not quite say it like that. I am paraphrasing. It was a long time ago.

However, essentially, the government talks about the wait time. Many members, certainly on our side, who do the tough work in their constituencies know that we get many constituents coming in with issues around immigration and refugee hearings. However, the government seems to think, therefore, let us starve the system of resources and then completely change it, all in the name of something it calls efficiencies. We all know that is a code word for privatization and for staff reductions.

I also want to bring up the issue of designated countries. In my riding and in the downtown core of Toronto, we have many Roma who came to Canada as refugees, many in 2008. The situation for Roma in Europe has not got any better. We know we have tight relations with the European Union and we are currently negotiating a free trade agreement behind close doors with the European Union; but if we look at the first round of elections in France yesterday, we can note a distinctly hard right anti-immigration thread going through the politics of Europe. That has filtered down to the most vulnerable and historically vulnerable communities of Europe, one being the Roma. We have a large community of Roma and they are hard-working, peace-loving human beings who we have embraced. Are we just going to tell them the deal is up and we are going to send them home?

There are so many issues that the bill does not address. We have a lot of work to do on this. I urge the government to consider some expert opinion and to work with us on this side to create a humanitarian, fair, cost-effective system.

*Government Orders*

•(1635)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his remarks and evident concern for the plight of refugees. However, I am concerned with what I regard as a clear lack of balance in the way the member and his colleagues in the NDP approach this issue. They speak about asylum claimants as though they are all refugees, when in point of fact some two-thirds of the asylum claimants in Canada turn out not to be in need of our protection. According to our very fair and generous legal system, they do not have a well-founded fear of persecution. Does he not acknowledge that it represents a problem?

He just spoke about European asylum claimants. Will he not acknowledge that nearly 100% of the European asylum claimants abandon or withdraw their claims of their own volition? Since we gave visa exemptions to central European countries, 95% of those claimants have not shown up at their hearings. It is telling us through their volition that they do not need our protection.

Does he not think we need a more efficient system that is able to address large waves of unfounded claims, claims that are not necessarily being rejected by our fair legal system, but are being withdrawn by the claimants themselves? Is he not the least bit concerned about this apparent abuse of our system and its generosity?

**Mr. Andrew Cash:** Mr. Speaker, the government loves to pull the most egregious examples and then craft legislation around those examples, but that is not the way to do it. That is what we are trying to say on this side.

Many Canadians, many experts, have a lot of concern about the very fact that the minister of the day would have essentially *carte blanche* on some of these decisions. There is a real concern around the way these decisions would be made. It is fair and reasonable for Canadians to be concerned about the process and the lack of transparency and accountability on the part of the government through this proposed legislation.

•(1640)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in Bill C-31 there are three areas we need to explore and discuss, and I look forward to doing that in committee.

The old bill, Bill C-4, will die because Bill C-31 replaces it. There were significant challenges brought forward by lawyers across Canada, who said that Bill C-4 had some serious legal aspects. They challenged its worthiness to even pass in a court of law in Canada and said that it was unfair to refugees. That is one component of the bill.

A second component of the bill deals with legislation that this House passed, but which the government is trying to amend so as to no longer have an advisory committee. The minister wants to have the power to designate countries as safe countries. Rather than having an advisory board, the minister wants that power.

I would like the member to comment on the third component, which deals with biometrics. Does the NDP have a position on the use of biometrics in regard to visas?

**Mr. Andrew Cash:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg North likes to keep us waiting for the question.

On issues such as biometrics and other matters where the government talks about cost savings, there are provisions in Bill C-31 that are very costly. For example, mandatory detention of irregular arrivals for a minimum of one year could cost up to \$70,000 per claimant. Refugee claimants from designated countries would not be able to apply for work permits for at least six months and they would be forced on to social assistance. These are the parts of the bill where the economics absolutely do not make any sense.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this legislation. It is something that my constituents ask me about on a regular basis. I have communicated with them several times on some of the great initiatives which the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has put forward in the past. Those measures were always warmly received. Our minister is doing a great job. Not only is he a great minister, but he is a great representative of Calgary Southeast and our home province of Alberta.

Canadians are rightfully proud of Canada's long-standing humanitarian tradition and the fact that we are one of the top countries in the world to offer protection to those who sincerely and genuinely need asylum. At the same time, reasonable Canadians would not disagree that our refugee system is in some need of reform.

As we see time and time again, genuine refugee claimants wait far too long for a decision on their claim. That is because those who seek to use our asylum system as a back door to get into Canada do so at the expense of genuine refugees.

Illegitimate claimants clog our refugee system and create unnecessarily long wait times for those truly in need of Canada's protection. This leaves in limbo those who are genuinely in need. Long delays also encourage individuals who are not in need of our protection to use the refugee system as a way to remain in Canada. Essentially, delays allow those who do not really need our protection to abuse our system and our generosity.

Last year processing times for a decision on a claim before the independent Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, affectionately known as the IRB, could take more than 20 months. Because of the resources available, it could take an average of four and one-half years from the time a claim is made until a failed refugee claimant has exhausted all legal avenues and is removed from Canada. This is completely unacceptable.

This makes Canada an attractive target for illegitimate claimants since they know that they can remain in Canada for several years while their claim is processed, during which time claimants can access our generous taxpayer-funded social benefits and perhaps obtain a work permit. In other words, these individuals basically establish themselves here in Canada without knowing if they are going to be approved as a refugee or not. Illegitimate claimants come here at a huge cost to Canadian taxpayers. The average unfounded claim costs about \$55,000. Last year alone bogus refugee claimants cost Canadian taxpayers \$170 million.

We need to send a clear and unmistakable message to those who seek to abuse Canada's generous asylum system that if they are not in need of protection, they will be sent home quickly.

The protecting Canada's immigration system act seeks to address these problems with our refugee system by providing faster protection to those in genuine need while quickly removing those who are not.

To help reduce the attraction of coming to Canada, these new measures would further accelerate the processing of all refugee claims, particularly for nationals from designated countries that generally do not produce refugees. This policy would provide the government with an important tool to respond to spikes in claims from countries that one would not normally expect a refugee to seek or claim asylum from.

This legislation would also reduce the options for resources available to failed claimants. Currently, these options permit failed claimants to further delay their removal from Canada. Even though many failed applicants know they will be unsuccessful, they also know these avenues of appeal will help them prolong their stay here where they can continue to have access to our generous system.

Let me be very clear about one thing. Under these new measures, all eligible refugee claimants would continue to be entitled to a fair hearing before an independent decision-maker. However, there would be no automatic stay of removal for claimants from designated countries of origin once a negative decision had been rendered by the IRB and the claimant had applied for judicial review to the Federal Court. This means that failed claimants could no longer use the Federal Court process to further delay their removal.

As I said, it currently takes an average of four and one-half years before a failed claimant has exhausted all avenues of appeal and is removed from Canada. In some instances it has taken over a decade. All the while, failed claimants have access to our generous tax-supported services such as health care and other social benefits.

Canadians work hard to support these services. They do not appreciate it when their hard-earned tax dollars go toward supporting foreign nationals who should not even be here in the first place, who come here under false pretenses knowing full well what they are doing.

• (1645)

The success of the new system hinges on our ability to speed up the current processing times for refugee claims. This is essential because the less time claimants spend in Canada awaiting a decision, the less incentive there is for people to abuse our generous asylum system and queue-jump the regular immigration process. Also, if we

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can speed up the current processing times for refugee claims, genuine refugees would get our protection more quickly.

Hearings at the IRB for claimants from designated countries of origin would occur within 30 to 45 days. Claimants who are not from designated countries of origin would also have their hearing timelines accelerated. It is proposed that these hearings would be scheduled within 60 days of being referred to the IRB, compared to the current system which takes over 1,000 days. It is no wonder that Chris Selley from the *National Post* said that the immigration minister is:

—certainly showing more guts than we came to expect from his Liberal predecessors...

Blame whomever you want, these timelines are completely preposterous. And they are one of the two biggest reasons that so many asylum-seekers make for Canada...But if a refugee claim was processed in, say, two months, instead of a year or two or five, the incentive for people with weak claims to give it a whirl would be massively reduced, as would the overall burden on the system.

John Ibbitson from *The Globe and Mail* also spoke positively about the bill:

I think we need a system first of all that doesn't cost too much. I mean if you spend four years processing a bogus refugee claim, that's the taxpayer who pays for it and that person may also be on welfare and other forms of social assistance during that time. So I agree. And I think there is broad public support for the idea that we need to process refugee claimants fairly and swiftly.

Finally, John Ivison from the *National Post* stated:

I was talking to somebody today who was saying within four days of a claimant landing in Toronto, they can be claiming welfare. Now that's an obvious magnet for refugees all over the world. We have the most generous refugee system in the world. We have an acceptance rate of something like 50 per cent. Nowhere else in the world comes close to that.

Well, how many people do you need to consult to figure out that Hungary should not be our leading source of refugees? What had happened was that the ten, the top ten countries that we receive refugees from did not figure in the UN's top ten list of refugees.

These new measures would be accomplished without affecting the fairness of our generous refugee system and without compromising any of Canada's international and domestic obligations with respect to refugees. By improving the refugee system in these ways, this legislation would also ensure that the refugee claimants who really do need our protection would get it even faster.

These proposed measures would continue to meet our domestic and international obligations. They would also maintain the balance and fairness that are the foundation of our refugee system. I am confident that they would honour the spirit and support for refugees that Canadians value.

In supporting this legislation, my hon. colleagues in the House can help to provide a quicker, more secure beginning for victims of violence and persecution around the world and help deter abuse of our refugee system. I urge all hon. members in the House to join me in supporting Bill C-31.

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• (1650)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to my colleague's speech. I wish to thank him for his speech. However, unfortunately, the hon. member seems to believe in magical thinking, as do most of his cabinet colleagues.

It is a very serious problem, because Bill C-31 repeats some aspects of Bill C-4, for example, concerning the 12-month mandatory detention of foreign nationals who are arbitrarily designated by the minister. In the end, we all agree that we are talking about a measure that could be a deterrent, as long as the people detained are informed of it and can weigh all of the consequences.

Elsewhere in the world, experience has shown that this does not work, but that is not the most serious aspect. The worst aspect is that, if this bill passes, it could be formally contested under section 9 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which has to do with arbitrary detention. Thus, we will be back at square one.

Considering the cost of this kind of detention and the possibility that it will be abolished, how can my colleague justify this kind of spending and such a waste of time, not to mention the suffering of the people detained?

[*English*]

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Mr. Speaker, I can say without any hesitation how my constituents feel about the current system. The current system completely fails them.

I do not know how many members of this House, I am assuming all members, get the same chain emails that I get, saying that pensioners would be better off if they left Canada and came back and applied as refugees. It does not matter if perhaps some of the information in the email is misinformed. It is the spirit in which it is sent. The spirit behind that is our system is currently too wide open to abuses.

