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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will have the singing of the national anthem today led by the hon. member for Yukon.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

2015 CANADA WINTER GAMES

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the city of Prince George, B.C. will be hosting the 2015 Canada Winter Games, and what games they will be.

Last week the Minister of State for Sport and I had the pleasure of announcing our government's \$11 million support for this event. Our government is the single largest contributor to sport in Canada and supports participation and excellence from playground to podium.

The Canada Games are the country's largest domestic multi-sport event and are the pinnacle of interprovincial and territorial sport competition. The Games are held at two-year intervals, alternating between winter and summer. They bring together participants from across the country to share the spirit of competition and demonstrate sporting excellence and cultural diversity.

The 2015 Winter Games will be a great time for the city of Prince George, the central interior of B.C., and indeed, all of Canada.

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[*Translation*]

NOVELIS

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean has received more bad news: a large primary aluminum processing plant, Novelis, has announced that it will be closing its doors on August 1. As a result, 160 good jobs with good salaries will be lost.

Yet the Novelis plant is doing well and generating profits. The plant's relocation is the unfortunate result of market globalization and U.S. protectionism. The Conservative government has not shown any political will to improve the situation or negotiate with large corporations in the interest of workers.

I object to the complicit silence of the Conservatives—particularly the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Transport, who, to add insult to injury, are not even bothering to return the many calls that we have made to their offices.

I am saddened for the workers and their families, but we, the people of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, are strong. We will roll up our sleeves and continue to look for solutions, with or without the help of the Conservative government.

* * *

• (1405)

[*English*]

ARMENIA

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as chair of the Canada-Armenia Parliamentary Friendship Group to commemorate a solemn anniversary. Almost 100 years ago a policy of systematic extermination resulted in the deaths of between a million and a million and a half Armenians.

In recent years, both houses of Parliament have adopted resolutions referring to these events as “the first genocide of the twentieth century”, but I draw faith from the Armenian people. To visit Armenia today is to enjoy a country that has grown and recovered and today enjoys democracy.

Today our Armenian Canadian communities celebrate their culture in healthy communities from Montreal to Vancouver, including in my own home area of Waterloo region.

We remember this today, not to look back to 1915, but to learn from the lessons of history and to recommit ourselves to ensuring that such a tragedy never happens again.

* * *

WORLD MALARIA DAY

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize World Malaria Day. Many may not know that malaria was one of the biggest causes of death during the construction of the Rideau Canal. It was widespread in the southern regions of Ontario up until the late 1800s.

Statements by Members

Today malaria affects millions of people in over 100 countries. However, the spread of malaria is something we can control for very little cost. We in Canada have an ongoing responsibility to ensure that underdeveloped countries have access to control resources. One way is through specialized nets. In 2010, 145 million nets were distributed in Africa, up from 88.5 million the year before.

The World Health Organization's 2011 report states that there were 216 million cases of malaria in 2010, causing 655,000 deaths, and 86% of the victims were children.

Even though the report also shows progress in the fight against malaria, it is not over yet. I ask members, if they can, to please buy a net.

* * *

NATIONAL VICTIMS OF CRIME AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week is the seventh anniversary of National Victims of Crime Awareness Week.

All members know of a family in their riding that has fallen victim to a crime. Our hearts go out to the victims and survivors. During Victims of Crime Week, Canadians consider how our society can help victims of crime move forward.

This week across Canada, we salute and thank the countless professionals and volunteers who respond to the call to help victims of crime move forward. Canadians can visit www.victimsworld.gc.ca to access these services. In the hours following a dreadful tragic crime, these Canadians help those suffering through their darkest hours. These brave and compassionate Canadians show up to stand with the victims.

Our Conservative government is proud to support and stand with those who work with victims of crime and try to maintain hope for the future and the rebuilding of lives in the aftermath of criminal acts.

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[Translation]

CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative budget has a new victim: the co-operative movement. We have learned that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, which experienced \$254 million in cuts in the last budget, has done away with the only federal program for co-operatives—the co-operative development initiative.

These cuts come as we are celebrating the International Year of Co-operatives, which Canada supported at the United Nations in 2009. Some 9,000 Canadian co-operatives employ 155,000 workers, contribute to business innovation and help rural economic development.

In the Outaouais, the Quartiers en santé co-operative will no longer be able to provide health services to aboriginal people in northern Quebec. The Place du marché co-operative in Ripon will also be affected by these cuts.

It is time that this government reviewed its priorities and reinvested in development, in our co-operatives.

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[English]

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, the suicide rate in this country was almost double that of the death rate from car crashes in 2007, the most recent year measured. Youth suicides are particularly disconcerting. That year, 421 youth between the ages of 15 and 24 took their own lives. That is 421 too many.

Thousands of family members and friends are impacted. The anguish they have felt is unthinkable to me as a parent. That is why I will be very pleased to stand in this House next month in support of Bill C-300 from the member for Kitchener—Conestoga to establish a federal framework on suicide prevention.

I am confident that the bill will encourage the many outstanding efforts taking place across this country, such as the Jack Project at Kids Help Phone. This project is a legacy of Jack Windeler, a Queen's University student who died by suicide in March 2010. The project's school-based outreach program is now being piloted for a full rollout next school year. We wish them much success.

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● (1410)

NATIONAL VICTIMS OF CRIME AWARENESS WEEK

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week is the seventh annual National Victims of Crime Awareness Week which raises awareness about victims' issues and the program, services and laws in place to help victims of crime and their families.

With my extensive involvement in combatting modern-day slavery, I am particularly pleased about a new program our government has announced to provide financial support to parents of missing and murdered youth. Having met many parents whose children have been tragically taken or lured from them, I know these parents face challenging financial strains in addition to significant emotional and mental burdens.

This important initiative adds to our government's ongoing actions to support victims of crime, including \$5.25 million for the creation and enhancement of child advocacy centres across our country and the development of a national action plan to combat human trafficking.

Working together, we must fight to end the sexual exploitation of women and youth across our nation.

*Statements by Members***EARTH DAY**

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate and thank the organizers of three fabulous Earth Day events: Victoria's Earth Walk, the Creatively United for the Planet Festival and Oak Bay's walk and picnic. Thousands of Victorians and some first nations came together to celebrate the environment. They also shared their concern about the proposed Enbridge pipeline to the west coast that would cross 1,000 streams and rivers in first nations territory.

To them, the inherent dangers of supertankers carrying raw bitumen through B.C.'s pristine coastal waters to China is unacceptable. A spill would destroy whale and fish habitat and could cause the collapse of the wild salmon fishery. British Columbians and first nations say that it is not worth the risk, and they demand to be fully consulted about this project. I commend them for standing up for us all.

* * *

WORLD MALARIA DAY

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is World Malaria Day. According to the most recent statistics in the World Health Organization's World Malaria Report 2011, an estimated 655,000 victims died from malaria in 2010. That means 75 people an hour die, and even more tragic is that 64 of them are children under the age of five.

I have been honoured to co-chair the All-Party Parliamentary Caucus on Ending Malaria. I encourage all members to spread the word in their communities about raising malaria awareness.

Our government is focusing efforts internationally to ensure that treatment is available to the most vulnerable. CIDA has invested \$105 million since 2007 to the Catalytic Initiative to Save a Million Lives. There were 48,000 Canadian-trained health workers who distributed more than 4.6 million insecticide-treated mosquito nets and administered anti-malarial treatments to more than 600,000 children.

On World Malaria Day, I am proud of the actions Canada has taken around the world.

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[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on April 15, more than 50 women gathered in Pierrefonds-Dollard at a women's event to take part in a discussion, the theme of which was "Women, Diversity and Community Engagement".

First, seven inspiring guests—Homa Appanah, Ranjana Jha, Marie-Bernadette Julien, Amita Khanna, Isabelle Sayed, Jasbir Kaur Seyan and Monika Spolia—spoke about their leadership roles, various projects, organizational strategies and ethical issues. The participants then asked questions, initiated discussions, spoke about the various challenges that they have in common and had the opportunity to network according to their needs and common interests.

[English]

At the end of the discussion, attendees were invited to enjoy an authentic meal and snacks prepared by the Hindu-Mandir Temple and Projet Communautaire de Pierrefonds.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the organizers and participants who took part in this event. I was impressed to meet so many exceptional women from my constituency and I am proud to represent such a dynamic and engaged community.

* * *

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, the Minister of Veterans Affairs led a delegation representing Canada at the 95th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

In addition, 5,000 Canadian youth travelled to Vimy. These outstanding youth have made it their duty to keep the torch of remembrance lit.

The bravery and perseverance shown by the young Canadians who fought during the Battle of Vimy Ridge is mirrored in a new generation. These young Canadians know the sacrifices made at Vimy Ridge and will move forward and shape the future of our great country with the same courage, determination and pride as those who fought 95 years ago.

The presence of these youth at Vimy gives me confidence that in the years to come Canada will be in good hands, that these young Canadians will ensure the sacrifices made by past generations will be remembered and the Canadian values they fought for will be preserved and upheld.

* * *

● (1415)

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of all Canadians who may be nervous about spending time on the ocean surrounding Newfoundland and Labrador after today.

As the diligent staff at the maritime rescue sub-centre in St. John's spend their last day as usual, protecting the lives of mariners and all who travel along the longest coastline in Canada, flags throughout Newfoundland and Labrador fly at half-mast.

This morning in Ottawa, at the meeting of Transport Canada's standing committee on fishing vessel safety, all members of the committee observed a moment of silence in support of the maritime rescue sub-centre and in fear for the lives that may be lost as a result of the closure.

On average, this centre has overseen the response to 500 calls a year, many of them distress calls, resulting in approximately 600 lives saved annually. The intimate knowledge the employees have of Newfoundland and Labrador's coastline undoubtedly was a key factor in these rescues from the unforgiving elements of the north Atlantic.

Oral Questions

I ask all members to join me in recognizing the critical and exemplary service provided by the employees of the MRSC in St. John's and trust that all who travel at sea, especially those who spend months at sea to earn a living for their families, will remain safe.

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[Translation]

GRAVE OF PRIVATE JONATHAN COUTURIER

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was deeply saddened to learn today that the grave of Private Jonathan Couturier was senselessly vandalized in a cemetery in Loretteville, Quebec.

Private Couturier lost his life in 2009 when an improvised explosive device went off near his vehicle in Afghanistan. It is really appalling that the final resting place of this young man who gave his life for our country has been disturbed. It is truly important to remember those who died in combat for Canada. Cruel acts of vandalism against the memory of our fallen heroes are simply unacceptable.

I sincerely hope that the vandals will be held accountable for their actions. I also hope that the generosity of the men and women who lost their lives for our country will live on in our memories and that their sacrifices will be commemorated.

Mr. Speaker, we will remember them.

* * *

[English]

NORTEL PENSIONS

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since Nortel entered bankruptcy in 2009, its workers have seen their pension plans devastated, their disability income lost and their health benefits vanish.

Now, the predatory vulture investors who bought Nortel shares for 12¢ on the dollar are trying to claim the full dollar value with interest, draining funds needed to pay for the benefits of former Nortel employees.

How is this possible? It is because the Conservatives, like the Liberals before them, have refused to amend our bankruptcy laws to protect employees from predatory investors.

This situation is shameful. It is wrong to put these speculators chasing a quick buck ahead of the hard-working Nortel employees who spent a lifetime building the company.

Nortel pensioners want the government to amend the bankruptcy laws and move pensioners and disability recipients to the front of the line.

Is anyone over there listening? Will anyone from the government stand up and do the right thing for Nortel pensioners?

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is no wonder the NDP advocates for a private member's bill that would restrict the

ability of members of Parliament to represent their constituents' issues in the way they best see fit. Just a while back, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain decided that the NDP was not the party she expected it would be and found a home elsewhere in the opposition benches.

This week, the muzzled member for Thunder Bay—Superior North broke his silence. After being muzzled and silenced again by the NDP leader, the northwestern Ontario member crossed the floor to sit as an independent. I hope he continues to stand for the interests of rural and northern voters, as he did when he stood with our government in his support to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

Now we see why the NDP supports a ban on floor crossing, as it clearly sees it has no support to gain, just members to lose.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1420)

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is what the Prime Minister said in 2009: "The military mission in Afghanistan will end in 2011. I have said it here and I have said it across the country. In fact, I think I said it recently in the White House."

Now it is 2012, and our soldiers are still in Afghanistan.

Has Canada received a request from the United States to keep our soldiers in Afghanistan beyond 2014?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this House will make its own determination about the presence of our troops in Afghanistan. Our troops are there to train the Afghan forces to assume greater responsibility for their own security. Afghanistan's security is in our national interest and in the interest of the international community.

[English]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is interesting, because in the past the Prime Minister was perfectly willing to discuss with the House what the White House had told him to do.

Lawrence Cannon, minister of foreign affairs at the time, said in 2010, "We might be pressured, obviously, but I think the Prime Minister has made this perfectly clear. March of 2014 is when we will be leaving". We have heard those words before. We were supposed to be out before.

Are we being pressured again to keep soldiers in Afghanistan beyond 2014?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been told that we have not had that specific request from the United States. Whether it comes or not, I will be very clear: Canada will make its own determination in this regard. We have our forces there now to help train the Afghan security forces because it is in the interests of our country that Afghanistan does not become once again a safe haven for terrorism and also in our interest that, in order to prevent that, the Afghans themselves assume greater responsibility for their own security.

Our government will make any decisions it makes with the best interests of our own country and the world community in mind.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was artful, “that specific request”. We will see what that means.

Canadians do not want yet another Conservative extension of the mission in Afghanistan, and the NDP will not support one.

Canadians have been perfectly clear. They want our troops home. They want this mission to end. It was supposed to end in 2006. It was supposed to end in 2009. It was supposed to end in 2011. It is supposed to end in 2014. When will it finally end?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not a remarkable statement that the NDP will not support the mission. The NDP could not even make up its mind to support the World War II mission.

Canada has been involved in Afghanistan with the support of most of the parties in the House for some years. Our plan at the current time is, obviously, for the mission that goes to 2014, but, as we approach that date, we will examine all options and we will take the decision that is in the best interests of this country and in the best interests of our security objectives for the globe, and not an ideological knee-jerk response like the NDP.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are taking note. They will not deny it.

In 2006, the Conservative platform pledged that Parliament would vote on the “commitment of Canadian forces to foreign operations”. By 2010, that had been artfully amended to “combat” missions.

Will there be another amendment now? Will Parliament only review the missions that the Prime Minister feels like discussing?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of the military missions committed to under this government have come before the House including the mission in Libya, which the House approved. We did not begin the mission in Afghanistan, but the extensions of that mission. Certainly, should there be any other significant military missions, we are committed to getting the consent of Parliament before we act. That has been our action, and that is what we will do in the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that in 2006, the Prime Minister said, “We made a pledge during the last election campaign to put international treaties and military engagements to a vote in this chamber.”

He added, “Before we send diplomats, relief workers and soldiers on dangerous missions abroad, it is important to be able to tell them

that Canada’s parliamentarians believe in their objectives and support what they are doing.”

That is what they promised. Will Parliament be able to vote this time on whether or not to keep our troops in Afghanistan beyond 2014?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is right. We made a promise. We have kept that promise so far and we will continue to keep that promise.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 17, 2010, the Prime Minister accused the then leader of the opposition of wanting to tear up jobs “by tearing up the contract”. Therefore, he clearly stated that there was in fact a contract with respect to the F-35. It is a statement the Prime Minister repeated again during the election campaign.

If there was in fact no contract, which is what the Prime Minister is now saying, and he is saying there is in fact still no contract, why did the Prime Minister mislead the House on November 17, 2010?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did no such thing. I think Canadians and the industry understand full well that Canada’s participation in the development of the F-35, the next generation of fighter aircraft, is intrinsic to the work that Canadian companies have received. It is almost half a billion dollars in contracts that have come to the industry in our country.

Obviously this government will continue to support our air force as well as our aerospace industry.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we have to choose between the record of *Hansard* and the Prime Minister’s newly discovered memory with respect to these questions, I think we will take *Hansard*.

Perhaps one of the reasons we can explain the lack of standards with respect to even being prepared to admit to having said something that he said is that it might explain also the conduct of the Minister of International Cooperation. It might also explain what is going on at the Old Port of Montreal.

How does the Prime Minister feel about the revelations today, showing clearly an abuse of office, of misspending of public dollars, catered meals, limousines—the same pattern we have seen with the Minister of International Cooperation? How does he explain this kind of activity at the heart of his government?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the agency in question is an independent crown corporation.

Oral Questions

As members will know well, the government has established strict rules and expects those to be respected. When they are not respected, appropriate action is taken. That is why, in all these categories, we spend vastly less than the previous Liberal government did.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reason the Conservatives are having problems with the rules is clear: it is because the Prime Minister himself does not follow the rules. He continues to mislead the House when he talks about a contract that does not exist and has never existed, even though he said in the past that it did exist. Perhaps this also explains the problem at the Old Port of Montreal and why the minister never paid back the cost of her limousine.

Will the minister pay back the cost of the limousine, since this has not yet been done?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been very clear. It is the leader of the Liberal Party who is confused, which is not surprising. The minister has apologized and has taken appropriate measures.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservative mismanagement of the F-35 fiasco is so bad that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is going to look at the government books on this troubled jet for a second time.

The PBO can help shed light on the government's attempt to cover up the \$10 billion difference between what it said it would cost and the actual price tag.

Will the government agree to fully co-operate with the PBO this time and provide all the necessary financial information so he can get to the bottom of this?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that we want this process to be transparent. I welcome the PBO.

I assume the Department of National Defence will be forthcoming with all of the documents necessary that the PBO needs and also in meeting the recommendation of the Auditor General, which is to update the cost of the F-35 and make that public in Parliament to all of us.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, assume, if it really did that, it would be a first.

The Minister of National Defence's accounting excuse was so bad last week that the PBO has been compelled to reopen the file. The last time the PBO had trouble even getting simple costing information from the government and especially from the Department of National Defence.

Will the Minister of National Defence stop trying to cover his tracks? Will he direct his department to fully assist the PBO and actually provide the information it has been hiding from the public?

● (1430)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General did pronounce on this issue. We have agreed with all his recommendations and his conclusions. We have put in place a seven-point plan to ensure full transparency and accountability. The number one recommendation is that the Department of National Defence update its cost estimates for the F-35 and table those in Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer is not the only one raising some serious questions about the F-35s. Even the Royal Canadian Air Force is saying that the government's plan is not working. Canadian Forces decision-makers are afraid that the budget allocated for the F-35s is not even enough to cover training costs. That is not an accounting error; that is mismanagement.

I would like to know if the Minister of Public Works also plans to improvise, or will she actually try to come up with a plan B?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, we have accepted the recommendations and the conclusions of the Auditor General. We expect full transparency and accountability from the Department of National Defence when it comes forward to table its updated cost estimates on the F-35 to all parliamentarians.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the air force says there is not going to be enough money to cover pilot training. That is important because those guys know that flying these things is a little more complicated than sitting in one for a photo op.

Let me ask the Minister of National Defence to come out from behind his desk to answer a simple question.

DND's own costing handbook says that a good rule of thumb is to take the acquisition price for the planes and multiply it by four. That is the total life-cycle cost. He may need a calculator for this, but I know the minister can do the math.

Therefore, why did he tell Canadians that this would cost only \$15 billion?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's advice on this, but I do believe the Auditor General's recommendation is a sound one and a good one. We fully expect the Department of National Defence to come forward, very transparently, with updated cost estimates for the government and for all of Parliament.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the ethics commissioner is once again taking a close look at the minister of conflicts of interest. Keeping a minister in cabinet despite his involvement in so many scandals perpetuates the culture of impunity that is poisoning this government.

Maybe the Conservatives' economic recovery plan is to create jobs in the ethics commissioner's office, but when it comes to workers who need help, such as the Aveos workers with whom I protested this morning, the government stands idly by.

When will the Prime Minister be consistent and send the message that his Minister of Industry's actions will not be tolerated?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the title the hon. member used originally is actually not a title of any minister in this government. Therefore, I would ask him to be a bit more respectful in posing his questions in the House.

In terms of the question he asked, there is absolutely nothing new in this story. The minister will assist the ethics commissioner in responding to the letter the Liberals have written.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by doing nothing, the Prime Minister is sending a clear message: "Help yourselves, do whatever you want, make your way to the trough."

The Minister of International Cooperation seems to have received the message loud and clear.

This morning, we also learned that people at the Old Port of Montreal go on luxurious retreats with five-star working lunches. Only the price of the orange juice remains unknown.

The more stories like these come to light, the more it looks as if the Conservatives have a strong mandate to lounge in luxury at taxpayers' expense.

Is there a grown-up on the other side of the House who will take control and send a clear message that the free-for-all is over and that we want our government to promote a culture of ethics?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in all matters, we have been clear that our government is managing taxpayer dollars carefully. That is why Canada is in a better position fiscally than any of the other major developed economies. That is why we have been focusing on getting our budget balanced. That is why we have been clear in the conduct of all public officials and all ministers, that we expect them to conduct business at a reasonable cost. That is what we see from this government. That is why our expenses are so much lower than the Liberals before us.

●(1435)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised Canadians he would clean up Ottawa.

Instead, he is letting his friends run roughshod over the taxpayer. Exhibit A is the Minister of International Cooperation.

Do members remember the \$16,000 limo bill she had in 2006, or the \$5,000 limo joyride at the Junos? Now it is \$3,000 in London. I am sorry, but if every time somebody gets caught and says "sorry", it just does not sound honest.

She has been caught. She has paid for the orange juice: big deal. Will she stand and pay for the frivolous limo rides she dinged the taxpayers with in London, yes or no?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have said before, the minister has repaid the inappropriate expenses in this matter and has apologized to the House.

As I have said many times, our government expects that ministers and all public officials conduct business with the greatest respect for taxpayer dollars. That is the reason why, compared with the previous government, our costs of ministerial travel are 15% lower. The taxpayers want to see a government that respects taxpayer dollars, and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives respected taxpayers, they would have their hon. members to stand and be accountable instead of hiding in the doghouse or behind the minister. A simple "sorry" will not suffice.

That is a minister who was found in contempt of the Canadian Parliament, a minister who has racked up thousands of dollars in frivolous bills, a minister who tells hard-working Canadians that, "I'm sorry, a five-star hotel just isn't posh enough for me".

Therefore, if she will not answer, I will ask the man in charge. When he has an ethically challenged minister, what does she have to do in order to get kicked out of his Cadillac cabinet?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the opposition member makes a number of accusations and allegations that are simply not correct. In terms of accountability, the minister has been fully accountable, was accountable in the House and has repaid all inappropriate expenses.

The important consideration for all taxpayers is that the government is interested in seeing that taxpayer dollars are respected and managed carefully. That is what our government has been doing and that is why, notwithstanding inflation, our expenses continue to be 15% lower for ministerial travel than those of the previous Liberal government.

We will continue to stay focused on ensuring taxpayer dollars are treated with the greatest of respect.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of International Cooperation rides in limousines and stays in the world's most luxurious hotels, her department is cutting nearly \$400 million from its aid to the world's poorest countries. Attendance at the Saving Children's Lives conference cost \$1,000 per day, yet as we know, a child can be vaccinated against malaria for a mere \$14.

When will the government curb the excesses of the “minister of mimosas” and restore funding to help those who really need it?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said several times, the minister has repaid the inappropriate expenses and apologized. Our government requires that travel on government business be undertaken at a reasonable cost to taxpayers. Our government's travel expenses are 15% lower than the former Liberal government's.

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while his ministers are sipping \$16 glasses of orange juice from the back of their limousines abroad, the government is pleading poverty at home. Coincidentally, \$16 per day is almost exactly what the average old age pensioner is expected to live on every day. That was until the Prime Minister attacked the pensioners.

The Prime Minister has effectively pulled \$16 per day out of the pockets of low-income seniors and handed it to the CIDA minister to pay for her orange juice. Why has the Prime Minister launched an attack on seniors, yet he ignored the out-of-control extravaganza of his—

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question from the hon. member is indeed surprising. That is an hon. member who made considerable violations of the rules of ethics in terms of her own expenses that she filed personally through the House of Commons, and that is a matter of public record, and she had her own problems when she was a minister.

The fact is we see a difference on this side in that we have attempted to have respect for taxpayer dollars throughout. That is why our travel expenses are lower. When it comes to hospitality, something she knows about, under our government the hospitality costs for ministers are one-third less than they were under the Liberal government.

* * *

●(1440)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, budget 2012 is Canada's environmental inaction plan. The government has gutted environmental regulations, put our waters and fisheries at risk and muzzled non-partisan scientists whose work contradicts the flawed ideology of the government. Instead of evidence-based decision-making, cabinet will use ideology to overrule the National Energy Board.

Could the minister stand and explain why he is willing to risk the health, safety and in many cases the livelihood of Canadians?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud that the resource development legislation will enhance environmental protection in a very significant way. We will invest an additional \$165 million to improve maritime safety and pipeline safety. We will make sure that all tankers are double-hulled, that there will be mandatory pilotage, that there will be aerial surveillance, and that there will be a 50% increase in the safety inspection of pipelines.

This government is committed to environmental protection.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the request of my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has just written to the Department of National Defence asking for the documents required to establish the real cost of the F-35, this time based on a 36-year life cycle.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer is also recommending use of the \$137 million per jet cost, as recommended and calculated by the Auditor General and the U.S. Congress.

Will the government comply with the request?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with the costing assumptions that the Parliamentary Budget Officer makes. My office has already met with him to ask his advice.

As I said, we accept the recommendation and the conclusions of the Auditor General. We fully expect the Department of National Defence to table its updated cost estimates for the F-35. When that is done, we would welcome the Parliamentary Budget Officer to review them.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages can launch all the PR campaigns he wants to try to look like the champion of culture, but the facts speak for themselves.

In Montreal today, CBC/Radio-Canada employees are demonstrating to condemn the dirty deeds the Conservative government is perpetrating against our public broadcaster. The CBC has had to pinch pennies for years, and now the government is imposing another 10% cut.

Is that what this government means by investing in culture, yes or no?

Oral Questions

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the CBC has the necessary funding to fulfill its mandate under the Broadcasting Act. Second, and what is more, it has the necessary funding to pursue its 2015 plan.

As for artists, it was our government that increased funding to the Canada Council for the Arts by 20%, and our government that is protecting these investments more than any other government with budget 2012, which the hon. member voted against.

* * *

[English]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister likes to sing a pretty tune; too bad he does not like to pay the Canadian artists who write the songs.

The Conservatives' notion of promoting Canadian culture is to rob it from Canadians. They have mugged musicians to the tune of \$20 million. They have kneecapped the CBC and Telefilm. They are closing CineRobotheque in Montreal and the NFB studios in Toronto.

How can the minister claim to support Canadian culture when he constantly takes a sledgehammer to its very foundations?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Heather Ostertag, the former CEO of FACTOR, said that what is offered to Canadian artists is the “envy of the world”.

We have increased our funding to the Canada Council for the Arts by 20%, and protected that. CBC has enough money to deliver on its mandate in the Broadcasting Act and to deliver on its 2015 plan.

The hon. member opposite said that we are taking money away from artists. What utter nonsense. What he is talking about is the NDP proposal to amend our Copyright Act to impose a new tax on iPods, cellphones and BlackBerrys, punishing consumers, treating them like criminals and forcing them to pay higher taxes. It is utterly out of line and not in the interests of consumers or artists.

* * *

● (1445)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only are these senseless cuts putting our culture at risk, they also are putting the health of Canadians at risk.

While the minister is trying to cover the real impact of his cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency by saying front-line services will not be affected, the reality is the opposite. As we speak, CFIA inspectors are briefing staff about cuts to important inspection programs. In fact, they are cutting the oversight of meat products imported from the U.S.

Will the minister come clean and tell us which front-line CFIA programs are being cut?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned yesterday, our

food safety system in Canada is superior. This was contained in a report on OECD countries.

Our cost-saving measures will not affect food safety. I want to remind the House, as I did yesterday, that in the last budget we tabled, we included an additional \$50 million to improve food safety in Canada. The member voted against that. His colleagues voted against that. He will have a chance to redeem himself when we vote on the budget implementation bills.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister's explanation does not add up. He cannot say that no services will be affected when he is cutting 10% of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's budget. The agency's management has informed its inspectors of the cuts to some of the inspection programs.

It seems as though the government learned nothing from the listeriosis crisis or Walkerton. Why put Canadians' lives at risk?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I said was that no cost-cutting measure will compromise food safety. In fact, we have hired more than 700 additional food inspection staff since 2006. I also said that it was the opposition who voted against allocating an additional \$51 million for food safety in our most recent budget.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a woman, a mother and a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I was absolutely horrified and saddened by the recent Ontario Court of Appeal ruling on prostitution.

Constituents in my riding of Scarborough Centre, and for that matter, Canadians right across our great country are very concerned about this ruling and the impact it will have on women, families and our communities.

Could the Minister of Justice please give the House an update with regard to the government's position on the Bedford prostitution challenge?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after consideration of the ruling from the Ontario Court of Appeal with regard to the Bedford prostitution challenge, I am pleased to inform the House that the Government of Canada will seek leave to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court of Canada.

We believe that a binding national decision is required. Prostitution is harmful for society as it exploits Canada's most vulnerable people, especially women.

Oral Questions

Canadians can continue to count on this government to protect those who are vulnerable to this kind of exploitation.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister's claim that his sweeping changes to the Fisheries Act are all about farmers' ditches smelled rotten from the start. Internal documents show his department was working to "expedite the approval of large natural resource development proposals". Yesterday he admitted the changes will benefit major industrial projects like the northern gateway pipeline.

When will the minister drop the fish tale and admit that he is selling out our fisheries to his big business buddies?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite has his facts all wrong. In fact, we are focusing fish and fish habitat protection rules on Canadian fisheries, not on farmers and their fields.

This is not about paving the way for pipelines. It is about allowing cottage owners to build a dock, farmers to clean an irrigation ditch, and municipalities to repair their supports and conduct routine maintenance on ditches.

As a matter of fact, I have a quote from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which said, "These reforms will make it easier for governments to set clear, sensible priorities for protecting fish habitats. Currently the Fisheries Act applies the same protections to rivers and streams—"

• (1450)

The Speaker: Order. I will have to stop the minister there.

The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are not buying the minister's fish tale. The minister removed the word "habitat" from the legislation, despite his promises. Beyond his words, the thing that concerns us the most is his plan, which will destroy the fish habitats in our rivers, lakes and streams. This has nothing to do with flooded fields and everything to do with their obsession to build pipelines as quickly as possible.

Why are ministers promoting the interests of corporations over the sustainable development of our resources?

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is two questions in a row where members had their facts entirely wrong.

As I said, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities said:

These reforms will make it easier for governments to set clear, sensible priorities for protecting fish habitats. Currently the Fisheries Act applies the same protections to rivers and streams as municipal drains and farmers' irrigation canals. That doesn't make sense.

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised Canadians that he would not reopen the debate on abortion. Nevertheless, that is exactly what one of his Conservative members is going to do tomorrow in the House. Canadian women have been fighting for decades for this right.

Why is the Prime Minister not speaking out loudly and clearly against what his own party is trying to do here in the House?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows the rules with respect to private members' bills. That bill will be debated as all other private members' bills are debated in the House, in accordance with the rules of the House. I do not see why that should be a problem for the hon. member.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the election and in the House the Conservative government has said that it is not going to reopen the abortion debate, but that is exactly what it is doing in this very House.

While other members have done this in the past, the Prime Minister has done something to stop it. This is not the case this time. He is saying one thing in the House while through the back door he is rolling back Canadian women's rights.

Will the Prime Minister stand in the House right now and tell his party that a woman's right to choose in Canada in 2012 is not up for negotiation?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's position has been very clear. Unlike the NDP, we do not muzzle our members as that party now does.

The bill will be debated as all private members' bills are debated.

* * *

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, about the long-delayed rail service review, will the government introduce a new law this spring to require railways to conclude enforceable level-of-service agreements with all their shippers? In every case, without any tiers or categories among the shippers, will all agreements include six mandatory elements: services and obligations, communication rules, performance standards, performance metrics, consequences for non-performance, and dispute settlement mechanisms?

Will we get this law this spring, yes or no?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to introducing legislation that would provide shippers with a service agreement template and dispute resolution guidelines.

Oral Questions

I would like to thank Mr. Dinning for all the work that he and his team did on facilitating the review.

People have been waiting for a long time. They waited 13 years for the Liberals to do something. We are delivering.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier today in question period we heard the government House leader claim that the Minister of International Cooperation had repaid all inappropriate expenses.

I have a simple question. Could the government House leader tell us if he believes that wasting \$1,000 a day on a chauffeur driven limo when a free shuttle was available is an appropriate expense, yes or no?

• (1455)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been clear and the minister has answered on this and has apologized. Inappropriate expenses were paid.

As I have said, our approach is always to respect taxpayers' dollars and ensure that travel is undertaken at a reasonable cost. A reasonable cost to us is one that is significantly lower than that under the Liberals, and that is what we have been doing.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we need to put this question to the Minister of International Cooperation. I asked her a straightforward question. Will she pay back \$3,000 in frivolous limousine expenses? She refused to answer. I am giving her a second chance because I was disturbed by the government House leader, who said that she is only on the hook for appropriate costs.

Will the minister pay that money back, or does the Prime Minister believe that her luxury lifestyle overseas is perfectly appropriate for Canadian taxpayers to foot the bill? Will she pay, yes or no?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think I have answered this question numerous times.

The minister has repaid the inappropriate costs. I think that is what the public would expect and what the opposition would expect, and I do not think she would be asked to repay costs that were appropriate.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the Conservatives, Quebec is a little bit like Atlantis: a mysterious country that they know nothing about.

The announced closure of the Canada Economic Development offices in Laval and Montérégie show that the regional mission is being abandoned. The agency's mission is to support communities and SMEs in order to help them to participate in the economy.

The government boasts that the economy is its priority, but this decision is ill-advised. Will the government reverse this decision?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to remind the hon. member of the spirit of Quebec, last week I was in Rouyn-Noranda and Victoriaville to make a series of announcements. My fellow ministers were also in other parts of Quebec. There is no Canada Economic Development office in Rouyn-Noranda or in Victoriaville, but that did not stop us from making the announcements.

We are streamlining administrative processes. This will not change the services that will be provided to the agency's clients. We will continue to do our job throughout Quebec, as we have been doing so well for the past several years.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is creating jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Today our government made an important announcement on improving the temporary foreign worker program. When Canadian businesses have made every effort to hire Canadians and cannot find the workers they need, it is important that they may be able to access temporary foreign workers in a very timely manner.

Could the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism update the House on how we are reducing red tape when it comes to temporary foreign workers?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): First, Mr. Speaker, let me thank the hardworking and diligent member of Parliament, the member for Edmonton—Leduc, the best chairman of finance we have ever had in this place.

Let me say that today the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development announced a streamlined process for labour market opinions to ensure that where Canadians are not applying for work that must be done in our economy, employers will more quickly and readily be able to access qualified temporary foreign workers. Under the new accelerated labour market opinion for trusted employers, they will be able to get an LMO in ten days, to keep the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

*Oral Questions***ETHICS**

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this issue is not complicated. I will ask the Prime Minister to respond to it.

The apology from the Minister of International Cooperation and her payback only came eight months after it was discovered and made public.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister, who is responsible for these standards: is \$1,000 a day appropriate for a limousine for a minister in London when such a cost was clearly not necessary or required for the job, or is it not appropriate?

Why will the Prime Minister of Canada not answer that simple question?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has already answered this question, as has the minister, as have I, and it is that the minister has repaid all inappropriate funds.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have always had a hard time when it comes to balancing the relationship with China. We remember that in 2009, the government made international headlines when it gave the duck to the Dalai Lama.

We understand that we must have a professional relationship with the Chinese, but that does not mean ducking a meeting with the Dalai Lama.

The question is this: will the Prime Minister accept the invitation to the Dalai Lama, sit down and meet with him this weekend?

• (1500)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, this government has very carefully balanced our relationship.

We have important economic and diplomatic relationships with China. At the same time, we do express our concerns on human rights and democracy in that country.

Of course the Dalai Lama, as I recently told Chinese officials, is an honorary Canadian citizen of this country, respected by all parties in the House. I do in fact meet with him, and that is the position.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week we learned of yet another disturbing political prosecution in Ukraine when a former defence minister, Valeriy Ivashchenko, was sentenced to five years in prison.

Yesterday, we received even more troubling news from Ukraine. There were reports that former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko was injured while being forcibly removed from her prison cell.

This is yet another example of mistreatment that Mrs. Tymoshenko has faced at the hands of the Ukrainian authorities. The situation of Mrs. Tymoshenko and other political prisoners in Ukraine is deeply concerning.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs please update this House on the state of affairs in Ukraine?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I know that he is so well respected that even members of the third party want to thank him for his hard work on Ukrainian relations.

We are deeply concerned with the latest reports from Ukraine on Ms. Tymoshenko's situation. We call on Ukrainian authorities to ensure that she receives the medical treatment that is required. As usual, Canada stands ready to provide medical support if she requests it.

We also call on the Ukrainian government to take the necessary steps to strengthen their democratic institutions and respect the rights of all of its citizens.

* * *

[Translation]

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the homelessness partnering strategy agreement is clear: Quebec chooses its own priorities. The office of the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development refused to give a subsidy to RAPSIM, even though the subsidy was approved by all the necessary committees. The agreement has been in place for 12 years and this is the first time it has been ignored.

Can the minister explain this attack against a network that is leading the way in the fight against homelessness in Montreal?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, housing is an important step toward self-sufficiency and helping vulnerable Canadians contribute to their community and to the economy.

We have had a substantive homelessness partnership strategy funded through to 2014. This government is focused on making sure that low-income families are well supported and that they have a roof over their heads so that they can contribute to their community and to the economy. I encourage the NDP in the future to support our initiatives to make sure that those homeless people find a home and have a roof over their heads.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, "With curves like that, Alizée doesn't need a set to get a man's attention, she just has to show up. She's a real little devil." That is the kind of commentary found in a magazine funded by the government, with our taxes, at the same time as the government is eliminating subsidies to the NFB and the Women's Health Contribution Program.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages change the criteria so that subsidies are no longer handed out to dubious magazines?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the program referred to by my colleague provides funding to publishers and not to specific publications. The government does not make the decisions. Officials make decisions about funding according to program criteria and conditions. The process is carried out at arm's length from the government.