We can sit here and discuss the merits and the technical merits of the bill. Detention is there. It is currently provided for if individuals are in need of detention when they come here as asylum seekers. With the legislation, they can be held in detention for a certain period of time. That would not change under the new legislation.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to share something with the member. Maybe he has had the opportunity to read the press release that was issued by the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers in its response to Bill C-31.

In the second point, it states that “the draconian measures of C-4 are rolled into this new bill”, obviously referring to Bill C-31 and that “C-4's proposed mandatory, unreviewable, warrantless, year-long detention is patently unconstitutional. The Supreme Court of Canada decided this issue in the clearest of terms.”

The second point being, “family separation for at least 5, and up to 8 or more years, will have a disastrous consequence for refugees.”

This is in fact what Bill C-31 is proposing to do.

This is not the Liberal Party or the New Democratic Party saying this. These are individuals who have represented refugees for many years. This is a professional organization. Would the member comment on that statement by the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers?

• (1655)

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's question. It would be like asking the defence lawyer association of Canada about Criminal Code changes. However, the reality is some of that \$170 million, I suppose, would be going to some of these lawyers in terms of fees and would be a burden to the taxpayers of Canada.

The reality of the system is if we want something sped up, the changes that the minister is proposing would take processes that take over 1,000 days now, years, and reduce them so that people who are genuine refugees would actually get the protection that they need.

I would think that anybody of moral virtue purporting to represent people who are genuine refugees would appreciate the legislation here. Somebody who would be losing the 1,000 days of endless appeals might not have that same view.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-31 on immigration because much of my campaign last year focused on the idea of having an immigration system that is as transparent as the justice system. Unfortunately, Bill C-31 does not meet these expectations of offering something fairer—not at all.

I received a lot of feedback in Quebec City after Bill C-31 was introduced. Many community agencies, citizens' groups and voters have spoken to me about this issue. They think it is completely ridiculous. It goes too far. We cannot leave everything in the hands of the minister, as the bill intends.

For the Quebec City agencies that are crying for help when it comes to this bill, there is a clear lack of resources to help immigrants in distress. People get lost in red tape and are discouraged most of the time because they do not understand. They see visas getting rejected for strictly administrative reasons—bureaucracy. It is under this government no less.

At first glance, the changes in Bill C-31 seem only to make clarifications to the existing legislation. However, this bill makes draconian changes to situations that are already precarious.

The first thing that jumps out and that I must highlight is the arbitrary power that the minister has clearly given himself. With this discretionary power, he can overturn any decision that has already been made. It is obvious that this will not resolve the issue I am being asked about: why does it take three years for one immigrant to obtain citizenship, and ten years for another? There is a lack of transparency. It is not clear.

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The change that scares future immigrants the most, and which we hear about regularly, is the rejection of applications and the pure and simple cancellation of most of the economic class applications. People have been waiting for 7, 8, 9 and even 10 years for positive news about their file, and their applications are going to be returned with a refund of the initial payment—a matter I will not get into at this time—because the minister wants to eliminate the backlog of applications filed since February 2008.

Rapid changes in the demand for labour in Canada would explain this situation. However, what about the people, the human element, the people who have held out hope all these years? The minister will say that they can resubmit their applications and that, if they meet the criteria, they will be chosen quickly. However, what is not being publicized is the fact that, since these people applied, the program has undergone some fine tuning and the law of natural selection now comes into play: the cost of applying has increased. There is no guarantee that the application will be accepted. Hopes are crushed.

Another change would see refugees sent back to their country of origin if the situation there improves. This is what organizations in my riding and people who call and email are telling me. People come here and adapt to life here. They start their lives over in Canada. They make friends and find work here. Their children are raised in Quebec or Canadian culture. Yet the government would send them back to a country they no longer know, a country they fled under difficult circumstances, in most cases. They left everything behind, hoping for a better life. And Canada, which invited them in to give them that opportunity for a better life, would deport them just like that because things have improved in their country? They can live peacefully here. They will want to adapt to our customs. They certainly have the right to that opportunity.

Bill C-31 has yet more shortcomings. For example, there is no mechanism to challenge blunt refusal with respect to family reunification. Families separated by time and borders that are frequently not their own are denied the opportunity to bring their spouse and children because they did not list them when registering. Registration happens in refugee camps where people live in terrible conditions. Once they arrive, they are given a vague one-year window to declare another individual on their application. That makes no sense. Bill C-31 does not address that, but it happens.

Immigration is much more than bringing people through the nation's door, welcoming them and then letting them go.

● (1700)

I recently met with a group of immigrants from my riding. I invited them to my office to discuss their concerns and the problems and issues they faced when they arrived in Quebec.

It is quite simple: they waited and they hoped. They lived the dream and were happy, but even after years, their diplomas are still not recognized and they are still having a hard time finding a good job. Reality bites. There is not enough support. When we really look at it, it seems as though the government believes that it has allowed them in and filled its quota, and now they have to get by on their own. Of course, this summary does not apply to refugees, but I heard this from the mouths of qualified workers who have come here to keep our economy moving and whom we are abandoning. We are not helping them fit in to our Canadian way of life.

Canada is a dream that is often inaccessible and sometimes incomprehensible. People fill out forms, answer questions, put up with delays, and still more delays, pay money and are eventually given the opportunity to fulfill their dreams, and this is all priceless. They are asked to leave everything behind—their house, their culture, their lives—to be submerged in a foreign culture, and they are asked to act like us, to be like us and to thank us. But what tools do we give them?

Just a few hours of French lessons and everything should be perfect? What about life in our society and what about our values? What about support, follow up and a real helping hand? Bill C-31 does not address any of that. Yet that is definitely a reality that many of my hon. colleagues must face in their constituency offices—they must see people going from tears of joy to tears of despair, and get all kinds of calls from people who want to know where to turn.

We see families separated, years of waiting just to be rejected, and hopes dashed. Fortunately, some situations end well. We help people achieve the dream of reunification and staying here. However, I always wonder. I hope everything will go well for them, but we never know. We are in the process of giving the minister more and more discretionary power and that makes no sense.

I also condemn this blatant lack of provincial-federal and interdepartmental dialogue. The government is certainly not known for listening to the provinces. There is no shortage of examples of problems that are only going to get worse under this Conservative government. People have simply lost everything. The federal government requires one thing, the provincial another. One accepts things when the other refuses or vice versa. Costs keep piling up. A federal-provincial dialogue would help people.

The same goes for a dialogue between the federal departments. Is it normal for a person to have his work permit rejected because there is a delay in processing claims at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada? No, that is not normal. The person is not responsible whatsoever for any such delay. The surprising thing is that he has to pay for these delays out of his own pocket every time and usually more than once. As far as I understand, the applicant is certainly not reimbursed.

This Bill C-31 does not reflect our values. This Bill C-31 does not help refugees. This bill is putting everything into the hands of the minister. That is not really a good thing.

I will close on a more positive note because that might be what we should focus on. Recently, in my riding in Quebec City, I met a newly arrived immigrant couple. In fact, it was a spousal reunification. The wife had waited years for her husband to finally be able to join her. To see such happiness is priceless. There are human beings behind all this paperwork.

We have to think of the people.

*Government Orders*

•(1705)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know exactly what the member was talking about, because it was really not Bill C-31. She expressed reasonable concerns about integrating newcomers. On that subject, I must inform the member that since 2006, this government has more than tripled federal investments in integration services for newcomers, in Quebec and throughout Canada, in particular for francization, language training and job searches for newcomers.

With respect to resettled refugees, we are increasing the number we accept by 20%. We are also increasing support for those refugees under the refugee assistance program. So we are doing a great deal to help newcomers.

We are also reforming immigrant selection at the federal level so they are able to arrive in Canada much faster with jobs organized before they arrive.

Is the member aware of these investments? Does she think that tripling investment in integration is important or not?

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for that question because it shows very clearly how the Conservatives think. They have invested, so that is supposed to do the job. They have put money into it, so everything should be fine.

What I wanted to do was bring a human perspective to it. In fact, I am not surprised to see that the minister also failed to grasp the main point after the human element, which is the dialogue with the provinces to solve the little problems I wanted to raise when I decided to talk about immigration, because this was the opportunity to do just that.

I very sincerely hope that this government will live up to its responsibilities and that it will be able to engage in dialogue to improve things. This is not just a question of investment or of doubling the number of hours. There are human beings behind it. Everything possible must be done to make it work. They cannot always set up an F-35 secretariat, or a veterans committee, to solve things.

It is very distressing to see that the minister wants to give himself more responsibilities, because that makes us wonder whether a committee or a secretariat is going to be created. We are wondering how far it will go. So far, I really am not sure that it is going to go well.

Thus, Bill C-31 certainly does not reflect what we on this side expect, and what Canadians expect.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, at the end of her speech, the member said that she would like to leave it on a positive note and she talked about the reunification of a couple. I would like her to comment on one aspect of Bill C-31. The Minister of Immigration is putting into place a situation where refugees, after a year of detention, will need to wait an additional four or five years before being eligible to sponsor a spouse left in a country that they left because of fear for their life. Under this bill, they will wait years before being reunited with their family.

I would ask the member if she could provide comment on that aspect of the bill that would prevent people from being reunited in a more timely fashion.

•(1710)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank my hon. colleague for allowing me to expand on this point.

The power that the minister wants to give himself is indeed a matter of great concern. It is an excessive power that is going to allow him to designate countries of origin. In view of changing political situations, which can improve, there would be a decision not to take this refugee or that refugee now.

No matter which countries he chooses, it will certainly complicate things in family reunification cases for families from certain countries. It seems to me that what we have here is the very definition of discrimination.

[*English*]

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join everyone here today to speak to Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act.

I thank the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism for not only bringing forward this much needed act, but for being here in the House while the bill is being debated to answer questions, explain what the act entails and how it would improve upon the refugee claimant system that we have here in Canada. I also thank his parliamentary secretary for the work he has done in carrying this bill and ensuring we have a full debate here in a democratic process.

I often hear from constituents in my riding of Selkirk—Interlake how important it is that we fix the refugee system. We always hear stories of people who come in and abuse the refugee system. They take dollars out of Canadian taxpayers' hands and use it in ways that benefit them personally but do not broaden the economy or culture of Canada. There have been a number of emails circulating on the Internet that find their way into the offices of members of Parliament and it is about time that we address some of the concerns that constituents have had. There are emails that have been going through cyberspace and letters to editors that have been written over the years that address the situation of whether people are legitimate asylum seekers, how many dollars are attributed to those individuals as they sit in the queue waiting to have their refugee claims heard, and whether or not they gain access to Canada or are denied and have to be returned to their country of origin.