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POINTS OF ORDER

GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with the unanimous consent of the House, I would like to table this document that we helped pay for to the tune of \$191,000. I would like to table it to ensure that all members of the House, including my female colleagues, are aware of it and of the fact that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, who claims to have had nothing to do with it and who does not seem to want to change the regulation—even though he could—has decided to indirectly support something so unacceptable.

It is fine for a document like this to exist, but I do not think that we should have paid for it. I would like to table this document with the unanimous consent of the House.

• (1505)

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I just want to advise you that I would appreciate the opportunity to respond to the comments made by the House leader with respect to the point of privilege that I raised on the subject of the Auditor General's report and I would appreciate the opportunity to do that tomorrow, if possible.

The Speaker: I will look forward to hearing further submissions on this question.

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 38(6) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 11 petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participa-

Routine Proceedings

tion in three combined visits, which occurred consecutively. The first was the visit of the Mediterranean Special Group, held in La Maddalena, Italy, on July 4 and 5, 2011; the second was the joint meeting of the Ukraine-NATO Interparliamentary Council, the Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships and the Sub-Committee on Democratic Governance, held in Kyiv, Ukraine, from July 5 to July 7, 2011; and the third was the visit of the Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Defence and Security Co-operation, held in Rome, Italy, on July 6 and 7, 2011.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie respecting its participation in six different conferences: first, the International Conference on Benchmarking and Self-Assessment for Democratic Parliaments of the APF in Paris, France, from March 3 to 4, 2010; second, the Meeting of the Parliamentary Network to Fight HIV/AIDS and the Parliamentary Affairs Committee of the APF, held in Casablanca and Marrakech, Morocco, from March 27 to 31, 2010; third, the Parliamentary Seminar on Democracy and Economic Good Governance: The Role of Parliament, held in Cotonou, Benin, from November 10 to 11, 2010; fourth, the Bureau meeting, the Conference of Branch Chairs of the Americas, the Steering Committee of the Network of Women Parliamentarians, the Education, Communication and Cultural Affairs Committee, and the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions of the APF, held in Quebec City, Quebec, from January 30 to February 3, 2011; fifth, the Meeting of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee of the APF, held in Clermont-Ferrand, France, from April 5 to 6, 2011; and finally, the meeting of the Political Committee of the APF, held in Lomé, Togo, from March 14 to 16, 2012.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-France Inter-Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the meeting of the Standing Committee, held in Paris, France, from March 15 to 16, 2012.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities regarding Bill S-4, An Act to amend the Railway Safety Act and to make consequential amendments to the Canada Transportation Act.

• (1510)

[English]

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

Routine Proceedings

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development concerning human rights in North Korea, in particular the fate of Ms. Shin Sook-ja and her two daughters.

* * *

[Translation]

**EXTRATERRITORIAL ACTIVITIES OF CANADIAN
BUSINESSES AND ENTITIES ACT**

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-418, An Act respecting the extraterritorial activities of Canadian businesses and entities, establishing the Canadian Extraterritorial Activities Review Commission and making consequential amendments to other Acts.

She said: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the government allowed Barrick Gold, a mining company with a global reputation for its poor environmental and humanitarian practices, to put its name on a room at the Canadian Museum of Nature. It is just a lucky coincidence that I am introducing my bill today, since the basic aim of the bill is to put some controls on this industry abroad.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said, “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.”

Our moral responsibility to future generations is not to help ourselves and leave our children to deal with the fallout. We must protect our children's heritage first and take only what we need. Our development should not only be sustainable and viable over time, but it must also take place with a vision of sharing, respect and solidarity.

Thus, in keeping with this vision of the world, today I am introducing a bill to establish a commission to review the extraterritorial activities of Canadian businesses and entities, and to monitor the behaviour of these businesses and ensure that they act responsibly with regard to the environment and human rights.

People across Quebec, throughout Canada and around the globe have said that these mining companies are taking advantage of the fact that they operate outside of Canada to act irresponsibly and sometimes even illegally. Some business leaders are exploiting the weaknesses of certain countries to do things that they would not dare do where their own families live.

Thus, it is imperative that this government assume its responsibilities and create tools to allow it to monitor all this. Furthermore, this bill ensures that Canadian companies operating abroad espouse our values and become our ambassadors, instead of tarnishing our reputation.

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

[English]

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition circulated by the Dogwood Initiative in British Columbia and signed by over 57,000 people, which reflects the large number of people in B.C. who do not support the Enbridge project along our coast.

This petition notes that the pristine coastal waters of northern B.C. have been protected from bulk crude oil tankers by a moratorium on oil tanker traffic since 1972. The petitioners call on the government to convert the moratorium into a permanent ban on tanker traffic. They say that tanker traffic on the west coast poses an unacceptable environmental risk and that an oil spill would be devastating to the economy, to the fragile ecosystem of northern coastal B.C. and to the coastal communities that rely upon it for their livelihoods.

CELLPHONE TOWERS

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present to the House a petition signed by over 300 of my constituents.

The petition raises concerns about potential health effects related to the electromagnetic radiation emitted from cellphone towers. I share these concerns. I believe the precautionary principle must be used when determining where cellphone towers are installed.

I am happy to present this petition for a response from our government.

● (1515)

PENSIONS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of Canadians from coast to coast who again take great exception to the government's decision to raise the eligibility age for OAS from 65 to 67, something the Liberal Party would never do.

The petitioners are explaining that for those who work in physically challenging environments and who look forward to retiring in comfort at the age of 65, to now have to work an additional two years is just unconscionable.

The petitioners are suggesting that the government reverse this decision, as it would have a drastic impact on our young people, who are right now the highest unemployed and underemployed in the country in terms of being able to find employment.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have previously spoken with respect to the Standing Orders regarding petitions and the fact that a member, when presenting a petition, is not supposed to speak for or against a petition.

Clearly, in this case there was some preference shown for the petition, and I think we should follow the rules, the Standing Orders of the House.

The Speaker: I will take a look at that.

The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, ever since the Prime Minister fled to Davos, Switzerland, to announce that he would be raising the age of OAS eligibility from 65 to 67, Canadians from across the country have been signing petitions to urge the government to change its mind.

I am proud to present petitions today, signed by literally hundreds of people from my hometown of Hamilton who are joining that campaign.

The petitioners rightly point out that only 31% of Canadians have been able to contribute to RRSPs and, even then, many saw their savings evaporate in the recent market downturn. They also note that only 40% of Canadians have workplace pensions and the future of many of those pension plans is increasingly tenuous.

Since over a quarter of a million seniors are now living in poverty and public pensions provide, at most, \$15,000 to the typical retiree, the petitioners are calling upon the government to drop its ill-considered change to the OAS, maintain the current age of eligibility and make the requisite investments in the guaranteed income supplement to lift every senior out of poverty.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition from constituents in beautiful Langley.

The petitioners state that Canada's 400-year-old definition of a human being states that a child does not become a human being until the moment of complete birth, contrary to 21st century medical evidence.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to confirm that every human being is recognized by Canadian law as a human being by amending section 223 of the Criminal Code in such a way as to reflect 21st century medical evidence.

FEDERAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from my constituents in Kingston and the Islands.

The petitioners are concerned about the legitimacy of Canada's electoral process and the threat posed to it by the voter suppression that we saw in the last election. They ask the government to conduct a full inquiry into the voter suppression that occurred, to provide for remedies in case suppression has been found and to create deterrents for voter suppression in future elections.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a petition signed by over 57,000 people, mostly from B.C., who would like to see a permanent legislated ban on oil tanker traffic off B.C.'s coast in order to protect the wonderful environment we have.

THAMES RIVER

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of several hundred residents in Essex and Kent Counties who call attention to the need for the Thames River, which is a heritage river, to be dredged.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to find necessary funds to have the boating channel from the mouth of the Thames River out to Lake St. Clair dredged to a depth of eight feet to allow safe boating access.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition regarding CCSVI.

The petitioners understand that the government will fund a trial but question the non-announcement announcement. Who was the research team? Why phase I-II when three FDA phase II studies are under way in the U.S., the U.K. wants robust clinical trials, 30,000 procedures have been undertaken in 60 countries, three safety studies involving over 1,000 patients have been done and leading North American physicians and researchers are pushing for phase II-III studies?

The petitioners call upon the Minister of Health to consult experts actively engaged in the diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI to undertake phase III clinical trials on an urgent basis in multiple centres across Canada and to require follow-up care.

● (1520)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to join my B.C. New Democrat colleagues today as we present 57,000 signatures on a petition concerning the protection of the pristine coastal waters of British Columbia forever.

As others have noticed, there has been a moratorium on oil tanker traffic since 1972, but the petitioners feel very strongly—and this is a very strong sentiment in British Columbia—that it is time to strengthen the oil tanker moratorium and turn it from policy into law.

The petitioners call on the government to legislate a ban on oil tankers to protect our coast forever.

We thank the Dogwood Initiative for the tremendous work it has done in gathering so many thousands of petitions that truly reflect the sentiment in British Columbia.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, add some petitions that are part of the 57,000 signatures collected in British Columbia, mainly from Vancouver Island.

The petitioners are adamant that we create legislation banning oil tankers from B.C.'s northern coast because of the potential danger of spills.

Routine Proceedings

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased as the member for Vancouver Quadra to also be presenting petitions that were collected by Dogwood Initiative.

Many people in Vancouver Quadra are concerned about potential oil spills on the Pacific north coast. They know that since 1972, when a Liberal government put protection in that area, the Liberals have stood for protecting the environment and for excluding oil tankers from the Pacific north coast. We continue to stand for excluding tankers in that area because of the environmental risks.

I am pleased to be tabling the names of those who agree with the sentiment, and we call on the government to pay attention.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, join my colleagues from British Columbia to present a petition on behalf of British Columbians who want to protect the waters off the B.C. coast. Basically, they are looking at banning the oil tankers off the pristine and wild B.C. coast so we can protect the environment and businesses along those coastlines.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also rise today to introduce a petition signed by over 57,000 people, mostly from British Columbia, who would like to see a permanent legislated ban of oil tanker traffic off B.C.'s north coast.

AIR CANADA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand to present a petition from many Manitobans who are concerned with Aveos closing down and the number of important, valuable jobs that are being lost in the province of Manitoba.

The petitioners are calling upon the government and the Prime Minister of this country to hold Air Canada accountable to the Air Canada Public Participation Act and to take Air Canada to court to protect those valuable jobs for the province of Manitoba.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I join my British Columbian colleagues in being part of the presentation of these 57,000 signatures from people right across British Columbia who have joined together to express to the government that they will be listened to despite the government's efforts to shut down hearings and exclude conversations to those who happen to agree with it, as is too often the case with the Conservative government.

The petitioners call upon the government to confirm into law that we will have our waters on B.C.'s coast protected for their value not just for British Columbians, but for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I also want to present petitions opposing oil tanker traffic along the coast of British Columbia.

[*English*]

These petitions are signed by the people in the small northern community of Kitwanga in British Columbia.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to pay close attention to evidence presented at the joint review panel, to stop prejudging evidence and to allow British Columbians to speak

clearly with one voice that we will not allow pipelines and tankers in our territories.

• (1525)

SECURITY CERTIFICATES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in relation to the use of security certificates. It deals particularly with today's Federal Court decision and the Court of Appeal ruling that Mohamed Harkat's rights were violated because electronic recordings were made as evidence and they were later destroyed. He had no access to this information. The court also ruled that the use of so-called class privilege for CSIS informers goes too far.

The petitioners, like the Green Party, want the Government of Canada to change these laws in order to protect the rights of those accused to know the case against them. It is fundamental.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too want to add my voice for this petition, which is to keep tankers out of the wild and pristine coastal waters of British Columbia forever. It has been signed by 57,000 British Columbians from all over British Columbia. I want to thank the Dogwood Initiative for stickhandling this petition.

The petitioners note that the oil tanker ban has been in place since 1972. They call on the government to legislate a ban on oil tanker traffic to protect our coastal waters forever.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise today and join my NDP B.C. colleagues to present this massive petition of 57,000 signatures simply entitled, "Keep tankers out of the wild and pristine coastal waters of BC, forever".

Although we are not allowed to say whether we support these petitions, I think this is the watershed issue in British Columbia. I am very proud to stand and present this petition.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to table, along with so many of my colleagues, a petition from 57,000 British Columbians who have stood up to say that we have to protect the north coast and legislate a ban on oil tankers to protect our coast forever.

These British Columbians who have written and have signed these petitions are from north Vancouver Island, Nanaimo—Alberni, Chilliwack, the North Shore of Vancouver, the Lower Mainland, Richmond and Surrey. They are also from interior communities in places like Kelowna, Prince George and Kamloops.

I now realize that these are communities where the MPs are Conservative. Therefore, we hope the government will listen to those 57,000 British Columbians who ask that it legislate a ban on oil tankers and protect the north coast of British Columbia forever.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to submit. The petitioners call upon the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to review the case of Fatemeh Kamkar.

Fatemeh Kamkar's application for permanent residency status in Canada was denied on the basis of an unforeseeable negative change in her health, which was further impacted by lengthy processing delays, over which she had no control, at the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. As a result of the decision, she will have to return to Iran, where she has absolutely no family support to assist her in her recovery from breast cancer. It should be noted that following her diagnosis, Ms. Kamkar did not obtain any financial aid for health care from either private or government sources in Canada. Ms. Kamkar has continued to finance her own medical costs.

Ms. Kamkar is currently working on her Ph.D. in neuroscience at the University of Ottawa and is one year away from graduation. The decision of Citizenship and Immigration Canada will deny her the ability to further contribute her knowledge and skills to the medical research community in Canada.

The petitioners ask the minister to reassess Ms. Kamkar's application for permanent residency under humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour to present a petition signed by people from Sept-Îles who are strongly opposed to increasing the old age security eligibility age from 65 to 67, as announced in the Conservatives' recent budget.

The petition is entitled "Protecting old age security". I think the message is rather clear, given that experts agree that the program is sustainable. The petitioners are calling for the old age security program, which goes a long way to fighting poverty among seniors, to remain intact and unchanged.

What is more, in this petition, the people of Sept-Îles are also asking that the guaranteed income supplement be increased in order to lift our seniors out of poverty, something that is very important to many Canadians, including the people of Sept-Îles.

* * *

• (1530)

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 512.

Routine Proceedings

[Text]

Question No. 512—**Mr. Brian Jean:**

With regard to questions Q-386 through Q-509 on the Order Paper: (a) what is the estimated cost of the government's response to each question; and (b) what is the estimated cost of the government's response to this question?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is currently compiling the cost information for producing these responses, some of which were just tabled in the House of Commons on April 23, 2012, and will provide a supplementary response.

* * *

[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, if Questions Nos. 513, 514, 515, 518, 519 and 520 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 513—**Hon. Gerry Byrne:**

With regard to government procurement: (a) what are the particulars of all and any contracts for services provided to government, including all departments, agencies, and crown corporations, since January 1, 2006, by any of the following companies, (i) 3D Contact, (ii) Acrobat Research, (iii) Admin Public Affairs, (iv) ADMM Public Affairs, (v) Alberta Blue, (vi) Canadian Voter Contract, (vii) CFC Voter Contract, (viii) Collect Corp, (ix) CRT Data Systems, (x) Dimark Research, (xi) Direct 2 Client Telesystem, (xii) Electright, (xiii) Feedback Research Corp, (xiv) Front Porch Strategies, (xv) Gillcomm Solutions Centres, (xvi) Global Target Marketing Corp, (xvii) IVRnet, (xviii) J D Web Enterprises, (xix) JMCK Communications, (xx) KLJ Field Services, (xxi) KLR Vu Research, (xxii) Le Groupe CDO, (xxiii) Momentum or Momentum BPO or Momentum BPO, (xxiv) Polylogue Research, (xxv) Praxicus Public Strategies, (xxvi) Solus VB, (xxvii) TeleResearch, (xxviii) The Marketing Clinic, (xxix) Total Impact Communications, (xxx) Voicelink, (xxxi) Voter Trac or Voter Track, (xxxii) Western Opinion Research, (xxxiii) Winning Edge Consulting, (xxxiv) Xentel or Xentel DM; and (b) for answers to all sections of (a), (i) what is the time period covered by the contract, (ii) what is the nature or purpose of the service provided, (iii) what was the amount paid to the company for their services, (iv) was the contract awarded through a competitive bidding process or was it sole-sourced, (v) which government department, agency, board, or crown corporation entered into contract with the company, (vi) under which budgetary allocation was the company paid for the service provided, (vii) what is the associated file or reference number for each contract?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 514—**Hon. Gerry Byrne:**

With regard to the Atlantic Gateway and Trade Corridor Strategy: (a) what was the total amount approved by Parliament for the Strategy; (b) what Parliamentary votes approved those funds; (c) what is the description, nature, and location of each project approved; (d) what was the approval date of each project; (e) what was, or is anticipated to be, the total cost of each project; (f) what was the amount allocated by the government for each project under each respective program; (g) what was the amount allocated by the government for each project under any other funding program; (h) who were the funding partners at any other level of government, or the private sector, for each project; (i) what is the expected sunset date of the Strategy; (j) how much funding remains uncommitted; and (k) how much funding, if committed, has not actually been spent?

(Return tabled)

Routine Proceedings

Question No. 515—Hon. Gerry Byrne:

With regard to the Border Infrastructure Fund: (a) what was the total amount approved by Parliament for the Fund; (b) what Parliamentary votes approved those funds; (c) what is the description, nature, and location of each project approved; (d) what was the approval date of each project; (e) what was, or is anticipated to be, the total cost of each project; (f) what was the amount allocated by the government for each project under each respective program; (g) what was the amount allocated by the government for each project under any other funding program; (h) who were the funding partners at any other level of government, or the private sector, for each project; (i) what is the expected sunset date of the Fund; (j) how much funding remains uncommitted; and (k) how much funding, if committed, has not actually been spent?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 518—Mr. Peter Stoffer:

With regard to ex gratia payments related to the testing of herbicides: (a) what is the total number of applications received by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) since 2007 for the ex gratia payment related to the testing of unregistered United States (US) military herbicides, including Agent Orange, at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Gagetown in 1966 and 1967; (b) how many applications were received each year from 2007 to 2011 inclusive; (c) for each year from 2007 to 2011 inclusive, what is the number of individuals who received the ex gratia payment; (d) for each year from 2007 to 2011 inclusive, what is the number of individuals who were denied the ex gratia payment; (e) for the persons mentioned in subquestion (d), on the basis of what criteria were they denied including (i) medical criteria, (ii) residency criteria, (iii) lack of supporting documentation, (iv) any other issues; (f) for each year from 2007 to 2011 inclusive, how many primary caregivers received the ex gratia payment; (g) for each year from 2007 to 2011 inclusive, how many primary caregiver applicants were denied the ex gratia payment; (h) how many primary caregivers who applied on behalf of a loved one were denied the ex-gratia payment, prior to the removal on February 6, 2006, of the requirement that the applicant must be alive; (i) out of those primary caregiver applicants originally denied as outlined in subquestion (h), how many subsequently (i) re-applied, (ii) were granted the ex gratia payment; (j) how many individuals who had previously applied for the ex gratia payment but were declined were contacted by VAC to discuss their application after December 22, 2010; (k) how many of the individuals in (j) were granted the ex gratia payment following this contact; (l) how many applications were received between December 22, 2010, and June 30, 2011, inclusive; (m) how many applications were received between June 30 and December 30, 2011, under the delayed/late application policy; (n) how many individuals were awarded compensation under the delayed/late application policy between June 30 and December 30, 2011; (o) what was the total expenditure of ex gratia payments issued under the delayed/late application policy from June 30 to December 30, 2011; (p) how many individuals were denied the ex-gratia payment under the delayed/late application policy from June 30 to December 30, 2011; (q) how many applications have been received by Veterans Affairs Canada after the authority to issue payments expired on December 30, 2011; (r) what is the total amount of money that was allocated for the Agent Orange ex gratia payment over the course of the program since 2007, broken down on an annual basis; (s) how much of the total amount of money allocated for the Agent Orange ex gratia payment since 2007 remained unspent each year from 2007 to 2011 inclusive; (t) if there were unspent funds as described in subquestion (s), for what reasons did funds remain unspent; (u) what is the breakdown of the annual spending by VAC from 2007 to 2011 inclusively as it relates to (i) the Agent Orange ex gratia payment to eligible individuals, (ii) administration costs, (iii) salary costs; (v) does the government have a plan to provide another ex gratia payment or similar program for those Canadians who may develop a medical condition related to the testing of unregistered US military herbicides, including Agent Orange, at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Gagetown in 1966 and 1967; and (w) does the government have any information as to how many Canadians who fell outside of the ex gratia payment timelines may still develop a medical condition related to the testing of unregistered US military herbicides, including Agent Orange, at CFB Gagetown in 1966 and 1967?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 519—Mr. Peter Stoffer:

With regard to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board (VRAB), legislated by the Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act: (a) for each year from 2006 to 2012, what are the number of favourable and negative decisions made by each permanent and temporary member of the Board at the (i) review stage, (ii) appeal stage; (iii) reconsideration stage; (b) for each year from 2006 to 2012, what are the number of favourable and negative decisions made by the Board for all reviews, appeals, and

reconsiderations; (c) has VRAB issued any directive to its board members on how many affirmative or negative decisions members can make in a year; (d) what is the status of VRAB's publishing of review and appeal decisions online; (e) does Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) frequently analyze the reasons why VRAB has overturned decisions made by VAC and, if yes, how frequently; (f) does VRAB frequently analyze the reasons why the Board overturns decisions made by VAC and communicate these decisions to VAC; (g) for each year from 2006 to 2012, how many compassionate awards have been issued; (h) does VRAB inform veterans that a compassionate award may be another avenue for veterans who have been denied at the review and appeal level and, if so, how; (i) does VRAB inform veterans that a "Reconsideration by the Minister" could be another avenue for veterans who have been denied at the review and appeal level and if so, how do they inform veterans; (j) for each year from 2006 to 2012, how many complaints has the Board received relating to disrespectful behaviour; (k) for each year from 2006 to 2012, how many complaints has the Board received on the length of time it takes to obtain a decision by the Board; and (l) for each year from 2006 to 2012, how many complaints has the Board received on other issues?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 520—Mr. Peter Stoffer:

With regard to the disability pensions awarded by Veterans Affairs Canada under the Pension Act and the lump sum payments issued by the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-Establishment and Compensation Act (New Veterans Charter): (a) what is the total number of disability pensions, broken down by type of service-related disability; (b) what is the total number of lump-sum payments, broken down by type of service-related disability; (c) what percentage of all disability pensions are issued for service-related disabilities as outlined in (a); (d) does Veterans Affairs Canada inform the Department of National Defence of the high incidence of certain occupational/service-related injuries and payments awarded by Veterans Affairs Canada per calendar year; (e) how many disability pensions under the Pensions Act have been awarded each year from 2006 inclusive to 2012, for (i) Agent Orange exposure, (ii) atomic veterans, including those who participated in nuclear weapons tests in the United States (US) and Chalk River decontamination efforts, (iii) exposure to asbestos, (iv) exposure to depleted uranium; (f) how many payments under the New Veterans Charter have been awarded each year from 2006 inclusive to 2012 for (i) Agent Orange exposure, (ii) atomic veterans, including those who participated in nuclear weapons tests in the US and Chalk River decontamination efforts, (iii) exposure to asbestos, (iv) exposure to depleted uranium; and (g) how many veterans under the New Veterans Charter have received the following benefits each year from 2006 inclusive to 2011 for (i) Earning Loss Benefit, (ii) Canadian Forces Income Support, (iii) Permanent Impairment Allowance, (iv) Supplementary Retirement Benefit?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CITIZEN'S ARREST AND SELF-DEFENCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (citizen's arrest and the defences of property and persons), be read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): When we last took up this motion before the House, the hon. member for Hamilton Centre had five minutes remaining in his speech.

The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again, I appreciate this opportunity. As I only have five minutes, I will not try to mount a review of everything I said.

However, a couple of people who were flipping through the channels and heard me using certain language contacted my office wondering what exactly that was all about. Therefore, I will take just a couple of the minutes I have to address that.

I was making reference to the Criminal Code and the areas that Bill C-26 would amend and how there had been a long-standing issue with a number of aspects of that legislation. I had pointed out that one of our chief justices had said in the case of *R. v. McIntosh* that sections 34 and 35 were:

—highly technical, excessively detailed provisions deserving of much criticism. These provisions overlap, and are internally inconsistent in certain respects.

I have no doubt that for learned colleagues who are lawyers, that language is crystal clear, but not so much for the rest of us.

I then presented to the House a quote from Mr. Bumble of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, which reads as follows:

If the law supposes that," said Mr. Bumble, squeezing his hat emphatically in both hands, "the law is a ass...

I hear one of my colleagues say that it really should be "an ass." That is the natural way to say it, but given that I was quoting, I wanted to use the exact quote as I would not want to wrong Mr. Dickens after all these years. Although that is the direct quote, there is more to it, but I thought that was the most apropos. It is a relatively well-known expression when we find ourselves in a situation that seems perfectly logical, but when we look at the law from a legal point of view it looks completely different. Therefore, we often hear people say that the law is "an ass". It is a reference to this famous works.

The reason I brought that forward was to try to illustrate the situation that Mr. Chen found himself in when he believed he was defending his property. It is a fundamental right that people have. He believed the actions he took did not cross any legal lines. He thought he was well within his rights to do what he did to assist in apprehending someone who was stealing from his business.

Mr. Chen was initially charged with kidnapping, carrying a dangerous weapon, assault and forceable confinement. However, the kidnapping and weapons charges were dropped, but the serious charges of forceable confinement and assault were proceeded with. He was acquitted of those charges.

Government Orders

Although we recognize that changing laws based on one case and one instance is an area that we need to be very careful of, in this case it illustrates to us that this place and the system can work. Mr. Chen was found innocent and the guilty person was found guilty and served a sentence. Now we are in the process of changing the law so the Mr. Chens of the future will not find themselves in the horrific legal position in which he found himself.

Therefore, all in all it worked out. Hopefully, this will improve our Criminal Code and will bring more justice to Canadians.

I thank all those who worked so hard to get us to the point where the official opposition is comfortable in supporting a bill that amends the Criminal Code and that actually helps people, as opposed to the spin we get from the government on its law and order agenda. Therefore, We are very pleased to support the bill.

● (1535)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this bill has fairly widespread support, whether from the Liberals, New Democrats or the Conservatives. One of the most important aspects of the bill is that there has to be some sort of educational component to it. Using citizen's arrest as an example, in particular areas, such as some of the commercial streets where there are a lot of restaurants and a greater likelihood of robberies and things of that nature taking place, it is important to make sure that citizens understand what they should do in order to make citizen's arrests. I wonder if the member might comment on that aspect.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I mentioned in my remarks yesterday that one of the concerns is that in clarifying the legislation, we may inadvertently incent the notion of vigilantism and that is something we do not want to do. I appreciate very much that the member has also focused on the important balancing act within the law and the need to balance the right of citizens to engage in citizen's arrests when the circumstances warrant, but that it does not get out of hand. We know where that could lead us. The notion of an educational component to advise citizens what their rights are under similar circumstances makes a great deal of sense. I hope that will be part of the follow-up to the bill passing this place.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the support from the opposition for this particular bill. I did note a comment made by the member and I will make this observation. He indicated this is a bill that will in fact help individuals as opposed to other law and order types of bills. This is typical of the NDP approach: let us make sure we can arrest them, but when they are arrested, simply let them go.

In fact, our government's approach is that when someone is arrested, by a citizen or police officer, there are consequences to breaking the law. That is what our legislation does, even if the member opposite does not support it.

Government Orders

● (1540)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the minister himself is responding to my comments. If we take further what the hon. member has said, we all know that the Conservative idea of a balanced justice system is to just throw someone in jail, throw away the key and then tell everybody that the streets have been made safe. The fact of the matter is that for all the people who go into jail, the overwhelming majority are coming out again. If we do not pay some attention to what is happening when people are incarcerated, yes, I stand by the statement that under some of the government's laws, things will be worse, the streets will be less safe and people will not have the justice that I am saying does exist within this bill.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know how misdirected the government has been on criminal justice issues. It slashed crime prevention programs, which we know actually reduce the crime rate. It is willing to spend billions of dollars on prisons even though the crime rate is coming down. We have seen a variety of justice legislation that seems to be written on the back of a napkin and thrown into the House.

Could the member for Hamilton Centre talk a bit more about the fact that this particular piece of legislation is much better because it was essentially drafted by New Democrats? The NDP member for Trinity—Spadina actually did the work. It is because of that we have a bill that is worth getting the stamp of approval of the House of Commons.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, indeed, every one of us here, certainly on this side of the House, has given credit to the member for Trinity—Spadina, in whose riding Mr. Chen lived and where the incident happened. It was her initiative and credit needs to be given. I said yesterday that I hoped somewhere in *Hansard* there was a quote from someone in the government who also recognized the leading role of the member for Trinity—Spadina.

In the time I have, I want to acknowledge what I said in the beginning. The government has finally found a way to work with the opposition, to get into the Criminal Code and deal with it in a real way as opposed to the political spin that is around every single law and order item that it brings forward. Therefore, I am prepared to acknowledge that, with the leadership of the member for Trinity—Spadina, it took the cooperation of members in the official opposition and the government. We only wish that the government would take this approach more consistently, because it is a heck of a lot more progressive and positive in terms of making changes to our Criminal Code than the way the government normally conducts itself on matters like this.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the member was just saying, there is perhaps a lack of collegiality or cooperation on the government benches. I would be interested in hearing more about that. Perhaps the member has an idea to pass along to the government.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, it was not that long ago in a minority setting that the government did not really want to, but was forced to, work with other members. We did get things done. The government has had from the beginning the attitude that it has a majority and somehow 39% of the votes give it 100% of the power. The Conservatives believe that they can just rule at will. Their whole

demeanour changed once they received that majority. It is a shame, because Bill C-26 is an example of how working together benefits all of us politically, but more important, provides better legislation, better laws and ultimately safer streets.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Hamilton Centre for his very eloquent speech. It gives us an appreciation for the situation and the work that has been done on Bill C-26.

The thing that strikes me is the spirit of co-operation that has allowed the House and the committee involved to achieve what we could call an optimal result. It may not be perfect, but perfection is unattainable. So it goes and we can live with that.

However, I think this is a start, or at least a shining example compared to other very unfortunate cases where the government decided to embark on its own path, alone. We have seen some of the consequences of that approach.

I would like the hon. member to say more about this spirit of co-operation that we wish for in order to achieve results that benefit everyone since, after all, we are all representatives of the Canadian population as a whole.

● (1545)

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, it was important that the member said the House and committees. All of us in this place know that the real work, the roll up our sleeves, get down to work, no one is watching, just do plain work, happens at committee.

We first started to see the government's approach to committee work when we were setting up the rules, when we were talking about how committees would be structured, how often people would be allowed to talk, all those basic and fundamental fairness rules. We watched the way that the Conservative government just rolled in like a bulldozer and attempted to get every advantage it could, believing again that its 39% of the votes gave it an entitlement to 100% of the power and everything that goes with that.

The member himself answered appropriately in focusing on committee, because that is where the work happens, that is where the tone is set. The work that was done in committee that led us to Bill C-26 was successful. I am willing to bet that if we looked at the transcript we would find that people cooperated, people worked together to find solutions rather than working to find divisions based on partisanship.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise during this discussion with great disappointment in my colleagues in the NDP. Many of the things that they have said today are absolutely not factual, not based on any kind of a study that has been done.

Having almost 19 years of police experience tells me that victims across this country are screaming for governments across the country to do the right thing and to support them in their efforts to find justice. This is another example of where the NDP has it wrong. Those members continually support judicial discretion for offenders.

Government Orders

I stand today to ask a simple question of my hon. colleague from the NDP. Will he stand and simply tell Canadian victims that he will support victims over offenders and join the government in its efforts to do so through its legislation? Will he support victims here and now? Will he state that to Canadians so that they know clearly that the government and opposition members are trying very hard to do what is right for all victims across the country?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I do thank the parliamentary secretary for her time and her involvement. Let me say at the outset that I have great respect for the service she provided in uniform as a Canadian police officer. I share some experience in the policing world, having been the Solicitor General of Ontario, as well the civilian head of the OPP. I was also responsible for corrections.

I know that the job does not end when we arrest someone. When somebody does something wrong, then our justice system needs to kick in. However, this notion that somehow from that moment forward whatever the crime, the individual no longer has a useful role in society is not an approach that we believe in.

The fact of the matter is that these are our family members, neighbours, co-workers, and at some point in their sentencing they are coming back out. If we do not do something to make it different for those individuals, they are going to come out and make it worse because they know of nothing else.

We believe in balance. While we must make sure that we impose the justice system as we need it, support police and support our justice courts, we must also be sure that we are fair to the people who are in there, recognizing that we want them to have a positive future, not just throw it away.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Timmins—James Bay.

Today, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-26 which deals with citizen's arrest and the defence of property, and clarifies the concept of self-defence.

The bill amends the Criminal Code in order to enable a person who owns or has lawful possession of property, or persons authorized by them, to arrest within a reasonable time a person whom they find committing a criminal offence on or in relation to that property. It also amends the Criminal Code to simplify the provisions relating to the defences of property and persons.

First of all, we will be supporting this bill, which is essentially modelled after a bill previously introduced by our NDP colleague from Trinity—Spadina. I would like to congratulate her for her efforts in this regard.

You will recall that it all began in her riding back in May 2003, when the owner of the Lucky Moose Food Mart, David Chen, arrested a man who stole something from his store.

The Criminal Code allows the owner of property to arrest someone only if the presumed perpetrator is caught red-handed. In the case of Lucky Moose Food Mart, the owner arrested the thief one hour after the incident, when the criminal returned to the scene of the crime. As a result, the police charged the store owner with

kidnapping, carrying a concealed weapon, assault and forcible confinement.

The charges of kidnapping and carrying a concealed weapon were dropped by the Crown, and Mr. Chen and his two co-accused did go to trial. They were acquitted of the charges of forcible confinement and assault in October 2010.

In order to protect citizens like David Chen from criminal prosecution, our colleague from Trinity—Spadina introduced a private member's bill to allow people to make arrests without warrant within a reasonable period. We are pleased to see that it has been reintroduced by the government.

It is important to note that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police supports Bill C-26. When he appeared before the committee, Superintendent Greg Preston said:

...CACP does support the passage of Bill C-26. We think it's important that citizens be recognized, that when they do act, they have self-defence available to them. We believe that this will assist the police in understanding, to be able to better determine whether or not somebody who does act does so lawfully.

...we'd prefer if we were on every street corner, but that's not the reality of the world. It is inevitable, and as such we certainly support the idea that they would be recognized for that.

It is important to understand that Bill C-26 does not reinvent the wheel. In Canada, the power granted to citizens to arrest without warrant is defined in section 494 of the Criminal Code. With regard to citizen's arrest, the only thing Bill C-26 does is to allow citizens to make an arrest without a warrant "within a reasonable time".

Bill C-26 also includes amendments to provisions of the Criminal Code related to self-defence and the defence of property. These amendments will lead to long-awaited reforms that will simplify the complex provisions of the Criminal Code on self-defence and the defence of property.

In committee, Nicole Dufour, a lawyer and the coordinator for the Barreau du Québec's Criminal Law Committee, had this to say about self-defence:

The Barreau du Québec would like to offer its congratulations on the effort to simplify the legislation relating to self-defence, which has been criticized by the courts and by law enforcement bodies. In our opinion, these amendments do not alter the current case law, since the proposed provisions address the conduct and actions of a person who uses force, and not the outcome, for deciding whether the use of force in the circumstances is reasonable and lawful.

In committee, Hamish Stewart, a law professor at the University of Toronto, also pointed out the efforts to simplify the provisions on self-defence. He said:

The existing provisions of the Criminal Code have often been criticized for being unclear, for overlapping in ways that are not always clear, and for being difficult to explain to juries. There has been a long stream of criticism from lawyers, judges, and academics about the difficulty of interpreting and applying the existing provisions. So the attempt to take all these ideas of self-defence and put them into one section that would be clear and that would apply to all potential crimes I think is very welcome.

Government Orders

● (1550)

Although we support this bill, we regret that in committee the government rejected our amendment to specify that self-defence includes actions taken under the influence of what is referred to as battered woman syndrome. We wanted the bill to recognize that it is possible that a person who has been a victim of domestic violence might reasonably perceive the perpetrator of repeated acts of violence to be a greater threat than someone without this history might perceive the perpetrator to be.

We believe that the definition of self-defence must take into account the subjective perception of the circumstances rather than a purely objective perception of the situation. We thought that the terms describing the history of the two parties were not specific enough in Bill C-26 and we wanted to ensure that in this type of situation “the act committed is reasonable in the circumstances” from the individual's perspective.

The Canadian Bar Association and the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies recommended this amendment. Unfortunately, this government did not support it.

Eric Gottardi, from the Canadian Bar Association, pointed out that the current legislation does not protect female victims of abuse very well and that it is imperative to correct this situation. In committee, he said:

It's well accepted in our case law that a reasonable person, acting reasonably in the circumstances of the accused, can have honest but mistaken beliefs about a set of facts. So someone might think that they're about to be attacked or they're about to be threatened, and they may act in self-defence. That, in fact, might not be the case. But as long as they honestly believed, and that belief was reasonable, then they are justified in using force to defend themselves, even in advance of an attack or in advance of a threat.

...

We're strongly against violence against women, and we support a law and an amendment to the law of self-defence that protects those women in their subjective belief that they are under imminent threat. It's our concern that subjective belief isn't adequately protected as the law is currently drafted.

I am extremely disappointed that the NDP's amendment was rejected and I can assure you that we will continue to press this issue. Furthermore, I met several times with women from La Mouvance, a women's organization in the riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles. These women do extraordinary work with female victims of violence. Unfortunately, they are not receiving any financial support from the federal government. Evidently, this government is not interested in helping women who are victims of violence by supporting the NDP's amendment.

There was a demonstration on the Hill today. We know that tomorrow, the Conservatives will be launching an attack on women in the form of Motion M-312. Canadians have fought for decades to give women the right to make their own choices about their bodies. Clearly, this government is determined to undermine women's rights. The Prime Minister has refused to clarify his government's position on this subject, and that has voters in my riding and across Canada worried.

Throughout our study of this bill, our primary concern has been to ensure that it does not encourage individuals to take justice into their own hands or to endanger themselves.

Personally, I agree with many of the witnesses who appeared before the committee to express concern that this bill gives too much freedom to the private security companies that are proliferating in Canada and Quebec. Even though a number of concerns were raised, we decided that this bill contains acceptable changes and that it will prevent people like Mr. Chen from being charged with a crime for defending their own property.