I do not think anyone in this House could disagree that Canada has the most fair and generous immigration system in the world. However, as I said, no one has tolerance for the abuse that the Canadian refugee system has undergone over recent history.



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However, for people to think that our government is trying to crack down on refugees and that there would also be a crackdown on overall immigration, I can say that is absolutely false. Since we have come to power, total immigration into Canada has gone up 15% on a year over year basis. That has helped Canada in finding skilled workers, finding people to work in our health care system and bringing people into our communities to help us continue to grow and prosper as a country. There is no doubt that immigrants who have come to Canada and call it their home have contributed significantly to our economy and helped us to get through the economic downturn.

Bill C-31 is a follow-up to what we have already done under Bill C-11, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act. I do not think it has been said enough here that we have committed as a country to increasing the overall number of refugees we take in every year by 2,500 per year. That is almost a 10% increase of where we were last year and it is still generous. It means that we are still reaching out to help those who are in need and that we will help people who are in countries where they are being persecuted, prejudiced, possibly facing genocides and other atrocities to have the opportunity to come to Canada. We want to make it faster for refugees to come through the system and get safe asylum.

We will do that through a number of different ways. We will establish the safe countries list. By having a safe countries list we hope to reduce the backlog we have today of over 42,000 refugee claimants who are seeking asylum in Canada. Bill C-31 would reduce the overall processing time to 45 days for those people coming from the safe countries list. Right now, claimants coming from safe countries are seeing an average processing time of 1,038 days. We would dramatically reduce that time.

Second, as was mentioned earlier by the member for Barrie, we would bring in biometrics and follow suit with what so many other countries have done. We would bring in digital photographs and fingerprinting, as well as give people seeking asylum the opportunity to make their application in their own countries at Canadian consulates and embassies to get their names into the system along with data. Allowing them to make those claims in their own countries before they come to Canada would expedite the process.

• (1715)

The third important thing here is that we are going after the human smugglers. We do not want to see people profit from other people's disadvantage. We do not want people going out and extorting thousands of dollars from people to bring them to Canada, even though they come from countries where they can make those refugee claims. It is important that this bill addresses that.

As the minister has already said, we are not going after the actual bona fide asylum seekers. Rather, we are going after those who are out to abuse our system. We use the word "bogus" a lot, and it gets thrown around, but there are those who absolutely abuse the system.

All we need to do is look at the facts that we are dealing with today. The European Union, western world countries, democracies with human rights and established rules of law, account for 23% of all claims coming to Canada. In 2011, 5,800 refugee claimants came from the European Union, which is 14% over 2010, and, more important, it is more than we are getting from Africa and Asia, where

there are countries that have dictators, where we know people are being persecuted either because of their religious belief or race or are being disadvantaged because of their gender.

It is just amazing that we are getting so many claims from the European Union. Out of those claims, and this is where the word "bogus" comes in, when they actually need to appear before the Immigration and Refugee Board, 95% of those claimants never show up to defend their case. They are saying that they are sorry that they have wasted our time and have taken our money but that they will go back home now. What we are hearing is that they are getting off the plane or the boat, coming from countries like Hungary, the Roma in particular, saying that they are a refugee and then ask for the cheque. They are not even attempting to go through the process of proving that they are disadvantaged in the country that they reside.

The Roma coming from Hungary are essentially 18% of all the claimants that Canada faces. They are the large majority of those coming out of the European Union. That accounts for over 4,400 people, which is an increase of 50% from 2010. Last year, 4,400 people from Hungary tried to claim refugee status here in Canada.

People in the European Union have the freedom to move around without visas and without passports. They get to go back and forth and work in each other's jurisdictions. Therefore, how can these people be economic refugees or political refugees, or be persecuted under a system where they can go anywhere they want within the European Union, where we know there are some great democracies and leaders in human rights and the rule of law?

Belgium only received 188 people from Hungary in 2011. The U.S. only received 47 applicants. France and Norway only received 33 each. We are dealing with 4,400 refugee claimants from Hungary. How is that a fair system when we have people applying who are coming from legitimate countries where they want to get away from war, from government-forced famines or from being persecuted because of their religious beliefs?

This would have a huge savings cost wise for the Canadian taxpayer because we would be removing these people who are just using the system but, more important, it would speed up the system and open the door for legitimate asylum seekers. Those are the ones we want to reach out to and to see overall numbers increase by 2,500 refugees a year, so that Canada's generosity and compassion will still be second to none in the world.

Again I congratulate the minister and his department for their foresight and for going ahead and making these changes so that we can once and for all do away with a system that is broken and allow us to address the real needs of those seeking asylum around the world.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what we are being told makes no sense. One of the aspects of Bill C-31 would allow the minister to designate so-called safe countries.

*Government Orders*

I am a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade. Not only are we not being given the opportunity to debate at length the free trade agreements signed with minor countries that trade with Canada—such as Jordan, Panama and Honduras—but we also face great challenges. The government obviously is pushing hard to sign these agreements with countries that have serious problems and that cannot guarantee, among other things, the rights of workers, the elimination of problems related to money laundering or, as in the case of Honduras, a solution to the problem of gang violence.

I would like to ask my colleague opposite what there is to gain from allowing the minister to draw up a list of safe countries when government priorities already allow countries whose safety is questionable to make trade agreements with Canada? This makes absolutely no sense to me.

[*English*]

**Mr. James Bezan:** Mr. Speaker, this is one thing that is being thrown out, that essentially there is going to be political direction given in determining which countries are on the list. There are going to be thresholds established. There is a process established. There is always the democratic way to ensure that regulations are brought into place, are properly sounded and that the public has a chance to respond to regulations.

Under the protecting Canada's immigration system act, the minister would have the authority to designate countries of origin, but with no sub-national or regional areas designated. Therefore, he has to designate the entire country, not just parts of it.

However, there are triggers for review based on rejection rates, withdrawal and abandonment rates, or qualitative checklists for countries with few refugee claims. For the quantitative criteria, a high rejection rate, which includes withdrawn and abandoned claims, would trigger a review for designation. The actual thresholds would be settled by ministerial order. The government is proposing a threshold of a 75% rejection rate and 60% withdrawal and abandonment rate. Those quantitative triggers would be established through ministerial order, so that allows the regulatory process to go through the gazetted review.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, with the previous Conservative speaker, I raised the issue of a press release issued by the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers in response to the bill. The association did not respond very favourably to the bill and the member seemed to give the impression that this was to be expected. It was implied that the people who would have authored this press release would have received more money under the current system. Therefore, one would expect them to oppose the bill.

Would the member acknowledge that the government's position is that the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers is in fact in conflict of interest and therefore anything it has to say on the bill is worth nothing?

**Mr. James Bezan:** Mr. Speaker, I have a quote from Richard Kurland, who is an immigration lawyer. He appeared on CTV's news channel on February 16. He said:

Finally someone recognized that the open wallet approach of the past, offering free education, free medicare, and a welfare cheque to anyone who touched Canadian soil making a refugee claim was not the right thing to do. So I'm glad to see today that finally, after several years, someone has the political courage to take the political

risk of saying, if you're from a European country and you can land in London or Paris or Berlin, fill out paperwork, and legally live there, work there, pay taxes there, you shouldn't be allowed to make a refugee claim in Canada. Buttress that with this reality check. Over 90 percent, and in some years 95 percent, of the target group, the Roma claimants, didn't even show up for their oral hearings. They rode on the taxpayer.

● (1725)

**Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I begin my comments, I want to acknowledge the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. It was important enough for him to come to Canada's tenth-largest city, and for those who do not know that is London Ontario, to be able to make some statements directly about Bill C-31 and the positive impact that it would have for people who would be affected by this. I wanted to acknowledge to him personally how much I appreciate that. As I make more formal comments, I appreciate the efforts of his department and the parliamentary secretary for ensuring the work that they have done provides us with what is a strong, fair and good bill.

As I rise today to discuss the importance of Bill C-31, I want to talk about this legislation, which ultimately is intended to strengthen Canada's already renowned immigration and refugee systems. It is quite evident that Canada has the most fair and generous immigration system in the world. However, our government and fair-minded Canadians have no tolerance for those who would exploit our generosity and take unfair advantage of our country's immigration and refugee system. As a result, we are taking action to crack down on this abuse by strengthening the integrity of Canada's immigration system through Bill C-31.

This bill proposed by our government is targeted to make our refugee system faster and fairer and at the same time to put a stop to foreign criminals, human smugglers and refugees who abuse our generous immigration system so they can receive lucrative taxpayer-funded health, welfare and other social benefits. In fact, the ratification of the bill would save Canadian taxpayers at least \$1.65 billion over five years, while providing protection more quickly to those truly in need. Through these improvements to the asylum system, the bogus claimants who are from countries with democracies that have respect for basic rights and freedoms will be weeded out.

The fact is too many taxpayer dollars are being spent on people who are not fleeing genuine persecution, who instead seek to manipulate and take advantage of Canada's generous asylum system to receive lucrative taxpayer-funded health care, welfare and various social benefits.

In its initiatives to ensure Canada does not become a magnet for abuse, some of the clear measures in Bill C-31 include the following.

The first is fast-tracking refugee claims and ensuring failed claimants are promptly deported. However, people deemed in need of protection will not be returned to their country of persecution regardless of what country they have fled.

The second is implementing biometric identification such as fingerprints and photos for people who apply for visitors' visas for the reason that this important change would guard against the use of false identities.

*Government Orders*

The third is preventing the attraction of fleeing to Canada through means of illegal human smuggling operations by: increasing the penalties for human smugglers, ensuring the lucrative benefits refugees receive are not more generous than those received by the Canadian public; preventing human smuggling associated individuals from applying for permanent resident status for a period of five years, given that they successfully apply for refugee status; and preventing those individuals from sponsoring their family members also for a period of five years.

Canada has a well-deserved international reputation for having the most generous and fair immigration system in the world and, since 2006, our government has welcomed the highest sustained average of immigration in Canadian history. Canada provides protection to more than one in ten refugees resettled each year worldwide, more than almost any other developed country in the world. Conversely, given the stated inefficiencies and flaws that are currently infecting the integrity of our system, Canadians have given our government a strong mandate to improve Canada's immigration system through Bill C-31, which would help us put a stop to those who seek to abuse that generosity.

Effective response measures to these detrimental abuses are needed now more than ever in order to restore the integrity and public confidence of our system. Our current system calls for the need for a faster and fairer refugee determination process, resulting in effective and efficient protection for legitimate refugees and faster removal for illegitimate claimants.

My constituents in London West and all Canadians expect that our borders and shores are protected and secure and our generous systems are protected from abuse.

Canada's current refugee system is flawed as it is vulnerable to abuse. Due to this, too many taxpayer dollars are being spent on people who are not fleeing genuine persecution, but are seeking to exploit Canada's generous asylum system to reap those benefits. For example, in 2011 Canada received 5,800 more refugee claims from the democratic and human rights-respecting countries, otherwise known as safe countries of the European Union, than from Africa or Asia, which was a significant increase, 14% from 2010.