I am ready for questions from my hon. colleagues.

● (1555)

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a little earlier, as I was listening to the Conservative members' comments, I got the impression that they are somewhat confused about the meaning of standing up for victims and supporting victims.

Unfortunately, we often hear statements to the effect that the NDP is against victims and does not stand up for victims. However, in my opinion, there is a clear difference between more severe sentencing for criminals or revenge for victims and real protection, real support, for victims. For example, victims can be given tools to help them react better or better defend themselves.

Could the hon. member explain, for example, the relationship between the bill to make our streets safer and this bill, which provides real support to victims of theft or other crimes? Could she tell us the difference between the two?

● (1600)

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for those comments.

She raised an excellent point. This government's position on criminal justice creates more victims than it helps. We cannot simply put people in prison without considering what they will do when they get out. Rather than investing in high schools and health, the Conservative Party would rather invest in new cells for prisoners. I find this very troubling.

This is an important point to raise. Rather than putting our young people and adults in prison, we must help them, particularly by addressing problems such as poverty and education.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the bill deals with citizen's arrest, self-defence and so forth, and has received fairly widespread support, whether it is in the House or from the public as a whole.

In part I would like to express what I believe are concerns held by people of Winnipeg North, the area I represent. They want to see more of action to deal with some of the crime issues out there, and ways of dealing with crime.

The member made reference to what I would classify as alternative activities for young people and how government could invest in those types of things and could enhance such things as community policing.

Government Orders

Yes, it is great that we have the bill before us. We know it is receiving widespread support in terms of its ultimate passage through the House today, but would the member acknowledge that we need to do more than just deal with bills such as this and look at other forms of preventing crimes?

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation is an important step, but of course we need to take other measures.

It is important to note that the rate of crime is in decline in Canada, so the position of the government in terms of criminal justice is not actually based on facts or science. There are no studies that back the position of the government with regard to criminal justice. It is something that will not work in our communities. It is something that will not prevent criminals from committing more crimes.

My constituents are telling me that we should not be putting young people in jail, because they will come out as hardened criminals. That is something the NDP also noted in the House of Commons during debate.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question for my friend, the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, relates to the issue of private security firms.

Contrary to the advice of my friend from Winnipeg North, there are a lot of groups opposing the bill, including Tom Stamatakis, the president of the Canadian Police Association, who is quoted in today's press as saying:

We should take care that any changes made with this legislation do not have unintended consequence of broadening the current mandate of private security.

I noticed that my friend mentioned private security firms yesterday. One of her colleagues said that they do arrest and that this bill would not change things; however, the bill will allow them to leave the store and chase somebody and arrest them that day or later, so I remain concerned that the bill is opening the door to private security firms. I would appreciate my friend's comments.

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, that is a reasonable question that has already been dealt with in committee.

We see that this legislation is reasonable. This legislation is aimed at citizens such as David Chen, citizens who are protecting their own personal safety and property.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a real honour to stand in this House and represent the people of the great region of Timmins—James Bay.

When we talk about crime bills, crime prevention and crime strategies, it is unfortunate that much of the rhetoric in the House of Commons has not been to deal with the substantive issues but sometimes to create black and white caricatures or set up windmills. This is difficult because the issue of crime and law is complex and the solutions are sometimes not as simple. This is why the judges do need discretion in being able to interpret action and being able to interpret circumstances.

However, I find this has been a good instructive debate for Canadians to participate in and to watch, because we are trying to find a balance regarding the protection of ordinary citizens. This is something that communities have done from time immemorial.

For example, I live in the great little community of Cobalt, Ontario, where people look out for each other. I remember late one night I was coming home from a trip with my family and my little kids. I drove up in my beat-up little Toyota Tercel hatchback, which may not be the ugliest car ever built, but it was certainly in the top five. Barrelling in the driveway behind me was a big pickup truck with double wheels on the back. It sounded like a tank. Out jumped Bruce Miller, a big guy from Sherman Mine. He said, "Who goes there?" I almost fell over, and then he said, "Oh, it's you. I knew you were away. I just wanted to make sure when I saw the lights on at your house that nobody was robbing you".

That is what neighbours do. We need to be able to say that it is okay for neighbours to check in on neighbours, that it is okay to stand up in a public square when something is wrong and say, "There are no police here, but a crime has been committed".

In saying that, we have to be careful. We have seen in the United States where politicians fan the flames of vigilantism and horrible tragedies result, like the Trayvon Martin shooting in Florida. If we look at it, we wonder how could it be that a self-styled vigilante armed with a gun can patrol a neighbourhood and, when the police tell him to stand back, he believes his life is at threat. Under Florida law he only had to believe that. It is completely subjective. Issues of subjectivity do have a value in dealing with perception of violence or perception of threat, but they are not the only thing. We cannot just say, "I didn't like the looks of him. He seemed like a bad guy, so I shot him". Yet, that is what is considered okay in the Florida legislature.

We have seen some of the crazy gun laws in many American states that think people should be able to carry a gun, a concealed weapon for self-defence, that they should be able to carry a weapon into a hospital because it is a citizen's right. That kind of over-the-top response creates dangerous situations.

I am looking at Bill C-26 from the sense of how we strike the balance between civic protection and ensuring that we are not putting people at risk. It is not about putting the so-called criminals at risk, but also the people who want to intervene. It is very difficult to intervene in a situation that could escalate. People need to have a sense of the ground rules. When the police are watching, they are certainly telling us to be careful about how we go about this.

There has been good discussion at committee. There has been good cross-party conversation.

On the issues of criminal justice, I had the great honour in the 1980s as a member of the Catholic Worker Movement to work with men coming out of prison and to live with men and women coming out of prison in the streets of Toronto. I saw a steady pattern in terms of recidivism. There were addictions. Addiction was probably the highest single cause of people committing crime. There were basic issues, such as a lack of a stable environment in which to actually get one's life together, and then there was plain stupidity.

Government Orders

I have known many cons through my work. Contrary to what we see in the movies, they are not criminal masterminds. That seems to be an oxymoron. Contrary to what my Conservative colleagues sometimes point out as these evil bandits who have to be locked up, sometimes they just make really stupid choices. I have talked to them about their choices.

● (1605)

I think that when we are looking at criminal policy, we have to remember that by far, the vast majority of people who end up in jail have made really bad choices. Should they be punished? Certainly. As a society do we need to have a plan to pull them back? Even more so.

I remember my friend, Robert, who died recently. In his day, Robert was a huge, massive expense on the health and criminal justice systems because of his horrific level of alcoholism. At the time, we could not get Robert into even a rooming house. There was no public housing. I remember the Conservative government of Mike Harris, and many of his old gang are on that side of the House now, telling us that social housing was a failed principle.

It was not a failed principle. We needed to get a guy like Robert a place to stay. Once we actually got him into secure housing, he sobered up. At that point he was never again a burden on the medical system or on the criminal justice system. I think he was 20-some years sober before he died. We needed to find ways to get men like him out of crisis, and it was possible.

That is where social policy comes in. If members believe that government should not be in the business of ensuring some level of social housing, then people like Robert will fall through the cracks. If people have levels of addiction, they might break into a car and get whatever change they can.

Last year I was moving and my car was broken into, probably because of the Oxy epidemic. Normally my beat-up old Chevy does not have much in it worth taking, but I was in the process of moving. There was a vacuum cleaner that my wife had given me. I did not mind sharing my vacuum cleaner with the criminal underground of Ottawa. I could have accepted that. That was in the car. There were a couple of brooms. They could have had them. But my God, my Bob Dylan collection, original vinyl, was in the back, as were my grandfather's favourite Scottish and Irish records. I have not brought forward a private member's bill about mandatory minimums for people who steal vinyl. I did manage to get some of it back. I went to the record store. I did not get any of my Bob Dylan collection; that was gone, but I got the Clancy Brothers and Kenneth McKellar records back.

I said to the guy, "Listen. These are my grandfather's records. They were stolen out of my car." I do not think they could have even bought one Oxy pill. I said, "I do not mind paying for them. I just want the records." The guy said, "We were only selling them for 50¢." Being Scottish myself, I would have spent \$5, maybe even \$6 on each of those records.

I am not saying this to make light of the situation. Perhaps if I had been at the house that night and saw the guy stealing my records, I would have run out and stopped him. I would have at least tried to offer him the vacuum cleaner instead.

When I go home at night through the market I have seen some situations that have started to escalate. I am not out with the late, late night crowd because parliamentarians are always in bed at an early hour, so I do not see any of the stuff that happens outside the nightclubs. However, it tends to be my perception that we are dealing with people with addictions, and sometimes people with addictions do desperate things.

The question is, if someone sees something happening on the street, such as a shakedown, an escalation towards violence, what as a citizen does the person do if there are no police there? There is the question of someone intervening, such as a shopkeeper intervening and stopping someone from stealing by saying, "You cannot do this. I am going to hold you until the police come." That is a reasonable citizen's response. That is a reasonable societal response.

In terms of the larger of issue of what people do when they see relentless situations, particularly when there is drug addiction and people are resorting to crime, we need a larger societal response. That is why I talked about the interventions and about the lack of treatment centres in northern Ontario. We do see levels of addiction, mostly involving Percocet and Oxy. There is no place for people to get treatment. That is an issue.

We cannot just leave it to the citizen to address the crime problem. We cannot just leave it to the jails. We need a larger, more comprehensive view. We have not had a holistic view of crime and crime response in this Parliament.

We will be supporting this bill. It is one little piece of a much larger puzzle. I am more than willing to take questions from any of my hon. colleagues.

● (1610)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the earlier questions I had asked the member's colleague was in regard to how important it is that there be some sort of educational component to this bill with respect to citizen's arrest.

I profiled that there are some areas within our communities that would benefit more by having community policing, police officers visiting some of the stores in communities where there might be more value in terms of making sure people understand what the legislation actually enables a store owner to do in terms of making a citizen's arrest.

I wonder if the member would share some of his thoughts in regard to the value of and the need for an educational component. There is some misinformation out there in regard to what a citizen's arrest is.

● (1615)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent suggestion, because the question before us is about ensuring that we have the correct nuance, and nuance is difficult when we are talking about legislation. Legislation is like moving a massive glacier. We might move it two inches, but that two inches could have a huge effect on what is on the other side of the glacier. People do need to understand.

Government Orders

I find that in the north where we deal with the Nishnawbe-Aski Police Service and mostly with the OPP, we have some really good community outreach. However, people need to understand that this is about being able to stop the guy who is ripping off the albums out of someone's car. This is not about saying that the person gets to beat the guy up. This is not about that person getting to exercise justice. He or she has no right to decide appropriate punishment, or to make the guy pay. This is about stopping a crime from happening.

There is a level which people are not able to go beyond and if they do, they cannot go crying to the public if they are arrested by the police for going beyond it. The education component is going to be very important. I am sure the police will play a large role through community policing.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I know there are concerns within other parties in the House. I regret that having come to some consensus through the committee process members who have concerns seem to feel they have to hold their noses and pass a bill that may well open the door to some serious problems in our society.

I note that the vice-chair of the Canadian Bar Association, Eric Gottardi, is quoted in today's paper as saying this is a gift to the rent-a-cops. He said, "Such personnel often lack the necessary range of equipment or adequate training to safely and lawfully make arrests in a manner proportionate to the circumstances".

Even at this late stage we should insist that the sections relating to citizen's arrest be left alone and remain as they are now in the Criminal Code and not extend them, as this bill does.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that private security exists already and that is not going to change. Are there concerns about how private security contractors are used? Certainly, but the bill is not going to change their reality in our society.

We think that the bill is a good bill. It is good because there has been push-back on both sides in order to deal with some outstanding concerns. If my hon. colleague feels that she has to hold her nose to vote for it, well, making laws is like making sausages. It is not the easiest thing. We do not get everything we want. Law is not easy either and there are always going to be grey areas. That is what will be interpreted by the courts.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Hamilton a number of years ago there was a situation where a Bell technician was outside a hotel and a husband and wife had a dispute. He held the husband because he thought the husband was going to injure the woman. The woman turned around and buried her shoe in the back of the Bell technician's head. It just shows us that when we give that kind of extra leverage to the public, there is a certain risk factor.

I wonder what the member's comments are on that.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I cannot say anything about what happens in Hamilton because I share a seat with a guy from Hamilton and I have played gigs in Hamilton and it is a pretty tough town. I was told when I went to Hamilton that I was in the big city and I had better behave, so I am not going to mention anything about what happened at that event.

There are always altercations. There is always going to be push-back. There are always going to be issues of how people defend themselves. What we are trying to do is clarify the laws. To use the example of the Lucky Moose that was being hit again and again and with no police there, it is not unreasonable for the shopkeeper to be able to stop the criminal.

My colleague's advice is wise. We have to ensure there is discretion. We have to remind people to be careful. It is better to wait and let the police do it. People should not get hurt over a box of Smarties.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before resuming debate, 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 Beaches—East York, National Defence; the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Saint-Jean, Flooding in Montérégie.

[*English*]

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest.

Bill C-26 demonstrates that the committee process in this House can actually work, when a bill starts out as reasonable in its aspirations and its general content. I will speak mostly to the self-defence provisions, which have not been getting as much attention during this debate, and I hope to have time to speak to citizen's arrest. If not, I am happy to answer questions.

The NDP worked in good faith within the committee and advanced a number of amendments, two of which were accepted. We feel that the legislation could be better yet, especially, from my point of view, on the citizen's arrest portions. However, we also feel that it has been somewhat improved and that, in general, it started out as worthy legislation. For that reason, we believe this bill should be supported, as my colleagues have been indicating.

With respect to the legislation that was originally tabled, I must commend the parliamentary secretary, the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, for his speech on December 1, 2011, when he introduced the bill. His speech was a model of thoughtfulness, tightness and elegance of exposition and, indeed, care taken to explain the bill's purpose and its relationship to the existing law and to the general principles of criminal law. That speech should be taken seriously when the legal profession begins to interpret Bill C-26, when it becomes part of the Criminal Code, with respect to the provisions on self-defence of the person, defence of property and citizen's arrest.

Government Orders

What is very interesting about both the reforms in Bill C-26 and the speech of the parliamentary secretary is the contrast with the approach of the current Criminal Code provisions. This is partly due to the origin of the current provisions in one of the original versions of the Criminal Code well over a century ago. However, the present Criminal Code provisions are best characterized as a patchwork quilt of relatively detailed provisions that are responding to a range of concrete situations. Partly because of that level of detail, these provisions have for some time been criticized, decried by some as needlessly complex and increasingly confusing, as we have had layer upon layer of judicial interpretation over the years.

The Bill C-26 provisions are, in contrast, a model of simplicity and distillation to the core principles in their essence. I dare say that their formulation owes a lot, although I cannot say this is for sure the case, to the civilian tradition within our multi-juridical heritage, with its preference for unifying principle and generality when we are codifying the core areas of the law.

A passage from the parliamentary secretary's speech speaks to this approach. When the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe spoke to the self-defence provisions in Bill C-26, he stated in part:

If we were to ask ordinary Canadians if they think self-defence is acceptable, they would say that it is acceptable when their physical integrity or that of another person is threatened. I think they would also say that the amount of force used should be reasonable and should be a direct response to the threat.

The reforms proposed in Bill C-26 are centred on those basic elements. Because of the general nature of these ideas, one law based on these fundamental principles should be able to regulate all situations that arise involving defence of the person. We simply do not need different regulations for every set of circumstances. All we need is a single principle that can be applied to all situations.

There is a lot of merit in the conceptual clarity and the focus on unifying principle that is represented by that passage. However, the common lawyer in me does worry a bit if the idea of “a single principle” is seized upon to the exclusion of what he also mentions, which is “all situations”.

● (1625)

General principles only live and breathe and become coherent in the real world where, hopefully, most Canadians live—when they are brought to bear on concrete situations to allow more nuanced rules to emerge gradually. It is for this reason that it is a virtue of the new proposed clause 34 in Bill C-26 on self-defence that it is grounded in a general idea, that of reasonableness of response, but this is also expressed, which is important, as “reasonableness in the circumstances”. That is proposed paragraph 34(1)(c). However, it is all the better that proposed subclause 34(2) then goes on to list nine factors that are relevant to the contextualized approach to the general principle of reasonableness.

The NDP was very concerned that these factors would themselves be principled and at the same time useful for real-world decision-making of ordinary citizens, then of police and prosecutors and, finally, of judges in their exercising of judgment as to whether a self-defence situation has arisen. In particular, an NDP amendment that was accepted modified the chapeau for proposed subclause 34(2) and that amendment is most welcome. It appears before the list of the nine factors and states:

In determining whether the act committed is reasonable in the circumstances, the court shall consider the relevant circumstances of the person, the other parties and the act, including, but not limited to, the following factors....

That sets up well the various factors. This phrasing interacts with factors (e), (f) and (f.1) in the provisions to provide a good basis for the criminal law to be responsive to the very particular challenges of applying self-defence in the context of abusive relationships, which is an area I know many members in the House have some concern about, especially where women have been subjected to patterns of violence and psychological abuse by their male partners. I think it is important to recognize that the parliamentary secretary himself, in his speech on December 1, recognized this when he said:

Another factor is whether there were any pre-existing relationships between the parties, including any history of violence and abuse.

This last factor is particularly important in cases where a battered spouse must defend against an abusive partner. As the Supreme Court has noted in the landmark case of *Lavallee*, it is sometimes difficult for a jury of citizens to understand how a battered spouse might stay in an abusive relationship or how the person might come to understand the patterns of violence of the person's partner. These cases do not arise often but when they do, sensitivity to these factors is crucial.

Having praised the parliamentary secretary's speech on December 1, I would also like to add that the response speech from the previous justice critic, the member for St. John's East, was also a model of constructive and thoughtful parliamentary engagement. While he expressed general support and appreciation for the intent behind the bill, he also raised questions aimed at ensuring that during the committee process, the overhauled existing provisions of the Criminal Code did not throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. In that respect, he said:

We need to examine it [Bill C-26] very carefully. We need to ensure that by making changes, we are not throwing away 100 years of precedent and all the advice that the courts have given. If we are starting off with a blank slate and a whole new law, it may take another 10 or 20 years of case law to understand what that means. Do we really need to go down that road?

I will end by saying that it is really important to understand that there is a conundrum built into law reform. Do judicial interpretation and the perceived understandings of the law go by the wayside when new law is enacted, especially when such detailed provisions are replaced by general provisions in criminal law? It must surely be the case that we, and by “we” I mean citizens and the legal profession, do not reinvent the law of self-defence from a whole cloth. We must engage with what was the living law under the old provisions and forge a new living law under the new ones that is in communication with what went before it.

● (1630)

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member is new to his portfolio but he was not at committee to hear the testimony. We heard testimony that suggested that, in this particular case, judges should use their discretion for victims instead of criminals, as that member's party has been saying.

Government Orders

We also heard experts at committee say that for years they have been seeking clarification of the law on self-defence. During my time practising criminal law there was a tremendous amount of confusion to say the least relating to many aspects of self-defence. I wonder if the member would not agree that we should listen to the experts in this case. Even the Canadian Bar Association said that it wanted clarification of the law.

Would my colleague not agree that it is a good thing for the government to stand up for victims instead of criminals and allow judges to use their discretion as well?

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with the member on the justice and human rights committee.

I do not think the premise needs to be accepted that the NDP views judicial discretion as only something that should be relinquished when it is a case of the wrongdoer. That is not at all what we have been saying. In general, judicial discretion needs to be respected in our legal system.

We are consistent that in the revised bill, with respect to the very open textured rules on self-defence, we think discretion will work, keeping in mind that the judgment of ordinary citizens will be equally important. The law cannot wander too far away from basic common sense.

However, we also believe that when it comes to things like sentencing, judicial discretion is also needed. We are being consistent.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to welcome my hon. friend to the House. This is the first time I have had an opportunity to put a question for the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth. I hope he will not mind if I trespass on his time to follow-up on a response from one of his caucus colleagues.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay made the mistake of thinking that I planned to vote for this bill. I do not plan to vote for the bill. I am fairly certain that I am the only member of Parliament who finds it objectionable to expand the powers of citizen's arrest. I note particularly that, while the member for Timmins—James Bay said that this little change was nothing in terms of citizen's arrest and private security firms, it would in fact create a new opportunity for people to arrest some reasonable time after the offence.

How does my friend from Toronto—Danforth feel about that?

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, I was upfront in my remarks when I said that I, like many people, have qualms about playing around too much with the citizen's arrest provisions. However, the committee and ultimately the government in its proposed bill has this right.

The member is absolutely correct. It is true that there is a small extension of citizen's arrest to include arrest within a reasonable time after someone has been found committing an offence. However, there are a number of safeguards. This cannot be done if it is at all reasonable to expect the police to show up and do the job.

There are a couple of other provisions that I do not have time to go into that really attempt to send the signal that the Lucky Moose shop case with David Chen is really the paradigm. We need to work out from that, use that as the analogy and not accept this as a licence for anything resembling citizen's arrest gone wild.

● (1635)

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the member for Toronto—Danforth to the House and congratulate him on his new portfolio as deputy critic for justice. This is the quality of debate and the type of thoughtful, reasonable and well-researched remarks that we can expect from this member after just a few short weeks. I cannot wait to see what he will be capable of in a year or two.

I am pleased to have an opportunity today to speak on Bill C-26, an act to amend the Criminal Code in relation to citizen's arrest and the defences of property and persons. In reality, the heart of this bill came from the New Democratic Party, specifically from the member for Trinity—Spadina. We need to pay tribute to her work because she put in place many of the aspects of the legislation before us.

I would also like to note that it is nice to see that for once the Conservatives are willing to accept a good idea from the opposition. I certainly wish the Conservatives would adopt more of our good ideas. If they had, of course, there would be not be 90,000 more unemployed families. If the Conservatives had taken our advice, we would not have the highest debt load of Canadian families in history. If they had taken our suggestions and listened to the NDP, then we would not have seen a real wage reduction of 2%.

Going back to the bill, it has its origins in the attention brought to a citizen's arrest two years ago at the Lucky Moose Food Mart in downtown Toronto, as many members have already stated. The owner of this store was a persistent victim of shoplifting. A shoplifter who was seen in his store walking away with some property apparently came back an hour or so later. Based on his experience in trying to get the police to respond to shoplifting events in the store, the owner felt that the only way to actually have this fellow charged was to apprehend him himself. As a result, the owner was charged with assaulting the individual and forcible confinement. This case caused a lot of controversy, some of which had to do with whether policing was sufficient in the area.

Government Orders

We know that in larger establishments like chain supermarkets and retail stores there are often paid security services. They have the resources to better protect themselves. These paid security services have training in apprehending people and are more familiar with the Criminal Code than the average citizen. They, in effect, perform a citizen's arrest based on seeing someone commit a shoplifting offence. They phone the police and hold the shoplifter until the police come, which is what Mr. Chen did. However, what was different in this case is that the individual had left the store and then came back. When he came back he was not in the act of committing an offence at that time. As a result, Mr. Chen, the owner of the store, was not inside the current provisions of section 494 of the Criminal Code that says a citizen may arrest someone who is found committing an indictable offence or personally believes on reasonable grounds that a criminal offence had been committed, the perpetrator is escaping from it and is freshly pursued.

Section 494 states specifically that, "A person authorized by the owner or by a person in lawful possession of property, may arrest without warrant a person whom he finds committing a criminal offence on or in relation to that property."

There is also a provision that says, "Any one other than a peace officer who arrests a person without warrant shall forthwith deliver the person to a peace officer."

The normal process for shoplifting is that the store detective, store owner or the private security officer can apprehend individuals, phone the police, turn them over and let the police handle it from there. In this case, because the arrest took place over an hour later on a return visit, the owner did not have any basis under section 494 to arrest the individual, which is, of course, why we are standing here today debating this bill.

The bill originally came forward as a private member's bill introduced by our colleague, the member for Trinity—Spadina. I think she may have even called it the "Lucky Moose Bill" in honour of Mr. Chen. It has received widespread support from all sides of the House with perhaps one notable exception. Many people who are in the position of lawmaker are very concerned about passing laws that would encourage a vigilante type of justice. This is why it is such a touchy area.

● (1640)

As has been pointed out by many of my colleagues, we have highly trained police forces operating across the country. We have a national police force, provincial police forces in Ontario and Quebec, as well as local police forces and community policing. We are incredibly proud of these men and women who serve Canadians on a daily basis. As well, in the area where Mr. Chen's supermarket is located in Chinatown, police patrol on foot. These are the people we need to rely on. On the other hand, not every store owner has access to security guards or store detectives, and certainly the police are unable to be everywhere at once.

The concern here is for people trying to run a business. In this case, Mr. Chen was trying to run a business and protect his property. Most people would think that he acted reasonably and detained the individual without using excessive force. However, it was still under the current provisions for forcible confinement that Mr. Chen was

charged. If one uses force to confine someone and prevent that person from leaving, that is an offence.

However, the citizen's arrest provision provides a defence for forcible confinement by changing it to an arrest, provided the arrest is made within a reasonable period of time.

If the individual who is committing the offence is known, one would be able to simply phone the police to tell them what the individual has done and that they have done this before, in this case, taking something and leaving. In this instance, Mr. Chen did not know the name and address where this individual could be found and unfortunately felt the necessity to take action. An individual should not be chased because of the danger involved, and the police should be called. However, as I have stated, in a case where an individual is not known, the only way to apprehend an offending stranger is to take advantage of the opportunity.

We support this aspect of the bill wholeheartedly. It takes a minimalist approach by making changes to section 494. What I mean by "minimalist" is that it changes only what is required according to the circumstances in which Mr. Chen found himself.

There have to be two conditions: one must witness the offence, and the arrest must be made at the time of the offence or within a reasonable time after the offence is committed; and, one must believe on reasonable grounds that it is not feasible under the circumstances for a peace officer to make an arrest.

We could say that when the individual came back into the store, instead of arresting him perhaps the police should have been called right away. However, in Mr. Chen's experience the police often did not come fast enough in these kinds of situations and he thought that this individual would be gone again.

If these changes had already been in place, Mr. Chen would have had his defence, as it would have fit these circumstances. As legislators, we should not make laws every time something unusual happens and we must be very careful in making changes to the Criminal Code. However, when a flaw is pointed out in the law due to an unusual event and injustice can be seen, then a reasonable legislature should take action. We support that wholeheartedly.

I have had several instances in my personal life where I have come close to this kind of situation while travelling on public transit in Toronto. I have taken the TTC on a daily basis for many years and have encountered all kinds of unusual situations. I witnessed an assault on a 13-year-old in the subway by 17-year-old students, and I witnessed a TTC patron spitting on a TTC operator. In each of these situations, the assailants fled. Being a little out of my mind with anger, I did pursue them. However, during that pursuit, I was lucky enough to locate peace officers who were then able to make the arrests so that I did not run afoul of the law in some way and end up in trouble myself.

This bill is important because it ensures that individuals like Mr. Chen, who are protecting their person and property, are able to do so within the law. To be able to defend oneself within the law is incredibly important. That is why over many years there have been all kinds of changes made to the Criminal Code, and we certainly have to do so diligently.

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• (1645)

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the test of reasonableness in my colleague's speech today, which is suggested by the legislation itself, the reasonableness of a judge who has had legal experience and legal education, and has seen these cases many times before.

Does he have a problem with the government suggesting that judges should use their discretion to determine what is reasonable in the circumstances? If so, why does he have a problem with judges deciding that? If he opposes the legislation, the very crux of the issue is the reasonableness of the judges and the interpretation of the law by them, and what is reasonable in the circumstances based on that citizen.

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if the member was listening. Nowhere did I say I was opposed to the legislation. In fact, we are supporting it.

What is absolutely surprising to me is to hear the member from his side of the floor, the Conservatives, now saying that judges should be able to apply their judgment. Time and time again we have seen the government attempt to make changes to actually take that discretion out of judges' hands with mandatory minimum sentences. That is the kind of thing that takes the law out of the hands of the experts and the people who should be applying sentences, who should be taking into account the circumstances of offences, criminal history, behaviour of individuals and reasonableness of the judgments being made.

This is the government that is taking that discretion out of judges' hands. I think it is a little hypocritical to hear the member make that kind of statement now.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party critic talked about how we support the bill in principle. There is fairly widespread support in the House. Most Canadians see the value of passing the bill.

In previous questions I have asked about the need for an educational component for certain sectors, in particular the retail or the commercial areas, to make sure people are aware of what citizen's arrest really entails. Would the member comment on what he feels is important in an educational component on citizen's arrest?

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, we as a society can do a better job of educating the public on a whole raft of different issues, not just citizen's arrest, but preventive health, tax code or a number of situations.

However, I would like to turn it back to the member and ask, if the Liberals feel that the bill is lacking in this kind of way, have they proposed, or will they be proposing, amendments to insert such language into the legislation?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to ask a question. Earlier, one of our colleagues said that she suspects the NDP cannot stand up for victims. My colleague's speech, which I just listened to, gave a fine example of how all parties can work together to come up with measures that will truly help victims.

We are not talking about victims' revenge; we are talking about real tools to help people defend themselves. I would like my colleague to comment on that a little.

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

It certainly shows the kind of results we can achieve when the parties work together. If we work together, we will have better laws. When the members opposite accuse us of all kinds of rather silly things, when the Minister of Justice, or the Minister of Public Safety, say things like "you are either with us or with the criminals", it does not help us do our job. Furthermore, such comments have no place here in the House.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to speak once again to Bill C-26.

It now appears that the bill is being framed as sort of the victims versus the offenders by the other side. I would like to clarify our party's position on victims versus offenders.

The bill came from our party in the first place through the member for Trinity—Spadina. It was an attempt to turn an offender who was really a victim away from being an offender. How does that work? It is where someone who was a victim of a crime, attempted to arrest or stop a person who committed a crime and he became an offender, according to the police, because he had unreasonably detained someone.

This bill is all about that. It is to try to regain the balance between victims and offenders. The bill is now one of the very few in this Parliament to have had actual agreement on amendments at committee. Many bills have gone through committee that have had zero amendments approved by the other side.

That leads me to comparisons between this bill and other bills which have created victims, by the other side, and in which the amendments we have proposed have been outright rejected. I am of course referring to Bill C-31, which has elements of this bill in it all over the place. People who flee countries, where those people are victims of crime or who have their own personal well-being threatened, to come to a safe country are themselves victims. They are the victims of crime in those countries. They are the victims of persecution. They are victims in any imagined sense of the word.

However, if these people arrive here by the wrong method, they immediately become an offender, according to the government. If they are victims of human smuggling, they are imprisoned and are considered to be offenders.

We need to turn those things around. This is a situation that cannot be allowed to stand. Unfortunately the votes on Monday meant that those bills are now off to the Senate and perhaps they will become law.

Government Orders

We have a situation where the other side is accusing this side of being soft on offenders and hard on victims, and the exact opposite is true. The government has determined that people who are victims will be made offenders. The immigration bill is but one example.

That is an example of a bill where the parties actually did work together. The previous Parliament actually passed a bill that was praised and lauded, that struck a balance between people being victims and being offenders.

However, now we have a government that is insistent on its ideologically driven anti-immigrant agenda that will now treat potential immigrants who come here by magic, because they found a way to get here when they were unable to get here any other way, as criminals.

In addition, those individuals who did everything right, who acted in accordance with the law, who applied to come to Canada years and years ago are now going to be treated as criminals because they are having their money given back to them and are being told “Sorry, we did not get to your application 10 years ago, and we are never going to get to it. You have to apply again”. Those people are being made into victims by the government. We are treating people horrendously.

I also want to talk about how this bill has a possibility of creating a vigilante system. We will support it, but I want to be very clear that we do not support anything which takes Canada further into the sort of American mentality of “shoot first and ask questions later”. We do not agree with that kind of mentality.

• (1655)

I was in a high school in my riding last week. In that high school was a bunch of Grade 10 students. They were 13 to 15 years old. I asked them how many of them owned an illegal handgun or knew someone who owned one. Half the class put up its hand, and that is not unusual. When I asked them why all these handguns, their immediate answer was for self-defence, that they had to defend themselves against others in their communities who had handguns.

What is the government doing about the proliferation of handguns that I find in my riding? There was a drive-by shooting last night and someone was shot just last week in the same neighbourhood by illegal handguns that have arrived in my riding.

What is the government doing about the proliferation of weapons of destruction, of killing? It is removing border protections. It is laying off border services people. It is cutting the number of sniffer dogs that might stop these guns from coming into the country in the first place.

The Conservatives have decided it is better to have guns come in and to—

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have been listening to the member talk on Bill C-26, which is about citizen's arrest, and he has been meandering all over the place, covering all sorts of different legislations and bills with which we were dealing. He talked about Bill C-31, which would improve the refugee act. Now he is talking about illegal handguns and border services. He is absolutely not talking about the subject at hand, Bill C-26, which would enhance citizens' protection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. member for his intervention. It is true that the members are encouraged to ensure their comments are pertinent to the question before the House. Members will also know they are given a great deal of freedom to explore different ideas and eventually bring them back on the subject. I am sure the hon. member for York South—Weston was getting to the point.

The hon. member for York South—Weston.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, I thought I did mention the point. The point is we do not want this bill to become a further direction. We do not want it to take us further toward a “shoot first, ask questions later” situation. Part of the bill is about self-defence and the definition thereof. I was trying to point out that I already had a situation in my riding where many young people believed that owning a firearm was a matter of self-defence. They believed they had the right to own firearms. I am sure we have heard some members opposite talk about that right. There is no such a right, but members opposite have said that.

Now these children, having heard this, believe it is their right to have a firearm to defend themselves. Part of the bill is about changing the definition of “self-defence”. It is in the news. It is something we cannot avoid. We are now facing this explosion of very young individuals who believe they need to own handguns. They get it by illegal means, I will grant that, because it is not legal.

However, I was astonished, as I think the members opposite should be, to discover that half of the 13- to 15-year-olds in that classroom had handguns or knew somebody who did. This is an astounding number of individuals of that age group.

Those same people are now being made victims, and that is part of where this is coming from. The bill starts with the premise that the person who is being robbed is a victim and should not be the offender. What we are trying to establish, and what I am trying to point out to the government, is that many of the bills it has brought forward in fact create victims of people who do not need to be made victims. We are trying to protect victims.

One of the things we are doing is trying to help pass this law, which would actually protect victims. However, there are other laws that have come to us that would make victims out of ordinary law-abiding people, and we are opposed to that.

It was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance who brought us to that portion about victims versus offenders in the discussions on the bill.

What we hope to do with this law should not become something more than it is. We hope to allow individuals to protect their personal property and to hold somebody, but we do not want to create a system of vigilante justice where individuals believe they have the right to use firearms on other individuals.

• (1700)

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member is new to this place, but he asked a very important question. He asked how he could solve the problem in his riding. I have a proposal for him.

Government Orders

The Safe Streets and Communities Act brought in tougher sentences for organized drug crimes and mandatory minimum sentences for violent offenders. It increased penalties for sexual offences against children and ended house arrest for serious crimes. We have the opportunity to put people in jail for committing serious crimes for a certain amount of time, keeping them off the streets and keeping citizens safe. Instead of voting against that and opposing our legislation to keep serious criminals in jail, New Democrats should support it. This is how to do that. It takes years to do it and he has the opportunity to support our legislation and keep criminals in jail where they belong.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, I am really glad the member opposite raised that issue. I asked the same high school students if they were afraid of being incarcerated with mandatory minimums for the possession of firearms and other crimes. The answer I got was what I expected. They do not read the law before they commit crimes. They do not determine, as somebody has suggested, that there is a mandatory minimum for growing six pot plants, which they were all surprised to learn. That is not how the criminal system works in Canada. The criminal system works because of desperate people doing desperate things or people who feel they have to defend themselves and do desperate things. That is not the kind of Canada we want.

If the member opposite suggests the law that creates mandatory minimums will somehow reduce the number of victims of crime in our country, he is very much mistaken.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member touched on an important issue regarding guns and weapons in schools. I used to be an education critic in the province of Manitoba. Most schools have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to weapons in schools. After all, our youth should have a sense of safety when they are in their schools, knowing there will not be knives and guns found in lockers. I was surprised at the degree of availability or general knowledge of illegal handguns.

Could he expand a bit on that point? Does he feel that type of weaponry is actually on school premises? Does he feel there should be a zero tolerance on weaponry in schools?

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely believe there should be a zero tolerance for weapons in schools. That goes without saying. I am not suggesting that these individuals are bringing firearms to school. I am suggesting that there is a proliferation of firearms of which parliamentarians should be aware. Certainly, in lower-income ridings, such as mine, poverty and desperation take us to a whole different level. We also have a situation in which illegal firearms come into our country through a very porous border and we should not support a government that wants to reduce the protections at the border and make it easier for firearms to get in.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am struck by the discussion about firearms. When we think of firearms in our country, we think about a criminal act of not storing them safely. Business owners will not be in a position to have loaded firearms available if someone comes in to take over the store because they have to store their firearms in a separate place from the ammunition. Safe storage is under the Criminal Code.

The other point I want to bring up is with regard to the police. For instance, police officers will say that the most likely gun they will be

injured or killed by are their own guns. In fact, their bulletproof vests were designed to repel a slug from their issued firearms.

When we talk about increasing the supply of firearms in our country, would the member not agree that it will take a lot of examination to see whether this bill fits in all of that?

● (1705)

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Part of why I am bringing this up is to try to draw attention to the fact that this bill creates a knowledge, appreciation and clarification of the laws around self-defence. We are trying to ensure the laws that talk about self-defence are not used by people to create a vigilante system that will end the lives of many of our young people.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-26. This is a great honour for me given that I have happily agreed, at the NDP whip's request, to become a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. This is both a great honour and a great challenge for me.

I will take advantage of my speaking time to express my opinion about a bill that the committee has studied and to talk about the ins and outs of bills like this one, their impact on society and their usefulness to the courts.

It is very important to understand that the courts are working to help society, to ensure order and to suppress crime using the tools they have been given by, among others, our House of Commons. That is an important notion because the bills that we draft, discuss, debate and study in committee to achieve an outcome are just part of the courts' toolkit.

Of course, simply passing a bill does not solve all problems. Quite the opposite. The goals of a bill can be achieved only if other authorities, including this House, give police forces and other stakeholders the means to engage in prevention and education and if other levels of government are equipped to ensure that the implementation of the law achieves the desired results.

I have to say that I am also very honoured to speak to this bill because I personally believe that it is a good model. This bill should become an operational model for the work of this House and of the various committees my colleagues work on.

Government Orders

I want to emphasize that because the New Democratic Party, as represented by committee members, was disappointed in a number of things. Unfortunately, even though the other members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights agreed to two of the amendments we proposed, seven of our amendments were rejected, including, among others, an amendment that was very important to us and that had to do with actions taken in self-defence, such as in situations involving domestic abuse.