• (1730)

Former Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff has recognized the legitimacy of designating certain countries as safe and ultimately even advocated rejecting all claims from those countries, which Bill C-31 does not propose to do.

This is a popular misconception of the bill, which is that by creating a process that allows certain countries to be designated as safe, Bill C-31 creates a two-tier asylum system and therefore violates the UN Convention on Refugees and/or the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, that is completely false. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the 1951 UN refugee convention require that all refugees be given the opportunity to have their claims heard. The process in Canada goes above and beyond its domestic and international obligations and that would not change under the proposed act.

Canada has and will continue to have one of the most generous refugee systems in the world. All refugee claimants will continue to

have their cases heard by the independent Immigration and Refugee Board. Furthermore, every failed refugee claimant will continue to have access to at least one level of appeal.

On February 26, Paul Attia of Immigrants for Canada stated:

Immigrants for Canada (IFC) represents the views of countless immigrants across our nation who hold strongly to the view that Canadian immigration policy should always be in Canada's best interests. The immigrants IFC represents worked very hard, and sacrificed much to arrive on Canadian shores, and who chose to do so in an honest and legal way. Accordingly, these same immigrants welcome legislation that works to ensure that people who have no valid claim to our protection are not able to use the refugee determination system to obtain permanent residence in Canada.

Under the act, our government can put a stop to those who seek to abuse our generosity, save a substantial amount to Canadian taxpayers, give protection to genuine refugees in a much more timely manner and allow the quick removal of illegitimate claimants who cheat the system and abuse our generosity.

Bill C-31, protecting Canada's immigration system act, is truly in the best interests of Canada and of genuine refugees themselves. That is what we are talking about here. Canadians have given our government a mandate to improve Canada's immigration system and our government is acting on that mandate.

I emphasize the importance of the bill and urge the support and ratification of it as it stresses tough but fair measures to stop those who would abuse our generosity from becoming part of Canadian society. I do sincerely hope that my hon. colleagues across the floor will agree and join me in supporting this crucial legislation.

When we talk about the integrity of our immigration system, it is critical that we look not just at what a political position might be, but that we look at what the integrity of doing the right thing is intended to do. If members opposite look at doing the right thing, they will look deeply at this. They will look at this legislation and say that this is right for people who are not cheating the process, that this is right for people who are trying to do their very best to come to Canada the proper way and make a honest contribution to Canada and make our country a better place.

That is why I am so sincerely appreciative of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Perhaps for the first time we have found a minister who has the guts and the forthright approach to make this the most fair and transparent system, the right system for Canada. I would like to applaud him and I thank him on behalf of all Canadians.

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am afraid I am going to disappoint the hon. member for London West by saying that we are not going to come on board on this.

Let us talk about some basic levels of fairness. Under this legislation, people coming here from a designated country would be given 15 days to complete the personal information forms and then 30 days to prepare for a refugee hearing. We are talking about people who are traumatized, people who have perhaps fled their country because of violent sexual assault, people who are extremely fragile. We are going to tell them that we want them to complete all of this complicated paperwork in 15 days and then come back with a fully formed argument and defence for their position.

*Government Orders*

How can anyone in the House believe that is fair treatment for refugees?

• (1735)

**Mr. Ed Holder:** Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of thoughts that come to mind. First, I will share his disappointment that they are not coming on board. If there was an opportunity for them to do that in a thoughtful way, we would certainly appreciate that kind of support. As we go forward, who knows what can happen? However, it may not happen in this case.

Let me say what is not humane. What is not humane is when people, through the system that we have, base their hope on something that is not real. There may well be people who come in through the back door as bogus refugees and I think we would find consensus on both sides of the House that if inappropriate refugees come into Canada and redirect the focus away from people who have done it genuinely, we would want to get rid of those bogus refugees. I think we could find support in that.

What is really the challenge and really inhumane is when people are in the system for years and years and do not have their cases heard because of the significant backlog. That is what is wrong. What we are going to see through Bill C-31 is a significant streamlining that is humane and fair and treats refugees with greater respect.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member would be well advised to recognize that a couple of years ago all parties in the House of Commons acknowledged the need to speed up the process. That is why legislation was passed back then that would have done just that.

Having said that, I would ask the member to imagine a completely legitimate case. Let us imagine that a man comes from a country where his life has been in danger, lands in Canada and becomes a refugee. That is wonderful. Then, after being stamped, he now has to wait to sponsor his wife, which could take another three or four years under the current system. It is being mandated under this particular bill that a qualified refugee is going to have to wait that period of time.

Does the member feel it is in the best interests of a legitimate refugee, who fled a country because of being afraid of losing his or her life or being tortured, to have to wait another three, four, or five years before being able to sponsor a spouse?

**Mr. Ed Holder:** Mr. Speaker, from my perspective, what is in the best interests of refugees who come to this country is to ensure that their cases are heard quickly, in contrast to the current circumstance. By virtue of the backlog and the folks who come in through the back door and do not come in genuinely, the biggest challenge in the system is the massive backlog.

If the member opposite would support streamlining this process, I think we could find accord with the third party as well. That would be very appropriate, and I would encourage him to support it for the very reason he is saying: to streamline this process. That is the humane, fair and right thing to do for refugees.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today to debate

Bill C-31, the Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act. The title of this bill is misleading because the only thing the bill protects is the Conservatives' paranoid ideology.

Once again, the Conservatives have a repressive agenda. They want to muster support by making people feel that they are under threat. This is the same kind of tactic we see our neighbours to the south using against illegal immigrants, an easy target for those seeking to drum up support for certain intolerant politicians. As we are seeing with Conservative policies, Canada is quickly becoming Americanized.

To perpetuate the illusion that their Canada is still a different country, the Conservatives are placing disproportionate emphasis on the monarchy and past wars, but those symbols are not relevant to Canadians' day-to-day lives. The Canada we love is an open nation that respects everyone and protects its people from arbitrary rule. We are proud of our past, but we live in 2012, so, back to this bill, which has a lot in common with American policy from the 1960s.

Bill C-31 targets a group of people who are fleeing persecution and suffering. These people are easy targets for the Conservatives because they have no legal status in Canada and no right to vote. The Conservatives can demonize them without suffering any consequences come the next election.

Instead, the Conservatives should tackle human smugglers, those who make money by exploiting human misery and breaking our laws. Illegal immigrants already take huge risks to escape misery. The threat of penalties will not dissuade them from entering Canada illegally. In other words, this bill will just cause more problems for refugees and will do little or nothing to punish smugglers. Do I have to remind the House that these smugglers typically treat illegal immigrants as slaves once they get here? The government should target those who stand to gain from the crime, not victims and desperate people.

I am extremely concerned about several aspects of this bill. First of all, I would like to note the changes to the deadlines that refugees must meet in completing their forms, the basis for their claim. Refugee claimants will have only 15 days to complete and file their applications. That is not long enough. Claimants need to obtain legal advice and must have time to prepare their cases and, above all, to become familiar with how things work in Canada. It is therefore unreasonable to give them only 15 days to complete their applications.

Another aspect of the bill that concerns me is giving the minister the power to create a list of designated countries of origin. Without having to consult any experts, the minister can make decisions that will have serious consequences. This seems arbitrary to me and, considering how the Conservatives have behaved in this House and during the election, many Canadians are worried about this measure.

*Government Orders*

As I already asked, why is this bill being so hard on illegal immigrants? Under this bill, anyone who arrives in a group will be detained for one year, even 16-year-olds. This typically Conservative “solution” is completely ridiculous. It will not stop illegal immigrants from entering Canada. They are often desperate and are being manipulated by human smugglers. They will not even be aware of the risk of imprisonment that they face when entering Canada illegally. It is unlikely that refugees will have read the Canadian legislation before coming here.

In other words, this will have no deterrent effect. Furthermore, who will have to pay for these detentions? Canadian taxpayers, once again. Before the Conservatives make Canadian taxpayers pay the cost of putting more people in prison, do the Conservatives have even one study that says that this will be beneficial in any way?

This government is looking more and more ridiculous because of its lack of professionalism and rigour. What is unfortunate about all of this is that taxpayers and refugees will be the ones to pay the price.

• (1740)

And what will happen to the young people under 16? They will try to reach Canada with their parents, who will be in prison. Who will take care of the young people? The state, of course, and it will fall to the provinces once again. In other words, the Canadian taxpayers will be on the hook again.

Why impose a 12-month minimum prison sentence? Why send the bill to the provinces yet again? This measure seems both unnecessary and expensive. Of course, increasing the age of imprisonment to 16 is better than throwing a seven year-old in jail, but again we have to consider the effects on the children of having their parents in prison for such a long time. What is more, those who will be imprisoned will not even be able to appeal the decision.

The Conservatives are making the provinces pay again. For example, as a result of the Conservatives' policies, Quebecers will have to foot the bill for creating a new firearms registry, building prisons, taking care of the children of imprisoned illegal immigrants, for the losses resulting from the expropriation of certain copyrights and for using the new Champlain bridge.

The Conservatives also want to balance the budget on the backs of the provinces. By constantly dumping their problems onto Quebec, the Conservatives are only providing ammunition to those who believe federalism is doomed to fail. Even separatists describe the Conservative Prime Minister as a great sovereignist.

Furthermore, those who are deported because their application has been rejected will be barred from applying for permanent residency status for five years. If we add this to the minimum one-year detention for immigrants who arrive from a designated country of origin, it will take more than six years for a person to immigrate. I do not believe that this measure is necessary. Are there studies that suggest this is the approach to be taken?

This bill raises another question. Is it constitutional? The withdrawal of permanent resident status from a person who loses their refugee status without committing a crime seems excessive. It is very likely that there will be Supreme Court challenges because those with refugee status are also protected by our Canadian Charter

of Rights and Freedoms. Legitimate applicants may be detained longer than necessary, which contravenes their right to freedom and legal rights. In addition, detaining someone for a minimum of 12 months without reviewing their file contravenes the Charter because it limits that person's right to legal recourse. Minimum detention of 12 month is also cruel for both children and parents and does not allow judges to decide whether or not the risk of reoffending justifies such imprisonment.

To conclude, I would remind the House of how much the Conservatives hate expert opinions, and that this is bad for Canada. In this case, the government is questioning the intelligence of judges and immigration experts. With this bill, the minister and the Conservative Party are claiming to be better qualified to decide the fate of immigrants smuggled into Canada than the experts are. Once again, this is a right-wing policy designed solely to create fear and exacerbate xenophobia. Yes, unfounded refugee claims must be rejected, but our government must not send the message that the doors to Canada are closed—quite the opposite. Imposing a minimum sentence, allowing the minister to decide what countries are acceptable and what countries are not, and separating children from their parents for as long as a year are not acceptable policies.