Some of my colleagues have given very eloquent, detailed speeches on this issue, which is very important to us. I will not necessarily go into further detail on the matter. However, I would like to come back to the fact that if there is one measure of satisfaction that all members of this House can express and, would be great. Incidentally, I would like to point out that we are all here as representatives of our constituents, first and foremost, and we are accountable to them, to everyone in our ridings, no matter which party we belong to.

Coming back to the main point I wanted to make, when all is said and done, and considering the results achieved, Bill C-26 is a great example of how this House and its committees can work together.

• (1710)

Although by no means ideal—that would be going to far—it is nevertheless a model that all members in this House can follow in order to improve the atmosphere here, which is not always easy. I do not wish to dwell on examples from the past, but unfortunately, the fact is that this government continues to blindly and stubbornly advance its own agenda, while dismissing any informed opinions that differ from its own. I would like to again point out the success of Bill C-26.

I would now like to address another very important aspect that gives us a great deal of satisfaction about the goals achieved while working on Bill C-26. It is important to understand that creating legislation that deals with a subject as complicated as self-defence and the protection of personal or other property is like walking a tightrope.

Defining the limits of actions, violent or not, that in some cases are clearly criminal and in others are not, can be very tricky.

As you know, self-defence is a widely accepted principle. Some of my colleagues, like the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth, have been very clear on this subject—and I thank them for that. In my opinion, this has allowed all of my colleagues to understand that even though self-defence is widely accepted by the public, there are nonetheless some inherent risks involved in its implementation.

The New Democratic Party does not accept and will never accept vigilante justice. It is very, very important to understand that. Likewise, it will never accept the pure repression that this government is promoting. Nuance is very important. Fortunately, or unfortunately—depending on one's point of view—we do not live in a world without nuance, where everything is black and white. On the contrary, the circumstances surrounding a case before the courts can become very important and can affect the outcome tremendously. That is one of the reasons our justice system gives judges some latitude. They are not, however, given full or arbitrary latitude.

Our judges have to make their decisions and work within the confines of the law and case law.

I am pleased that this bill will give our courts new tools for building more balanced precedents in matters of self-defence, protection of property and citizen's arrest. It is very important.

However, I am warning this government not to believe that passing this bill will solve all the problems. On the contrary, if we do not give the other stakeholders—such as our courts or police officers—all the tools they need to implement this legislation, then unfortunately, Bill C-26 may very well not meet its objectives.

• (1715)

I repeat: I wanted to put this in perspective. This bill will be only one of a number of methods for achieving the important objective of protecting ordinary people who, in some exceptional circumstances, may find themselves in situations where they could be convicted of a crime.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am just curious. I have not heard again the reference to judicial discretion. I know there has been some argument in committee by the NDP in relation to this, and then again some discussion here. I am wondering how the member feels about removing judicial discretion for judges in respect of victims. The NDP has said in the past that judicial discretion should not be removed and that a judge should be able to send people away for as long as the judge feels is appropriate.

We say that we need to send a clear message to the community that violent crimes, violent drug offences and gang-related organized crime will not be tolerated and that the people who commit these crimes deserve mandatory minimum sentences. That would remove judicial discretion and bring certainty across the country that people who commit violent crimes have to do serious time.

I am wondering if the member agrees with our position here to allow judges to have judicial discretion in relation to victims' rights.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question and comments. That is a very good question.

I think judicial discretion is key. I therefore find it particularly strange to see the hon. member getting upset about the fact that judges have a certain amount of discretion in the performance of their duties, in their use of the criminal justice system.

Government Orders

Unfortunately, this government has always had the bad habit of applying the “give a dog a bad name and hang him” philosophy. What is really outrageous is that they believe that wishful thinking can solve any problem and they refuse to trust professionals, people who, through years of practising law, have acquired sufficient judgment to apply the law to its fullest extent. Indeed, under our Criminal Code, life and other very stiff sentences can be imposed. Judges have the freedom to impose such sentences and it is very important that their freedom be preserved.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative member said that eliminating judicial discretion and imposing minimum sentences gives victims more rights and ensures that those who commit serious crimes are incarcerated for a certain amount of time.

However, and I do not know whether my colleague is aware of this, with minimum sentences criminals generally are more inclined to plead guilty in order to negotiate a shorter sentence. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

Personally, I think this proves that minimum sentences do not always work.

• (1720)

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague very much for her question.

We can consider minimum sentences from several perspectives, as the government argues. We can take the statistical or epidemiological point of view: it has been clearly shown that minimum sentences do not reduce or prevent crime. On the contrary, they result in more crime.

I remember very well some discussions we had at our national convention in Vancouver last year, especially with correctional officers. Apparently all inmates, no matter what sentences they receive—except for those serving a life sentence with no possibility of parole—will have a life after serving their sentences. Whenever hope is crushed or thwarted, the inmate is all too easily pushed into despair, or put in a position where they could reoffend or commit more serious crimes.

It is truly important. We are seriously worried about this and we will continue to defend our position as we continue our work in this place.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak for a second time to Bill C-26. Those watching the House of Commons today might be thinking that they are watching a competition to see how many times the Criminal Code can be amended in one Parliament, with these Conservatives and their tough on crime agenda.

Nevertheless, I would like to say that I think this change is essential. A number of lawyers and judges say that this is a necessary change. There is no denying that the Criminal Code sections on self-defence, defence of others and defence of property have been causing some confusion in the courts for a long time. I would like to read a section of the presentation made by the Canadian Bar Association to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

The Criminal Code provisions concerning self-defence, defence of others, and defence of property have been subject to decades of criticism, and have been an ongoing source of frustration for lawyers, judges and juries. This is due to the multiplicity of relevant Code sections and subsections, and the variations among their elements. Many high-profile cases have faltered on jury instructions regarding self-defence.

Clearly, there was a real need for change. As a member of this House, I am pleased that we were able to bring about this change. I would also like to congratulate my colleague from Trinity—Spadina for having initiated this bill in the previous Parliament.

As we all know, this bill was inspired by one specific case. Mr. Chen was trying to protect the merchandise in his store. When he discovered that the thief who had stolen a plant—I think—had returned to his store, he detained that person, but he faced charges himself.

During one of our meetings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, someone from the convenience store owners' association was present. He talked about this need and this desire on the part of owners—those who cannot afford a security guard—to be able to protect their property and put an end to these constant thefts. He pointed out that convenience stores tend to be robbed over and over again, and this translates into serious losses at the end of the month.

I understand that situation. Many small and medium-sized businesses are trying to be independent, and they do not necessarily have the means to protect themselves by hiring security agents. So if someone steals milk every week, eventually that ends up being a loss for the convenience store. I really do understand the situation.

During testimony, we asked a lot of questions about the bill. We were a little worried about the balance between the subjective and objective elements of the bill. We even presented some amendments that, unfortunately, were rejected. The Conservative Party rejected one amendment in particular. We were disappointed about that, but we worked well together to make sure we covered the issue thoroughly.

We also considered whether this could become a trend and what we could do to make sure that it does not. By that, I mean making sure that people do not take on the role of the police. People can put themselves in potentially dangerous situations by arresting someone themselves if they do not have the experience or the strength to do it.

However, we all agreed that we do not want to see this to become a trend. We also proposed amendments to prevent that from happening, but that does not mean we should not have these provisions.

In my opinion, Bill C-26 also includes another important and interesting element.

• (1725)

It contains a non-exhaustive list that the judge can consult when a person pleads self-defence. This list allows the court to determine whether that person has a history of violence, whether there is a history of interaction between the parties, the nature of the force, the size of the person, etc.

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Of course, I am a small woman and I would be afraid of a large man. I have reason to be afraid in certain situations. This is very important to consider, particularly when we think about women who are victims of domestic violence and who, every day, have to face a person who could do them harm. It is very important to consider the factors on this list.

I am also happy that this list is not exhaustive and that there is always the possibility of adding additional factors to it. We know that, with time, we will find other factors that should be added to the list.

We also heard comments about security guards. I find this dynamic very interesting. Our society seems to be depending more and more on security guards, and private ones for that matter. I encourage the House to examine the issue of private security guards. They are not necessarily obliged to obey the charter.

This bill will affect their work because, when they are on site, they try to protect a store or shop and its goods. They cannot always arrest someone. There is, therefore, a certain desire among security guards to see these changes implemented. They are very happy about them, and I encourage the House to continue to examine this issue. Personally, I believe that some studies are needed in this regard.

I would also like to speak about the arrest of a person after the fact. We know that, in some rural communities that do not have as large a police force as metropolitan areas like Montreal, it is not always possible for a police officer to come and arrest someone who has committed a minor crime, such as stealing plants, as in the case of Mr. Chen.

The bill clearly states that a person can only be arrested if it is believed that the police would not have arrived in time to make the arrest. It is important to include this. Perhaps it does not go far enough. We submitted a number of amendments to try to restrict this a bit, but the Conservatives refused. The bill states that it can only be done when a peace officer cannot come to arrest the person in the place of the citizen. I am pleased about this because it could be dangerous for someone to make an arrest because that person may not necessarily have the expertise or the strength required.

I will end my speech here. I would like to point out once again that we support this bill, but that we do not want it to become a trend.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville will have five minutes for questions and comments when the House resumes debate on the motion.

[English]

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

STUDY ON INCOME INEQUALITY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.) moved

That the Standing Committee on Finance be instructed to undertake a study on income inequality in Canada and that this study include, but not be limited to, (i) a review of Canada's federal and provincial systems of personal income taxation and income supports, (ii) an examination of best practices that reduce income inequality and improve GDP per capita, (iii) the identification of any significant gaps in the federal system of taxation and income support that contribute to income inequality, as well as any significant disincentives to paid work in the formal economy that may exist as part of a "welfare trap", (iv) recommendations on how best to improve the equality of opportunity and prosperity for all Canadians; and that the Committee report its findings to the House within one year of the adoption of this motion.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce my motion M-315, on the issue of income inequality in Canada.

I would like to start by telling the House a bit about my dear friend the late Wallace McCain, a great Canadian who passed away last year. At his funeral, Frank McKenna gave the eulogy, and in describing Wallace, Frank said:

He was a steely-eyed capitalist, competing and winning against the biggest and best in the world. On the other hand, he was also a deeply patriotic Canadian, committed to a caring and sharing society. He believed the government has an important role. He believed in public health care. He believed in early childhood development, he believed in progressive social policies. He believed that we truly are our brother's keeper.

Wallace McCain used to say, "I pay a lot of taxes. I don't mind paying taxes. Everybody's got to pay their taxes. We get a lot for our tax money in this country".

I share this story about Wallace's vision on the role of government because I do not believe that the issue of income inequality should be reduced to one of class warfare. It should be about creating and protecting equality of opportunity.

Wallace McCain would have wanted Parliament to study income inequality because he would want us to continue to ensure that Canada is a place where we can grow up in Florenceville, New Brunswick, and with education, hard work and a lot of determination, go on to conquer the world. Then when we succeed, it is about giving back. It is about building a Canada where we can hope for a better life for our children, our grandchildren and our neighbours' children and their grandchildren. It is about making sure that regardless of where we start, we can work to make a better life for ourselves and our families, that we have a chance.

As MPs, we have a responsibility to make sure that Canadians can access the tools they need to succeed, regardless of where they start. Unfortunately, in Canada opportunity remains far from equal. Income inequality across Canada is in fact growing. This has been the trend for the past generation under federal and provincial governments of all stripes.

Inequality is growing between Canadian regions as our economy is divided between resource-rich provinces and those without. Inequality is growing between urban and rural Canada, and it is growing between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians. These growing inequalities result in tremendous costs for our economy in terms of lower economic growth and higher demands on health and social services.

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The economic cost of growing inequity and inequality for aboriginal Canadians is particularly alarming, and the trend is getting worse. On the issue of aboriginal poverty, we face the growing cost of Canada's youngest and fastest-growing population also being the most economically disadvantaged and socially disenfranchised.

Growing income gaps have been the trend across OECD nations, although some countries are doing better than others. When it comes to the growing gap between rich and poor, no political party in Canada has a monopoly on answers or the blame, but in recent public opinion surveys, Canadians have identified growing income inequality as the most important issue they want their members of Parliament to be working on. That is why I proposed this motion: so that parliamentarians could work together across party lines on ideas to strengthen equality of opportunity for all Canadians.

The issue of growing income inequality in Canada has recently been identified as a major public policy challenge by the OECD, by the Conference Board of Canada and by Canada 2020. The level of inequality in Canada is in fact above the OECD average, and while it is true that the U.S. still has higher income inequality than Canada, income inequality in Canada is now growing at a rate faster than that in the U.S.

Even Bank of Canada Governor Mark Carney agreed that this recent growth in inequality is an important challenge, and Mark Cameron, a Conservative and a former director of policy to the Prime Minister, has argued that addressing the issue of growing income gaps should be a priority for the Conservative government. Let me read from Mr. Cameron's recent paper on the issue:

A society in which a small group is perceived to be benefiting unfairly, or where there are wide gaps between social and economic classes, can lead to dissension, jealousy and anti-social behaviour, even if the less well-off are still making material gains. This, in turn, can lead to increases in crime, loss of participation in social and charitable organizations, and greater demands for government intervention to help deal with these social tensions. Such a scenario should concern not only social democrats or liberals..., but also conservatives who are concerned about maintaining public support for free markets and limited government.

• (1735)

The fact is, equality is good for the economy. However, on that front our economy faces strong headwinds. The problem of Canada's shrinking middle class has been somewhat masked by cheap credit as Canadians borrow more and increase personal debt in order to make ends meet. Canadians now owe, on average, more than \$1.50 for every dollar of annual income.

The record levels of debt-financed consumption we see by Canadian households cannot continue forever. The Bank of Canada has already identified Canada's record levels of household debt as the biggest risk to our economy, and it is just a matter of time before rates start to rise. The problems of growing income inequality will grow as rates go up.

Recent studies also show that income inequality is not just growing between individuals; it is also growing between Canadian neighbourhoods. In fact, incomes in the poorest neighbourhoods in Canada are not just stalling: between 1980 and 2005, their incomes actually shrank, making the poor even worse off. However, in the top neighbourhoods, incomes continue to grow rapidly. As a result, Canadian cities, communities and towns are becoming increasingly

ghettoized. This division leads to weaker communities, increased crime and worse outcomes for health and education.

The Code Red study in Hamilton, Ontario, looked at the link between income inequality in Hamilton neighbourhoods and the health of its citizens. The results are startling. It found a 21-year difference in life expectancy between those living in the richest neighbourhoods and those living in the poorest. In fact, the poorest neighbourhood in Hamilton would rank 165th in the world in terms of life expectancy.

People living in poorer neighbourhoods also require significantly more time in the hospital. They are more likely to find themselves in emergency rooms.

Healthy birth weights are an important indicator of future health. The average rate of low birth weights in sub-Saharan Africa is 15%. The study found seven Hamilton neighbourhoods where the rate was more than 20%, including one where the rate was, astonishingly, 47%.

The study described some of the poorest neighbourhoods in Hamilton as living with

...Third World outcomes and Third World lifespans—all the more shocking in a city with a major medical school and top teaching hospitals, in a country with universal, publicly funded health care.

Income inequality can be a life-and-death issue. Stats Canada has been looking at income levels and the probability of dying prematurely. The results show a Canadian male in the top 20% of income earners only has a 27% probability of dying prematurely. However, that risk rises to 35% for average-income males and 50% for those in the bottom 20% of incomes. It is 52% for an aboriginal, and there is a 69% chance of premature death for those living in a shelter or rooming house.

The issue is also about hope. For generations, Canadians have prided themselves in calling Canada a land of opportunity, a place where someone can arrive with nothing, but with hard work and perseverance can make a better life for themselves and their family, and while they are struggling to make it, Canada's social safety net will be there with them.

The economic mobility project recently asked Canadians about their current thoughts on economic mobility and their level of hope for the future. Only 47% of Canadian parents—less than half—now believe that their children will be able to match the same living standards of their parents.

As parliamentarians, we should consider that fact carefully. When people no longer have hope for the future and for their children, that is when they start getting into trouble.

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When it comes to specific measures that can both reduce income inequality and improve GDP per capita, the focus of the proposed finance committee study, there are some areas in which Canada is already adopting some best practices at both the federal and provincial levels.

I believe one good idea is the working income tax benefit. This refundable tax credit helps remove disincentives to work by bridging the welfare gap faced by low- and modest-income Canadians. It helps the recipients and it helps the Canadian economy. It is an idea that was first introduced by the previous Liberal government in the 2005 fall mini-budget and the subsequent election platform, and it was implemented by this Conservative government in budget 2007 and increased in 2009. It is an idea that builds on successful provincial programs, such as Saskatchewan's employment supplement and rental housing supplement and Quebec's work premium, which are also designed to help Canadians in those provinces climb the welfare wall and get out of the welfare trap.

Another area where investments both grow the economy and help address inequality is investments in early learning and child care. Together with the provinces, communities and parents, we can support initiatives for early learning and child care and help make sure Canadian kids get a good start.

• (1740)

Income inequality is a complex issue. Complex, challenging issues are exactly what we as parliamentarians have a responsibility to take on here. There are groups and individuals with expertise on income inequality. There are faith-based community organizations and churches that are on the front lines of this issue. We can hear from them and learn from them. We can hear from other levels of government to help inform federal policy and help us tackle this problem together.

After 15 years as a member of Parliament, I am not so naive as to believe that a study by the House of Commons finance committee will solve income inequality once and for all, but it will be a start. It will engage Parliament in a constructive non-partisan effort to deal with an issue that Canadians care deeply about. It will help us understand this issue better and put Parliament on a path of progress where we can work with other levels of government and other stakeholders to address it. Canadians want us to deal with income inequality, and we should not disappoint them.

I would like to conclude on a personal note.

Growing up, I went to Dr. Arthur Hines Elementary School in Hants County, Nova Scotia. It is an area where a lot of people face very deep rural poverty. Wendy Elliott of the Kings County *Advertiser* has written about this issue of rural poverty. She has also written about the fact that Canada is the only G8 country with full day classes and no national school meals program.

The fact is that where I grew up, a lot of the kids went to school hungry. Of the 23 students in my grade 6 class at Dr. Arthur Hines school, fewer than half went on to graduate from high school. Those who did had one thing in common: they had access to some early learning, generally from parents who read to them. Some of the kids did not have that opportunity, not because their parents were bad parents but because their parents had trouble reading.

Today the Hants Shore Community Health Centre provides early learning to local children to help all the local children get a good start. Thanks to pioneers like former principal Hazel Dill and restaurateur Michael Howell, nutritional education is helping kids eat better food. As a result, not only are more kids from Dr. Arthur Hines school graduating from high school in Hants County, they are winning scholarships and going on to post-secondary education as well.

Let us learn from these success stories. Let us approach this with an open mind and open hearts. Let us develop ideas that can help all Canadians. Let us understand this important issue better. This motion and this study are an important step for the Parliament of Canada to understand income inequality better. It is an important step in helping us address income inequality, which is an issue that Canadians say is a top issue they want us to deal with here in Parliament.

I hope that we can, as individual members of Parliament and as political parties, put partisanship aside and approach this issue by supporting this motion. I certainly look forward to this debate now and in the coming weeks. There will not be a vote until June. I would urge all members of Parliament from all parties to keep an open mind and an open heart, and hopefully we can show Canadians that we can make Parliament work for a more equal and more equitable Canada.