Regardless, we know that the Conservative government will not admit it is on the wrong track and will not amend its bill.

We must make efforts to prevent human smuggling and to punish smugglers, not the people who are fleeing human misery. It is unfortunate that we are again debating a bill that will not achieve its goal, simply because it is aiming at the wrong target.

• (1745)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the member who has just spoken. That is why I am certain that he did not write the speech he just delivered. I imagine that his speech was written by a member of his staff, a young, misinformed and ideological member. It certainly does not reflect the values of his constituents.

[*English*]

I was recently in Montreal, meeting with some of his constituents from the Canadian-Italian community in Montreal. This issue came up. They wanted to know why it was that the number one source region for asylum claims in Canada now is Europe, more than from Africa or Asia. They could not understand, as people of European origin, why folks who can move around with full mobility in a space of 27 democratic countries would be coming to Canada, and Canada alone, to make asylum claims and why virtually none of the claimants actually show up for their hearings, almost all of them abandoning and withdrawing their own claims.

He used some very strong and, I would argue, demagogic and irresponsible language, saying that this approach encourages xenophobia. Does the member not appreciate the fact that we need to address highly organized waves of false claims? Does he not agree with his constituents on that? Is he not willing at least to admit that the government is actually accepting more resettled refugees per capita than any other country in the world and that we are increasing the number of such resettled refugees by 20%, as well as the support we give them? Does he believe that reflects xenophobia?

*Government Orders*

• (1750)

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his question. I have just a couple of clarifications.

He may have been in my riding, but I do not think he met with any of my constituents. Not all Italian-speaking Montrealers live in my constituency. Most of those he met do not live in my riding.

I think it is a general concern, not just in Montreal but everywhere, that we do have to try to minimize some of the refugee claims coming in. In my speech, I did not speak about the refugees who are coming in and making false claims. What I have a problem with is the refugees who are coming in *par des passeurs*, meaning the people who are organizing these refugees to come in. When a refugee comes in, even if he pays somebody to go around the system, he does not know the Canadian laws. He does not sit there in front of his computer, reading Canadian laws and saying “Once I get to Canada, I am going to be able to get around the refugee act”.

What I have a problem with is that a refugee comes here, has 15 days to prepare for his hearing and, if he does not prepare it appropriately, is going to be detained for a year. That is without speaking about the kids who are going to be sent with another family.

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask this question in terms of those who are designated irregular arrivals. I am pretty sure that if I am in a war-torn country where my life is threatened, I am going to pay whoever, however, to get out of that country to save the lives of myself and my family.

What I would like to ask the hon. member to comment on is this. Should those people be penalized who are legitimately fleeing for their lives, who do not have the time to sit there, leaf through a book and say “Okay, I have to do things this way”, who want to get out and who will pay somebody to get them out? Somebody will take advantage of that situation and take advantage of them.

Should those people be penalized in the way the government is looking to penalize them, by having their children stripped from them and being jailed for up to a year?

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti:** Mr. Speaker, I agree that most of the people who are desperate will do desperate things, will pay whatever it is and do whatever it is. They are not going to sit in front of their computers or write a letter to the Minister of Justice, asking him what the refugee laws are before they come to Canada, asking if they meet the criteria and whether they should go or not go.

It is totally unacceptable that these people who are actually coming here from a war-torn country, the example the member gave, be penalized and separated from their kids on top of everything else, after some of the tragic circumstances they may come from.

The premise of this bill is that it is starting on a bad footing. I have no problem sending a bill to committee, but when it starts on a negative footing like this, where there are tons of people who are already against it and do not see how it is ever going to be fixed, how can one support a bill of such a fashion?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all members who have participated in this debate over the course of

some 23 hours of debate over 5 parliamentary days, 64 members having spoken to the bill, in addition to which this bill was preceded, in part, by Bill C-4. Bill C-31 is subsuming Bill C-4. If we combine the amount of debate on the two bills, we have had 41 hours of debate over 14 days, with 137 speeches, a very fulsome debate, and I do hope that this important bill, an act to protect the integrity of Canada's immigration system, will be referred for close, detailed study to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Allow me, at this point, to respond to some of the concerns and criticisms levelled by opposition members against this balanced effort to protect the integrity of our fair and generous immigration and refugee determination systems.

First, throughout the course of this debate, particularly today, we have heard a level of demagogic rhetoric that I personally regard as being irresponsible.

Thankfully, in this country, we have a broad public consensus in favour of immigration and refugee protection. Thankfully, we have avoided the kind of heated and divisive politics of immigration we see, for example, in certain western European countries. I believe it is incumbent upon all of us as elected representatives to maintain the breadth of that consensus through a responsible and balanced discourse on these issues, not to say that we will always agree on particular features of our asylum or immigration systems but that we should engage in the debate in a responsible way.

I hear opposition members saying, as the deputy leader of the NDP did, that this government is “beating up on refugees”.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

When I hear members like the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel say that we are promoting xenophobia, when I hear that the bill is against immigrants and that the government is creating fear, I am in fact hearing irresponsible voices in a debate that calls for us to be very careful and very cautious at all times.

[*English*]

This is really outrageous. “Xenophobia”, “beating up on refugees” and “anti-immigrant” are the kinds of terms we could fairly ascribe *au Front national de la France*, to the British National Party or to the xenophobic parties of western Europe that are against immigration and refugee protection.

However, here are the facts. This government, objectively speaking, based on the facts, based on the evidence, is the most pro-immigration government in the history of this dominion. Since 2006 we have admitted, on average, 254,000 permanent residents. That represents an increase of 14% over the levels of the previous Liberal government, which admitted 222,000 permanent residents, on average. This represents, under this government, the highest sustained levels of immigration in Canadian history, adding nearly 0.8% to our population per year, the highest per capita levels of immigration in the developed world.

*Government Orders*

As the Prime Minister has noted, this was one of the only developed countries in the world to maintain robust levels during the global economic downturn, as opposed, for example, to the government of one Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who cut immigration levels almost in half during the early 1990s, or the government of Jean Chrétien, who cut immigration levels from 260,000 under this minister and his colleagues in 1993 to 175,000 in 1995. Those are the facts. The opposition asked us to have evidence-based policy. Here is evidence.

Here is more evidence. We already accept one out of every ten resettled refugees from around the world. According to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, we receive more resettled refugees per capita than any country in the world, already, under this so-called xenophobic, anti-refugee government.

However, guess what. Because we so profoundly understand this country's unique vocation as a land of protection for victims of persecution, of ethnic cleansing, of violence, because we understand that from the united empire loyalists to the black slaves who came north through the underground railroad to the victims who fled communist totalitarian states throughout the 20th century, because it was a Conservative government that opened the doors to the Vietnamese-Indochinese refugees in 1979, because we understand that this is in our DNA as a country, this government is increasing the number of convention refugees we accept from around the world by 20%, and we are increasing at a time of fiscal restraint. We are increasing the integration support we give to them by 20%, so we will be far and away the number one recipient of resettled refugees in the world. Therefore, I say to my friends in the opposition how ridiculous and shameful it is to characterize that record as one of xenophobia and promoting "beating up" on refugees.

What the bill before this place seeks to do is to take a balanced approach to refugee protection that exceeds both our charter and UN convention obligations. Our obligation under the charter, as defined by the Supreme Court in the 1985 Singh decision, is very simple. It is to provide to asylum claimants an oral hearing before a competent decision-maker where credibility is an issue. We exceed that requirement by giving all claimants access to a full hearing, regardless of which country they come from or whether such country has been designated by the minister or not, regardless of the means through which they came and whether they came in a smuggling operation or not.

Notwithstanding most of the speeches from the opposition, every single asylum claimant will have access to the same full, fair, independent hearing at the quasi-judicial IRB, in full compliance with natural justice, due process and the requirements of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which system, according to the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, is the model system in the world for refugee protection. We are maintaining and in fact enhancing that system through the creation, for the first time, of a new full, fact-based appeal and oral hearing afforded failed claimants at the newly created Refugee Appeal Division.

When I hear the hypocrisy about this from my colleagues in the Liberal Party who were in government for 13 years and refused to create a full appeal process for failed refugee claimants and who criticize this government, which is increasing the number of refugees

we accept and creating for the first time a Refugee Appeal Division, I say to my friends in the Liberal Party that they should be ashamed.

Our record speaks for itself. We are adding additional procedural protection for failed asylum claimants, but in this context we must deal with the reality that there are far too many who seek to abuse our generosity and that of our asylum system. Nearly two-thirds of asylum claimants are determined or deemed not to be well-founded claimants. Many of them, if not most, are manifestly fraudulent claimants who come here. They ought to come through the regular immigration procedures but very often are advised by consultants and maybe lawyers. We have had lawyers actually charged recently for coaching people to make fake asylum claims. People who are coached sometimes unwittingly go along with this to make false claims when they do not actually have a well-founded fear of persecution, which is the test in the convention for refugee protection. This has become an acute problem coming from certain democratic countries.

No country in the world is perfect. Certainly, none of the countries in the European Union are. However, it is a space that allows full mobility within 27 democratic member states, so why is it that Canada would be getting 90% of the asylum claims from around the world from the European Union? Why is it that almost 100% of those claimants do not show up for their own claim but rather abandon and withdraw the claims of their own volition? This is rather clear evidence that there is a highly organized wave of unfounded claims. That is not to say that their lives are perfect in Europe, but clearly by their own admission they do not need our protection. That is why we propose an accelerated process with limited appeals for people coming from designated countries. That is not to say that the minister would interfere in the decision-making process. That is nonsense. This is a full, independent, quasi-judicial decision that every claimant would benefit from.

● (1800)

I would further point out that this bill would allow us to give protection and certainty to bona fide asylum claimants in two to three months rather than two years. It would also allow us to remove from Canada false asylum claimants who have had the benefit of due process in a few months rather than several years, allowing them to restart their lives back in their countries of origin instead of abusing the generosity of Canadian taxpayers.

This is a balanced approach that respects our moral and legal obligations toward refugees. I am proud to support it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoulu, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. minister's speech. My concerns were not addressed.

One very important aspect that we have discussed quite often and that, unfortunately, has not been addressed satisfactorily is the question of designated foreign nationals in the context of a system of countries targeted as unsafe. The minister and the government are claiming that this approach in itself is going to combat this method of illegal immigration, but they are unable to show us how that might be done.

*Government Orders*

In the past, they used as their pretext examples of mass illegal immigration, including the arrival by boat of smugglers who exploited the good faith of people who wanted to immigrate to Canada. Then they hand us a bill like this, when a life sentence can already be imposed on people convicted of human smuggling under the existing legislation.

Given that we are unable to prevent this kind of immigration at present, probably because of a lack of resources, how can the minister guarantee to this House that this legislation will really resolve the situation if we do not have the resources to enforce it?

● (1805)

**Hon. Jason Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question, but, frankly, I am not entirely sure I understood.

I can say that we are increasing prison sentences for human smugglers. For example, fines are imposed on the boat owners who help smuggle people into Canada.

The problem is that it is very difficult to apply Canadian law to the smugglers who live overseas. That is why we need to include deterrents in the bill for the potential clients of the smugglers. That is why we are proposing a five-year temporary residence period instead of permanent residence for immigrants who arrive here illegally and who are recognized as protected persons. We have to have deterrents for the clients in order to reduce the human smuggling market.

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister is wrong on many points. When he makes reference to the most generous government in terms of immigration into the country, it is not this minister and not this government. If he does not have the facts, I can provide him with a copy of the facts, which I would be more than happy to table. The most successful immigration program, in recent history is the provincial nominee program which had nothing to do with the current minister or prime minister. It was a Jean Chrétien program. It is in fact the best, fastest-growing immigration program.

I have a picture of the Minister of Immigration standing on a ship with the Prime Minister, at the time of the *Ocean Lady* and the *Sun Sea*, talking about how tough he is going to be on profiteers and human smugglers. In reality, this bill is going to do more damage and make double victims of legitimate refugees who come to our shore. He is making refugees victims again. This is a minister who has a power grab. It is this minister who wants to—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Order, please.

I know it has been two weeks, but I would just remind hon. members that the time allocated for questions and comments is limited and they may want to keep about one minute for a question, and a response is in order. Then more hon. members would have the opportunity to pose a question.

The hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

**Hon. Jason Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, here are some points of fact. The average number of permanent residents admitted from 1993 to 2005 under the previous government was 222,000. Since this government took office in 2006, we have admitted on average

254,000 permanent residents per year, the highest sustained level in Canadian history. With respect to the PN program to which the member referred, in 2005, 4,700 PNs were admitted to Manitoba and this year, 12,000. We have tripled the number of PNs going to Manitoba. We have increased the program overall nationally tenfold. We have increased those numbers.

Finally, why is it that the Liberal Party has not yet offered a single concrete or positive idea to deter human smugglers from putting people's lives at risk by targeting Canada as a place for their odious commerce?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before we resume debate with the hon. member for Mississauga South, I will let her know that I will have to interrupt her at 15 minutes after the hour, as this is the time allocated today for government orders.

The hon. member for Mississauga South.

● (1810)

**Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have this brief opportunity to discuss Bill C-31 and how it proposes much needed reforms to secure our immigration system.

A number of my colleagues have spoken on this matter and illustrated a number of safeguards Bill C-31 contains to ensure that Canada will take a prudent and balanced approach to protecting the immigration system from abuse. Both the government and opposition parties have noted with pride that Canada has a long tradition of providing protection to those who are in need of it. With Canada accepting 1 out of every 10 refugee claims made in the world, it is very clear that the Canadian system is the most compassionate and generous in the world today. As a government, members on this side of the House have every intention of continuing to build on that great tradition.

Refugees who make honest claims and come to Canada because they truly need protection have nothing to fear. There will always be a place in Canada for them for as long as they need it. Canadians have given us a strong mandate to protect Canada's immigration system. We are acting on that mandate. We are creating a faster and fairer immigration system.

*The Globe and Mail* editorial board has applauded Bill C-31. Listen to what it had to say:

[The] Immigration Minister...[s] refugee reforms, aimed at making the process more efficient and decisive, are generally good. If implemented, they will improve an unwieldy asylum program...

The legislation rightly focuses on weeding out claimants who are not genuine, and stemming the flow of asylum seekers from countries such as Mexico and Hungary that are democracies with respect for basic rights and freedoms....

Fast-tracking refugee claims from these countries, and ensuring failed claimants are promptly deported, is an excellent way to ensure Canada does not become a magnet for abuse. The bill will also implement biometric identification, such as fingerprints and photos, for people who apply for visitor's visas. This welcome change will guard against the use of false identities.



*Government Orders*

What I would like to see acknowledged by the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party is the fact that the system should have a mechanism in place that allows Canada to deal with refugee claimants who were not honest in their claims and gained permanent residency in our country through fraudulent means. The opposition MPs keep rising in the House and exclaiming that this rule is taking away people's rights. We are committed to preserving the place of people who are legitimately persecuted and make honest refugee claims. Canada will continue to protect these people. Their rights are not in question now and never will be.

The so-called rights in question, the rights that the NDP is trying to defend, must then belong to those who made fraudulent claims. This is patently absurd. It is not a right to defraud the Government of Canada. It is not a right to defraud Canadian taxpayers. It is not a right for refugee claimants to provide false information to the government to gain permanent residency in Canada and with it gain access to Canada's generous system of health and social benefits. The total savings to taxpayers as a result of this bill would be \$1.65 billion over five years. If we do not pass this bill, then we will continue to pay up to \$170 million per year for bogus EU claimants.

The NDP does not understand this approach and how it will save taxpayers money. Instead, the NDP approach to dealing with someone who manages to sneak by the system, who is able to swindle the system and Canadian taxpayers, is to do nothing. If it is found out that refugee claimants have cheated the system, the NDP wants to reward them by letting them stay in Canada and letting them claim social benefits at the expense of working families for even longer. This is wrong.

We are making sure that fraudulent refugee claimants do not get to benefit from their deception. The comments from NDP members suggest that they are intent on protecting people who cheat the system. The government is trying to close this loophole. Immigration lawyer Richard Kurland has even called the minister a loophole closer. He went on to say:

Finally someone recognized that the open wallet approach of the past, offering free education, free medicare, and a welfare cheque to anyone who touched Canadian soil making a refugee claim was not the right thing to do. So I'm glad to see today that finally, after several years, someone has the political courage to take the political risk of saying, if you're from a European country and you can land in London or Paris or Berlin, fill out paperwork, and legally live there, work there, pay taxes there, you shouldn't be allowed to make a refugee claim in Canada. Buttress that with this reality check. Over 90 per cent, and in some years 95 per cent, of the target group, the Roma claimants, didn't even show up for their oral hearings. They rode on the taxpayer.

• (1815)

The government has said all along that Bill C-31 would make the immigration system faster and fairer. If members read the bill, they would know that is exactly what we are doing. Just as we are making the immigration system faster and fairer for legitimate refugee claimants who are truly in need of our protection because of persecution in their homeland, we are also making it more efficient to remove those refugee claimants who face no such persecution and those who have managed to cheat the refugee process.

Canadians do not want what the NDP wants, which is to let fraudulent refugee claimants stay in Canada. We must take action to crack down on the abuse of our generous immigration system. Our

government is committed to strengthening the integrity of Canada's immigration system.

The protecting Canada's immigration system act would make our refugee system faster and fairer. This bill would put an end to foreign criminals, human smugglers and bogus refugees abusing our generous immigration system and receiving lucrative taxpayer-funded health and social benefits. At the same time, this bill would provide protection more quickly for those who are truly in need. Canada has always made a place for those who have needed our protection. I encourage everyone in this House to support this bill.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to order made on Monday, March 12, 2012, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** In my opinion the nays have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Call in the members.

• (1845)

[*English*]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 182*)

## YEAS

## Members

Allen (Welland)  
Angus  
Atamanenko  
Ayala  
Benskin  
Blanchette-Lamothe  
Borg  
Brahmi  
Brosseau  
Casey  
Charlton  
Choquette  
Christopherson  
Coderre  
Côté  
Crowder  
Cuzner

Andrews  
Ashton  
Aubin  
Bélanger  
Blanchette  
Boivin  
Boutin-Sweet  
Brison  
Caron  
Cash  
Chicoine  
Chow  
Cleary  
Comartin  
Cotler  
Cullen  
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)

*Government Orders*

Davies (Vancouver East)	Day	Kerr	Komarnicki
Dewar	Dion	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly	Lauzon	Lebel
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé	Leaf	Leitch
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dusseault	Lemieux	Leung
Easter	Eyking	Lizon	Lobb
Foote	Fortin	Lukiwski	Lunney
Fry	Gameau	MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Garrison	Genest	Mayes	McLeod
Giguère	Godin	Menegakis	Merrifield
Goodale	Gravelle	Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia	Norlock	O'Connor
Hsu	Hyer	O'Neill Gordon	Oda
Jacob	Julian	Oliver	Opitz
Kellway	Lamoureux	Payne	Penashue
Lapointe	Latendresse	Pollievre	Preston
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Raitt	Rathgeber
Leslie	Liu	Reid	Rempel
MacAulay	Mai	Richardson	Rickford
Marston	Martin	Saxton	Schellenberger
Masse	Mathysen	Seeback	Shea
May	McCallum	Shiple	Shory
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Smith	Sopuck
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Sorenson	Stanton
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Storseth	Strahl
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Sweet	Toet
Mourani	Mulcair	Toews	Trost
Murray	Nash	Trottier	Truppe
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo	Tweed	Uppal
Pacetti	Papillon	Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Patry	Péclet	Van Loan	Vellacott
Perreault	Pilon	Wallace	Warawa
Quach	Rafferty	Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Ravignat	Raynault	Sky Country)	Williamson
Regan	Rousseau	Weston (Saint John)	Woodworth
Sandhu	Savoie	Wong	Young (Oakville)
Scarpaleggia	Scott	Yelich	Zimmer— 146
Sellah	Sgro	Young (Vancouver South)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan		
St-Denis	Stewart		
Stoffer	Toone		
Tremblay	Turmel		
Valeriotte — 121			

**NAYS**

## Members

Adams	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Dykstra
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenny (Calgary Southeast)	Kent

Nil

**PAIRED****The Speaker:** I declare the amendment defeated.

The next question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.**Some hon. members:** No.**The Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.**Some hon. members:** Yea.**The Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.**Some hon. members:** Nay.**The Speaker:** In my opinion the yeas have it.*And five or more members having risen:*

● (1850)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 183)***YEAS**

## Members

Adams	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Ambler	Ambrose	Casey	Cash
Anders	Anderson	Charlton	Chicoine
Armstrong	Ashfield	Choquette	Chow
Aspin	Baird	Christopherson	Cleary
Bateman	Benoit	Coderre	Comartin
Bernier	Bezan	Côté	Cotler
Blaney	Block	Crowder	Cullen
Braid	Breitkreuz	Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)	Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Butt	Calandra	Dewar	Dion
Calkins	Cannan	Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Carmichael	Carrie	Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Chong	Clarke	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dusseault
Clement	Daniel	Easter	Eyking
Davidson	Dechert	Foote	Fortin
Del Mastro	Devolin	Fry	Garneau
Dreeschen	Dykstra	Garrison	Genest
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Giguère	Godin
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty	Goadale	Gravelle
Fletcher	Galipeau	Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Gallant	Gill	Harris (St. John's East)	Hassani
Glover	Goguen	Hsu	Hyer
Goldring	Gosal	Jacob	Julian
Gourde	Grewal	Kellway	Lamoureux
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn	Lapointe	Latendresse
Hayes	Hiebert	Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Hillyer	Hoback	Leslie	Liu
Hoepfner	Holder	MacAulay	Mai
James	Jean	Marston	Martin
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Masse	Mathysen
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent	May	McCallum
Kerr	Komarnicki	McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake	Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Lauzon	Lebel	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Leef	Leitch	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Lemieux	Leung	Mourani	Mulcair
Lizon	Lobb	Murray	Nash
Lukiwski	Lunney	Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie	Pacetti	Papillon
Mayes	McLeod	Patry	Péclet
Menegakis	Merrifield	Perreault	Pilon
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	Quach	Rafferty
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson	Ravignat	Raynault
Norlock	O'Connor	Regan	Rousseau
O'Neill Gordon	Oda	Sandhu	Savoie
Oliver	Opitz	Scarpaleggia	Scott
Payne	Penashue	Sellah	Sgro
Poillievre	Preston	Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
Raitt	Rathgeber	St-Denis	Stewart
Reid	Rempel	Stoffer	Toone
Richardson	Rickford	Tremblay	Turnel
Saxton	Schellenberger	Valeriote — 121	
Seeback	Shea		
Shipley	Shory		
Smith	Sopuck		
Sorenson	Stanton		
Storseth	Strahl		
Sweet	Toet		
Toews	Trost		
Trottier	Truppe		
Tweed	Uppal		
Valcourt	Van Kesteren		
Van Loan	Vellacott		
Wallace	Warawa		
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to		
Sky Country)			
Weston (Saint John)	Williamson		
Wong	Woodworth		
Yelich	Young (Oakville)		
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 146		

## NAYS

## Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélangier
Benskin	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boutin-Sweet
Borgi	Brisson
Brahmi	Caron
Brosseau	

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion adopted. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

## RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in February, I asked a question about the closure of AstraZeneca in Montreal, which has resulted in the loss of 136 jobs. The closure is a symptom of problems in Montreal's research and development sector.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Since 2010, Montreal has lost approximately 1,000 research and development jobs in the pharmaceutical industry. Jobs have been lost and companies have closed their research and development centres: Johnson & Johnson, Sanofi, Merck, MDS, Teva, Terra Technology.

Montreal is currently facing a serious problem with respect to research and development in the pharmaceutical industry despite having developed leading-edge expertise in the field.

My question was for the Minister of Industry because the closure reflected a failure of leadership on the part of the Conservative government with respect to R&D and innovation. Since then, the government has tabled the 2012 budget.

Budget 2012 did not meet our expectations for a new direction from the government, nor did it answer this question. It refers to changes that were supposedly inspired by the Jenkins report.

There are two problems with the government's decision, which will not address situations like the one in Montreal.

The first problem is the fact that the government will use other means to fund research and development. Instead of offering tax credits, the government will provide direct subsidies to businesses or the industry. The problem is that we do not know what the criteria will be. We can hardly wait to see what the criteria will be because this could, perhaps, lead to favouritism and politically-motivated decisions rather than decisions based on economic considerations that could help the industry rather than the political party currently in power.

Second, we are concerned about another aspect of the budget, the government's dwindling interest in pure research. There is pure research and applied research. Pure research is vital. It is perhaps less marketable to begin with, but it is necessary for the full development of applied research in this country.

In terms of research and development, the 2012 budget does not support pure research. This is generally carried out by Canadian universities, which will be weakened by the new strategy the Conservative government has announced in the 2012 budget.

As I was saying, the closures in Montreal were at the heart of the question I asked in February, which the Conservative government has not answered. Unfortunately, Montreal is currently paying the price for those decisions.

I would like the Conservative government, the Minister of Industry or his representative to provide a clearer answer in terms of the direction the government wants to take with regard to research and development in order to promote harmonious and competitive development not only in Montreal, but in most Canadian cities. In the case of the Island of Montreal, I am talking specifically about research and development in the pharmaceutical industry.

● (1900)

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance recently tabled economic action plan 2012 which lays out an effective and comprehensive plan on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. Through this budget, we are investing an unprecedented amount to

support entrepreneurs, innovators and world-class research. Support for science and technology has been a government priority since 2006, as exemplified by the introduction of the S and T strategy in 2007 and the series of initiatives to build an innovative economy that followed. The federal S and T expenditures reached nearly \$11.9 billion in 2010-11.

Innovation by business is a vital part of maintaining a high standard of living in Canada and building Canadian sources of global advantage. As indicated recently by the Prime Minister, investments in science, technology and innovation remain a priority for the Government of Canada. Economic action plan 2012 provided additional funding for CIHR, boosting its industry-academic research partnership initiative by \$15 million to support advanced health related research. Economic action plan 2012 also allocated \$60 million to Genome Canada to help maintain Canada's research leadership in genomics.

In budget 2012, we allocated \$400 million to venture capital funds led by the private sector to help increase sector investments in high growth and innovative firms. Our government also committed \$110 million per year to the National Research Council of Canada to double support for the popular IRAP program. This investment was accompanied by \$14 million over two years for the industrial research and development internship program and \$12 million per year to make the business-led Networks of Centres of Excellence program permanent. All together, economic action plan 2012 announced \$1.1 billion over five years to directly support research and development and \$500 million for venture capital.

It is unfortunate that the NDP stands ready to vote against these important investments in science, technology and innovation for all Canadians. Unlike the opposition, I can assure hon. members and Canadians that we are still focused on jobs and job creation.

I want to assure the member that Canada remains a choice destination for the pharmaceutical industry. For example, GSK Canada, a subsidiary of GSK, a British-based pharmaceutical multinational enterprise, announced in 2011 the creation of a new Canadian-specific \$50 million venture capital fund to support early stage research. This will have a positive impact on Canada's life sciences clusters, including the one in Montreal.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

We have been focused on science, technology and innovation. We are getting the job done.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the grocery list the parliamentary secretary just read to me. I have two questions for her, because what she said does not at all answer my questions, which were reiterations of a question I have asked in the past, and still did not get an answer. My two questions are very simple.

First of all, she said that \$1.1 billion was allocated to directly support research and development for industry. Why did she fail to mention that this budget also eliminated \$1.5 billion in tax credits in order to allow the \$1.1 billion in question? This means a net loss of \$400 million.

Second, once again, how can she justify the fact that this government is distancing itself from pure research and justify this budget's lack of policies in that area? How can she explain the fact that direct subsidies are being given to businesses for applied research? Just how harmful will this be to Canada's research and development sector?

[*English*]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, economic action plan 2012 will help Canadian firms create jobs, modernize their operations and better compete globally. Over 690,000 more Canadians are working today compared to the end of the recession in July 2009, making Canada one of only two G7 countries to regain all of the jobs lost during the downturn. We are continuing to identify and deliver on opportunities where we can improve industry's ability to be more productive and innovative in order to achieve success and secure jobs for Canadians. We must continue to focus on economic growth and stay on course to create more jobs and an even stronger economy, including a stronger quality of life for all Canadian families.

The NDP talks a good talk, but when it comes to actually supporting investments in science, research and innovation, it simply does not.

## JUSTICE

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on February 28 I asked a question of the Minister of Justice regarding the report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer on the costs to the public of the changes in just one aspect of Bill C-10, which was then before Parliament. This had to do with the conditional sentences aspect.

There were considerable changes to the availability of conditional sentences in part 3 of Bill C-10. Amendments were made to 32 previously eligible offences under the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act that were rendered ineligible for conditional sentences. The question was what the cost of this was. Interestingly, when the costs were looked at, other factors became known. It confirms some of the criticism that we brought forward in committee that this legislation was ineffective in reducing the amount of crime and increasing the punishment and supposedly making our streets safer which was the sub-name of the bill.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer found that 4,500 offenders would no longer be eligible for a conditional sentence and would

face the threat of a prison sentence and the costs associated with that. It was also interesting that, based on a legal analysis, approximately 650 of the 4,500, in other words 15%, would actually be acquitted, meaning that fewer offenders would face any consequence of their offence and be under correctional supervision. For those who were punished, they would be under supervision by the Correctional Service for a shorter period of time. The average cost per offender, on the other hand, would rise by a factor of 16%. So effectively we got a situation where we had skyrocketing costs, ineffective results, fewer offenders convicted serving less time, and that was at a 16% rise in the costs.

That was the question put to the minister, and he did not adequately respond. He said that if there were fewer people convicted, that would make the NDP happy. That is the kind of slur we have been getting from the other side when we raise sensible questions about government policy and the consequence of it. We had the same kind of debate last week when the government closed two prisons and a mental health facility and said, "Hey, look, the opposition is all wrong; we are actually closing down prisons". That is the kind of misinformation and misleading spin that the government likes to put on things.

At the same time, the government was building 2,700 new cells in over 30 existing prisons. One of the analysts concluded that would have the same effect as building six new prisons. To make it look like we are closing down prisons, the Conservatives closed down two penitentiaries and a mental health unit and are opening 2,700 more facilities. That is the kind of subterfuge that goes on here. As we know from the F-35 debate, the Conservatives do not like to give any credibility to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. However, he again points out, as a service to this Parliament and to the public, that there is an increased cost by 16 times, with fewer people being incarcerated, fewer people actually paying the penalty for these crimes on account of changes that are being made in Bill C-10.

That was my concern, and I will be interested in the parliamentary secretary's response.

● (1905)

**Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to speak in support of the amendments to the conditional sentencing regime contained in Bill C-10, the safe streets and communities act. We will have another go at convincing the opposition to stand up for law-abiding Canadians.

Canadians support the government's commitment to make our streets and communities safer, which includes ensuring that house arrest is not a sentencing option for serious and violent crimes. The safety and well-being of Canadians is fundamental.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The government has been forthright about its estimated federal costs of the impact of Bill C-10. As the Ministers of Justice and Public Safety said during their October 6, 2011 appearance before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the costs to the federal government to implement Bill C-10 will be \$78.6 million over five years. These costs relate to the reforms on child sexual offences and on serious drug offences. They also confirmed that there are no federal costs associated with Bill C-10's proposed conditional sentencing reforms.

To understand this, one need only look to the actual criteria governing when a conditional sentence is available. Bill C-10 spells out clearly that identified offences will not be eligible for conditional sentences rather than leaving it to the interpretation as to whether an offence is ineligible because it is a serious personal injury offence.

Bill C-10 would not change the criteria that say that a conditional sentence is only possible if the sentencing court is of the opinion that a sentence of imprisonment of less than two years is warranted. As we all know, federal correctional responsibility only relates to sentences that are two years or longer. Therefore, it should be clear to the members that Bill C-10's conditional sentence reforms do not apply to federal sentences of imprisonment.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer's analysis of the amendments to the availability of conditional sentences contained in Bill C-10 raises many questions about how he arrived at his cost estimates and the basis for making many of his assumptions.

For instance, one of the most troubling assumptions made in the Parliamentary Budget Officer's analysis is that the proposed amendments to the availability of conditional sentences will result in fewer individuals pleading guilty. This consideration is not applicable to conditional sentences because there is no certainty that house arrest will be given for a particular offence, only that it is never available if the offence in question is punishable by a mandatory minimum penalty of imprisonment.

Guilty pleas are often the result of plea bargaining, which will continue to be available in appropriate cases. The incentive to plead guilty should be the same after these amendments come into force as it was before. There has been no change.

Another puzzling assumption in the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report is that it estimates that about 4,500 offenders would have to serve a prison sentence because they will no longer be eligible for house arrest once Bill C-10 comes into force. However, the analysis does not differentiate whether the offence was prosecuted by indictment or by summary conviction. I would remind all members that offences prosecuted by summary conviction and that do not carry a mandatory minimum penalty will still be eligible for house arrest.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer's report also assumes that offenders who receive a conditional sentence of imprisonment successfully complete their sentence. However, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics has noted that up to 37% of conditional sentences are breached, which represents additional costs as a result of subsequent court appearances.

Consequently, the Parliamentary Budget Officer underestimates the current costs related to conditional sentences and consequently

overestimates the cost impact of the proposed amendments. That is a total misdirection on his part. In my view, the estimates are very problematic.

Canadians have given the government a strong mandate to bring forward these reforms and that is what Bill C-10 delivers.

● (1910)

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Mr. Speaker, I would remind the parliamentary secretary that the methodology in the report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer was excellent and peer reviewed by seven independent academics. Therefore, if the Conservatives do not like the methodology for ideological reasons, that is too bad.

The government says that there will be no cost to the federal government. The Parliamentary Budget Officer comes up with a figure of \$8 million. Most of the costs would go to the provinces of some \$148 million. Those are the kinds of numbers we are talking about for a very small portion of Bill C-10.

The Conservatives talked about saving money by closing down prisons last week. They said that they will save \$124 million. However, what they do not mention is that last year they increased the costs of Correctional Service Canada by \$575 million with just one piece of legislation, the so-called two-for-one bill, which increased those costs.

Again we see the public being misled by a failure to disclose the full figures and a trashing of the Parliamentary Budget Officer when he does independent peer-reviewed studies and makes them available to Parliament.

**Mr. Robert Goguen:** Mr. Speaker, the government has been clear about the objectives of Bill C-10. It responds to the strong mandate that Canadians gave the government to ensure that serious crimes, including violent crimes, result in appropriate sentences that appropriately reflect the seriousness of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender. It realizes Canadians' expectations that those who commit serious and violent offences will never get to serve their sentences in the comfort of their homes.

As I said earlier, the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report relies on puzzling assumptions to estimate federal costs for Bill C-10's conditional sentence reforms when the government has stated that there are none.

The report also seems to ignore the cost of crime to victims. In 2008 crime in Canada cost an estimated \$99 billion, the majority of which, \$82.5 billion or 83%, was borne by the victims. Victim costs include a range of damages, such as stolen property, pain and suffering, loss of income and health services.

The government has clearly acknowledged that implementation of Bill C-10 will have federal cost implications, but only with respect to the child sexual offences and serious drug offences. This is a cost for which the government is fully prepared because the cost of doing nothing far exceeds the cost of fighting crime. Something had to be done, and it was.

I would note that parliamentarians heard from many witnesses who appeared on Bill C-10, before both the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, who supported the restrictions to the availability of conditional sentences.

● (1915)

[Translation]

HEALTH

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, for several years Canada has been facing drug shortages. This is a worldwide situation and it has worsened in the last 10 years. We now know that some drugs are produced only by certain multinational pharmaceutical companies and there are fewer and fewer suppliers, particularly for generic drugs.

When a company stops producing a drug, it is disastrous. As we saw in the case of Sandoz, no notice was given to inform Canadians of a possible disruption in production.

The provinces, doctors, pharmacists and nurses are all aware of the situation, which is causing more and more problems. That same goes for the federal government, yet nothing has changed at Health Canada. No long-term plan has been made to deal with these repeated shortages.

On March 7, when we were in the middle of the shortage and surgeries were being postponed in Quebec, I asked the Minister of Health of Canada why she had no plan to guarantee drug quality and avoid future shortfalls. The Minister of Health replied that it was the responsibility of the provinces, the industry and even health professionals to remedy the situation.

How can a responsible government claim that it has no role to play in an issue as crucial as the approval and supply of drugs?

Do I have to point out that we are talking about essential, life-saving products?

Contrary to what the minister thinks, Canada can and must play a leading role. The United States, New Zealand, Sweden and France, to name only a few countries, have all enacted legislation to prevent shortages of essential drugs.

Last week, pharmacists and doctors in Quebec released a report about supply disruptions. After months of studies, the experts concluded that the federal government, the provinces and the industry had to take action to address the crisis. Some recommendations are direct echoes of the motion that was introduced in this House by the NDP and unanimously adopted.

Among other things, that report said that Canada should adopt a national vision and an action plan for access to essential drugs, which would be developed by the federal, provincial and territorial ministers of health. The committee of experts also recommends that

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Health Canada adapt its regulations to prevent future shortages, in particular by requiring suppliers to give notice of supply disruptions. That is exactly what the motion proposed by the NDP says.

The federal government must create better regulations and show some leadership by immediately beginning a dialogue with the provinces in order to improve access to essential medicines. Quebec's health minister, Mr. Bolduc, with whom I had the opportunity to discuss this issue two weeks ago, also said that the federal government must play a role in this area. He is prepared to work with the government to prevent future shortages.

If we want to ensure the efficiency of the entire supply chain, all levels of government must work together and in partnership with the industry and health care professionals. The provinces alone cannot solve the problem, because approval is the federal government's responsibility. Other people are saying that the solution should be global. Once again, this kind of international co-operation comes under federal jurisdiction.

For the past three years, pharmacists, anesthesiologists and doctors have all been sounding the alarm and calling on the federal government to intervene. Why does the government refuse to act? Why have all of the potential solutions proposed by expert panels been so easily dismissed by the federal government?

Will the government finally agree to work with the provinces, the industry and health professionals in order to come up with solutions to this crisis, or will it continue to blame everyone else and shirk its responsibilities?

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there has never been any doubt about the quality of medicinal drugs produced in our country. That includes the drugs manufactured at the plant in Boucherville.

Health Canada regulates the quality, safety and effectiveness of drugs manufactured in Canada as well as those manufactured elsewhere and sold in this country.

As we have said all along, this shortage results from decisions by the provinces and territories to sole source drug contracts. If there is only one supplier of a drug and that supplier stops production for any reason, then there could be a shortage.

A drug supply system that is built on purchases from a single supplier will leave customers vulnerable if there is an interruption in production. To avoid future shortfalls, many changes will need to be made to the drug supply system. That will require the participation of all the players if we are to reduce the number of shortages and to reduce the impact on patients.

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For its part, Health Canada as the regulator is able to use a variety of tools to minimize the impact of shortages felt by Canadians and their health care practitioners. This includes expediting reviews of submissions for new products to replace those in short supply and to fast-track submissions to use new production facilities.

Health Canada is working around the clock to address the issue by identifying new suppliers for the provinces and territories and fast-tracking approvals. In fact, the department has approved 18 replacement drugs and more than 120 drugs through the special access program.

Health Canada is facilitating communications with provincial and territorial governments and is working with international colleagues. In addition, the Public Health Agency of Canada has offered the provinces and territories access to products held in the national emergency stockpile system to offset the drug shortages.

Finding long-term solutions to address drug shortages has been one of the Minister of Health's top priorities. Health Canada is working with industry and stakeholders to ensure they are getting the information they need about potential or actual shortages. Accurate information will allow doctors and patients to adjust treatments.

Industry has responded to the Minister of Health's call for public notification of shortages. Rx&D and the Canadian Generic Pharmaceutical Association have each contributed \$100,000 to the start-up of a national one-stop website for notification of drug shortages.

This site, drugshortages.ca, is up and running. Industry can now go to this one site to provide accurate and timely information about drug shortages for health care professionals and all Canadians. This will go a long way to improve transparency and to get health professionals the information they need to manage drug shortages.

When supplies are interrupted, hospitals, clinics and health professionals implement strategies to ensure the most efficient use of existing supplies and to minimize impacts on patients. They keep patients advised of the supply situation in each facility and community and adjust treatment schedules and procedures if needed.

Our government is very much aware of the concern Canadians are feeling because of the threat of shortages of medicinal drugs and medications. Health Canada is encouraging industry and the provinces and territories to continue to collaborate on measures beyond information sharing in order to create stability in their supply chains and prevent drug shortages from occurring.

We are taking steps to mitigate the impact of the drug shortage circumstances and we will continue to work with industry, provinces and territories and health care professionals to put the needs of Canadians first.

•(1920)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:** Mr. Speaker, I find it quite ironic that the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey is responding when she is the one who told the Standing Committee on Health that the federal government had no role to play in the matter of drug shortages. I think that diminishes the credibility of her testimony today.

If it is true that the federal government accelerated drug approvals to deal with the shortage of generic drugs resulting from the production shutdown at the Sandoz factory, then it was a temporary measure that came too late. Is it not true that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure?

Canada needs to have a strategy, a long-term plan for anticipating, identifying and managing drug shortages. This has to come from the federal government and must be done in concert with the provinces and territories.

The pharmaceutical industry cannot and must not regulate itself. We have to ensure that the drug producers adopt best practices for managing production and supply. For example, a number of countries, including France and the United States, require manufacturers to provide a notice for the end of production. Also, in the United States, the Food and Drug Administration plays a coordination role. The Drug Shortages program helped prevent 38 drug shortages in 2010 and 195 in 2011.

It is thus possible to better manage shortages and to prevent them, and that is what we are asking the federal government to do. We are asking it to take concrete measures to prevent shortages in the future.

•(1925)

[*English*]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, while there is a new twist of potential drug shortages due to recent events, the threat of shortages is not new, nor is it limited to Canada. Drug shortages are a challenge globally, and Canada is not immune. It is a situation the Minister of Health has been working to rectify in a number of ways and has made it her top priority.

Health Canada is working with governments around the world to draw on experiences and identify opportunities for meaningful action to reduce the impact of drug shortages and prevent them from reoccurring in Canada. We are also working with provincial and territorial governments, health care professionals and industry to see that Canadians are better informed about the shortages so they have time to plan and change treatments, if necessary.



*Adjournment Proceedings*

[*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 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:25 p.m.)

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