• (1745)

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, one must wonder whether the hypocrisy of the Liberal Party really knows no bounds. It was just a few years ago that our government introduced the child tax benefit to benefit and improve the lives of single moms who are underprivileged. Members will remember that it was a senior member of and senior adviser to the hon. member's party who said that they would use it to buy beer and popcorn. What an awful shame that was.

The member indicated that we introduced the working income tax benefit in 2007, which he supports. In the five years since, the tax benefit has proven to be a very effective tool in helping underprivileged people get back to work.

In February 2009, the member for Kings—Hants said:

The working income tax benefit...has helped many working families and increasing it further will contribute even more significantly to helping make work pay.

Therefore, I ask the member why the Liberal Party voted against its creation in 2007, and whether he will finally apologize on behalf of his party for denying hard-working Canadians this—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would like to give the hon. member for Kings—Hants time to respond.

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, I guess if Canadians watching this debate were hoping that perhaps we were starting a less partisan approach to this important issue, they would be disappointed by hearing from that hon. member.

As the Conservatives mock and laugh at income inequality and Canadians who are living below the poverty line, I hope they can consider the immaturity of their approach and the effect of their pithy partisanship on the way Canadians look at Parliament. I find it very disappointing that the hon. member would not take his work as a parliamentarian seriously and actually try to address this issue that I and my party are seeking to address in a non-partisan and constructive way.

• (1750)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, first of all I would like to thank my Liberal colleague for his motion to study income inequality in Canada. Because of his compassion for people in difficult circumstances, I would like to ask him a question.

When the last budget was tabled, the government announced that it would no longer subsidize the National Council of Welfare. The work of the NCW brings the concerns of people living in poverty into the political sphere, while providing important information to community organizations, researchers and the government in order to implement measures that will eliminate poverty.

NCW's annual budget is only \$1.1 million and its work gives hope for a real distribution of wealth. Does my colleague support the government cuts to the NCW, an organization that provides assistance and studies poverty in Canada?

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question very much. Given the level of poverty in Canada, it is clear that now is not the time to be withdrawing resources from groups that are looking for solutions and ways to reduce poverty.

I do not understand why the government has cut funding from such programs. It is clear that we must invest more and try to come up with more ideas. We must involve other groups in Canada, such as community groups and churches that work to address challenges in our communities every day. We must work more closely with the other levels of government, the municipal and provincial governments.

I agree with the hon. member. In my opinion, this is not the time to be cutting funding from important groups that are working to find solutions.

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, I truly appreciate the opportunity to discuss today's motion introduced by the member for Kings—Hants, although I must express my sincere disappointment.

The member for Kings—Hants, not too long ago, would have mocked these types of grand but ultimately empty proclamations on income inequality. Indeed, in recent memory he told the House what truly drives economic growth and improves the fortunes of all Canadians. I will remind him of his own words. He stated, "Government does not create jobs. The economy does. The appropriate role of government in managing the economy is to set the conditions for investment opportunity, growth and job creation. Redistributing incomes is a poor substitute for ensuring that

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opportunities to participate in the economy are shared throughout all regions of the country and all sectors of society".

I do not mind admitting that he was actually right then but he has really drifted away from that position now.

[Translation]

He ended up in the Liberal Party, which endorsed the lamentable and outdated policies of the 1970s, policies that created outsized government bureaucracies and endless social programs and imposed ever-increasing, damaging tax rates on businesses and individuals.

We know that during the last election, the Liberal Party, which was relying on the hon. member for Kings—Hants as its finance critic, made raising corporate taxes a key plank in its election platform.

Against all the empirical and theoretical evidence to the contrary, the Liberal Party wanted—and still wants—to deprive entrepreneurs and businesses across the country of billions of dollars annually in order to "invest" in a "fairer" Canada. But, it does not work that way and the hon. member for Kings—Hants knows it.

Increasing corporate taxes, the cornerstone of the Liberal Party's economic policies, deters investors, kills jobs and takes money out of the pockets of Canadian families.

• (1755)

[English]

As respected economist, Jack Mintz, from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, recently explained in the *Financial Post*:

...corporations do not pay taxes—people do. People work for businesses, owners provide financing and consumers buy goods and services. Corporate taxes are either shifted forward to consumers as higher prices or shifted back onto shareholders through lower dividends and capital gains and/or workers by reduced negotiated salaries and benefits.

If Canada reduces corporate taxes... Businesses will invest in more machines and structures, often with the most advanced technologies. The demand for workers consequently increases—businesses bid up wages to attract workers or take on more workers.

Mintz also referenced a recent independent Oxford University study that concluded that business tax increases, like those advocated by the Liberal Party, are passed onto workers by over 50% in the short run and more than 100% in the long run due to lower worker productivity. If the Liberal Party were really interested in improving prosperity for all Canadians, why would it publish the very businesses and entrepreneurs who make it happen?

Only a few short years ago, the member for Kings—Hants understood the folly of the left's reflexive demands for higher taxes on businesses. In this very House he said:

Innovative, forward-thinking governments globally have proven that we can build a competitive economy with dramatic reductions to corporate taxes....

We only need to look at the Netherlands, Sweden.... Australia and New Zealand....

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The Scandinavian example is particularly important to help guide us because Scandinavian countries value investments in social policy...and, at the same time, they saw the need to reduce their corporate tax levels to some of the lowest corporate taxes in the world.

The old globaphobic, socialist, Luddite nonsense that somehow innovative and forward-thinking economic policy is contrary to good social policy is wrong.

We have tried to work with that Liberal member and hoped that the Liberal Party would listen to evidence presented at committee to disprove its flawed thinking but I am not overly hopeful. When it comes to waiting for some rational thinking from the Liberal Party, to quote Benjamin Franklin, "He that lives upon hope will die fasting".

[*Translation*]

Let us be clear. Since coming to power, the Conservative government has brought in strong economic policies that have allowed us to offer more opportunities to more Canadians, and especially to low- and middle-income Canadians.

Furthermore, these economic policies are achieving results. Since 2006, some 1.1 million net new jobs have been created, which represents the strongest growth in the G7. This means that 1.1 million more Canadians are working than under the previous Liberal government.

What has contributed to this job growth? As I just said, the Conservative government has taken major steps to reduce the tax burden on businesses that create jobs. The result? Canada has the lowest overall tax rate on new business investments in the G7 and can finally compete with all major OECD countries regarding corporate tax rates. This has allowed Canadian job creators to offer better salaries and to invest in training, equipment and technology, so they can compete more effectively on the global market, thereby protecting jobs in Canada and creating new ones.

[*English*]

As Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters president, Jayson Myers, recently declared that without the Conservative government's aggressive tax reduction agenda "the recession would have been deeper and unemployment would have certainly been higher. Now, however, we have a business sector...better poised to take advantage of new market opportunities, which will, in turn, continue to generate job growth".

However, we have done much more than that. Since 2006, and especially through Canada's economic action plan, we have made key investments in infrastructure, science, research and development and much more. We have also kept transfers to provinces and territories for health care and schools at record high levels, unlike the previous Liberal government that gutted them. It was a shameful Liberal legacy that hurt the most vulnerable Canadians.

Furthermore, we have taken targeted action to help low income Canadians. This includes removing more than one million low income Canadians from the tax rolls completely and one-third of the personal income tax relief provided by our Conservative government is going to Canadians with incomes under \$42,000 even though they pay about 13% of taxes. Additionally, we introduced the working income tax benefit to reduce barriers for low income Canadians to enter the workforce, something that nearly everyone agrees has been

tremendously positive, except for the Liberal Party that voted against its creation.

In the words of McMaster University professor, Bill Scarth, "[WITB] stimulates employment rather than subsidizes people not to work. ...it's a fundamental and beneficial change".

While our Conservative government has been pursuing smart economic policies to encourage job creation, today's motion from the member for Kings—Hants, and more important, the Liberal Party's embrace of far left economic thinking of higher taxes, is not what Canada needs.

We have committee work to do. It is a charged agenda in the finance committee. We have tried to work with that member in the finance committee. I am not sure why he refuses to work with the rest of us. We tend to get along very well with the NDP members in committee. That lone member just does not seem to get that the economy is a priority of Canadians and we will work toward ensuring that Canadians' priorities are addressed with or without him.

● (1800)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to this motion of income inequality. One of the fundamental tenets of the NDP is the promotion of a more equal society and therefore we will be supporting this motion.

[*Translation*]

Increased inequality is one of Canada's greatest challenges. Most Canadians' real wages have remained stagnant for several years now. In fact, the average income of Canadians has increased by only 5.5% over a period of 33 years.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, income inequality is growing faster in Canada than it is in the United States. Much of this growing inequality can be attributed to an increase in the revenues of the richest 1% of the population. Canadians who belong to that 1% have increased their share of the nation's total revenue from 8.1% in 1980 to 13.3% in 2007.

In fact, Canadians in that 1% are responsible for nearly one-third of all total income growth between 1997 and 2007. This growth occurred at the expense of other income groups.

[*English*]

This increase in equality of the 1% has had serious implications for the majority of Canadian families.

Lars Osberg at Dalhousie University argues that over the period from 1981 to 2006 the life experience of most Canadian families has changed. The new normal has been that entering cohorts of young workers have earned less in real terms than their parents' generation did at the comparable age.

We also now see double the unemployment rate for young Canadians. The national unemployment rate is already far too high. Our young people are also facing a much tighter job market. Conservative budget plans call for unemployment to actually rise. Women, aboriginal people, racialized communities and recent immigrants also suffer from disproportionate poverty relative to other Canadians. Such inequality has societal consequences.

In 2009 a groundbreaking book on inequality by British scholars Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett demonstrates that inequality, more than GNP or GDP, has a significant impact on a range of social indicators, indicators like health outcomes, such as the average life expectancy, and in other measures of human development, such as rates of literacy, teenage pregnancy or incarceration.

I see this growing poverty, this growing inequality, in my own neighbourhood, in Parkdale—High Park, where people suffering from poverty, from mental health problems, from lack of housing are seeing their condition worsen.

This is not the legacy that we should be leaving to the next generation.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Before the mid-1990s, Canada's tax and benefit system was just as effective at stabilizing inequality as those of Nordic countries, offsetting over 70% of the rise in income inequality. However, the impact of redistribution has declined since then. The OECD found that taxation and benefits now offset less than 40% of the increase in inequality.

The Conservatives tend to focus on an economic spinoff model with respect to income distribution. They seem to think that higher incomes for the rich will ultimately trickle down and benefit the rest of us. However, tax cuts for big corporations and the richest Canadians have resulted in rising income inequality, stagnant economic growth and increasing unemployment. They are really on the wrong track.

Moreover, several university studies have concluded that census data are critical to accurately measuring income inequality. The elimination of the long form census will interfere with our ability to tackle the problem.

[*English*]

The Liberals presided over increased income inequality when they were in power during the 1990s and 2000s. They have also consistently supported Conservative budgets that have led us down the wrong path. We saw during the Liberal government the most massive cuts to our social programs, which had serious and dramatic effects in increasing inequality.

Even when the Liberals had the financial ability with surplus budgets to make positive changes, they cut the national housing strategy and the funding for housing. They cancelled the national minimum wage. They failed to create a national child care program. They also failed to make serious and meaningful investments in our infrastructure.

Private Members' Business

The motion introduced by my colleague from Kings—Hants is a starting point, but the suggested study is limited in the taxes it would examine. Inequality is not influenced only by personal income tax and transfers. It is also influenced by consumption taxation, corporate taxation and international taxation. The motion would be stronger if it included some of these items in the scope of the study. Furthermore, there is no reason that this study should constrain the tools with which we can combat inequality.

It is important to learn from our mistakes, Liberal and Conservative mistakes, mistakes made around the world, and identify precisely what has contributed to the increasing inequality in the latter half of the 20th century.

The specific references to the welfare trap and the disincentives to paid work in the formal economy may open the way to unduly focusing the study on the characteristics of the poor and/or the unemployed as a cause of inequality. This is typically the manner in which the Conservatives approach the issue.

A stronger, more progressive approach would look at the full range of micro and macro economic and structural determinants of inequality, such as income redistribution through taxes and transfers, access to and the process of collective bargaining, access to education, health care and other social services, especially mental health services, structural changes to Canada's industrial composition, the government's role in employment transition and regional inequalities.

The suggested study also limits itself to recommendations to improve equality of opportunity. This is not consistent with the rest of the motion. If we are to study income inequality, there should be recommendations regarding the reduction of inequality.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Income inequality is a serious problem with serious consequences, and Canadians want us to take action.

According to the results of a recent EKOS poll, Canadians' primary concern is inequality. Another recent survey shows that 77% of Canadians believe income inequality is a serious problem, and that they are ready to do their part to find a solution.

The occupy movement gave rise to a major public debate in many western nations about income inequality. The OECD stated that governments like Canada's should do more to reduce income inequality because inequality undermines growth and social cohesion.

The OECD's 2011 report also underlined “the need for governments to review their tax systems to ensure that wealthier individuals contribute their fair share of the tax burden.”

[*English*]

One of the fundamental goals of the NDP is a more equal society and even in its present form, the motion is consistent with that goal.

New Democrats have a long history of fighting to reduce inequality and fighting for equality. Unlike the Conservatives, we will not work actively to increase inequality. Unlike the Liberals, we will not say we want to reduce inequality and then do the opposite.

Private Members' Business

Supporting the motion will be a continuation of our decades of work on income inequality. Canadians can count on New Democrats to work for a prosperous Canada for all.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the motion from my colleague from Kings—Hants.

I was disappointed by the Conservative response in particular, because the motion was presented in a totally non-partisan way to address an issue which more and more Canadians have come to regard as of critical economic importance. I do not think it is a right wing or a left wing issue.

The parliamentary secretary kept talking about corporate taxes. My colleague never said a word about corporate taxes. It does not necessarily involve corporate taxes. The parliamentary secretary went on about all the accomplishments of the Conservative government. Well, maybe yes, maybe no, but that is not the point.

The point is whether we can make Parliament work, whether we can have a study over a course of one year to deal with a problem that is increasingly important in the minds of many Canadians and many people around the world. I do not know why the Conservatives are so hostile to that idea, although the good news is they have more than a month until the vote, so with any luck they might choose to reconsider.

Very rich people are concerned about inequality. The late Wallace McCain, as my colleague quoted Frank McKenna on, was concerned about that. The case of Warren Buffett is well known. He was concerned that his secretary paid a higher tax rate than he did. These are not raving socialists. These are very rich business people.

[*Translation*]

I therefore cannot understand the government's attitude in this regard. I hope that it will change its mind over the coming weeks.

A lot of work has already been done on this, particularly by the OECD. I can perhaps mention some points made by the OECD.

The OECD spoke about three important areas for improving income distribution. First, build human capital; second, build a tax and transfer system; and third, create jobs.

[*English*]

All three of these areas are important for the subject at hand. We do not know enough about them all, which is why the proposed study is so important. We do know something. The first of these, the creation of human capital, is really important for the improvement of income inequality and the increase in equality of opportunity.

As my colleague mentioned, if children are educated how to read at a young age, that will improve their life skills and life chances and this will have a positive effect. There are many other areas, training and retraining, education. All of these are critical to the success of younger and older Canadians. That is one major domain, human capital or human skills, that is of critical importance in this area. We could have done the study, and hopefully we will have such a study, to examine best practices in various places around the world.

There is the Quebec child care program. There are experiments and important lessons to be learned, perhaps from Germany or some

of the Scandinavian countries. If we do not do this study, we will not achieve any of this.

The second domain is the tax system and social transfers. The government mentioned the working income tax benefit, WITB, which was a joint program in a way because we brought it in in the 2005 budget. We then lost the election and the Conservatives reintroduced it. This is a very effective program to both increase the efficiency of the economy and to reduce inequality.

However, we cannot solve the whole question of inequality with one WITB program. I think if we had this study, we would find more WITBs, more things to do that would reduce inequality, while at the same time potentially increasing productivity and the efficiency of the Canadian economy.

Germany, again, is a good case. Germany has actually had stronger growth recently than Canada, lower unemployment and less inequality. Maybe we can learn from the Germans what they have done well in the area and how Canada could copy some of the ideas.

• (1815)

There is not a socialist government in Germany. We do not have to be fearful of those dangerous socialists from Germany. It is actually a conservative government.

Finally, there is the third point of the creation of jobs. As others have said, the best solution to poverty is a job. That is certainly true. I am sure all sides of the House agree that continued success in creating jobs is a really important ingredient both for its own sake to create those jobs and also in terms of the reduction of inequality and increase in equality of opportunity.

In closing, let me say I think this motion was presented in a positive and non-partisan spirit. It is a balanced proposal, neither left nor right. It has the potential to launch us on a track that will allow the government and Parliament to address one of the more pressing issues affecting Canadians today. The only regrettable side of things is that the Conservatives have provided so far a very partisan and negative response. I can only say, in concluding, that I hope in coming weeks they will have sober second thoughts and possibly be able to support this motion.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kings—Hants for giving me this opportunity to discuss the government's contribution to building a prosperous Canada and the important action we are taking to reduce inequality. Certainly Governor Carney yesterday indicated that this is a global issue.

We do not need another study. When there is an issue, I am proud to be part of a government that acts. I think it is important. We just looked at the information that the previous member for Markham—Unionville gave us. He talked about the numerous studies and he talked about three areas that are very important for us to move forward with. We are moving forward. I think this comes back to my nursing days in Emergency. We know what a problem is and we take action. We do not need to navel-gaze forever. It is an important issue. Our government is taking action.

Private Members' Business

Some of my comments are going to perhaps help the member look at the budgets that he has voted against and how they apply to some of things where he has voted against supporting equality for Canadians.

Since coming to office in 2006, our Conservative government has recognized the needs of individuals and families in our country and the challenges they face, which is something that today's motion neglects to mention.

For example, since 2006, our Conservative government has cut taxes 140 times, while ensuring that low- and middle-income Canadians receive the greatest benefit. These tax reductions are leaving significantly more money in the pockets of low- and middle-income Canadians. In fact, the average family of four now saves more than \$3,100 per year in taxes than it did under the previous Liberal government, of which, I must point out, the member for Kings—Hants was a member. Indeed, the progressive tax system that he calls for is alive and well here in Canada.

As a recent *Ottawa Citizen* editorial reminds us, "In 2009, more than 19 million Canadians reported income of less than \$50,000. They paid an average income tax of 7.5%. Those who made more than \$250,000 paid 32.1%. That is pretty progressive."

As a mother and a Canadian who has worked hard to make ends meet, measures introduced by our government have done more for Canadians who struggle with poverty than the motion before us ever could. Not only that, it fails to acknowledge the important work of the Standing Committee on Finance which has already undertaken numerous studies.

And so, again, really, do we need another study? Or should we just act?

For too many low-income Canadians, working can mean less money than staying on social assistance. For these Canadians, it is irrelevant that hockey players make millions of dollars a year. The important thing is finding a job that enables them to support their family. That is why budget 2007 invested more than \$550 million a year to establish the working income tax benefit. Not only did the working income tax benefit fulfill our government's commitment to make work more rewarding for low-income Canadians already in the workforce, it increased the incentive for more Canadians to find work.

We went even further in budget 2009, when we doubled the tax relief provided by WITB, paying out over \$1 billion in benefits to vulnerable Canadians and their families. I am proud that this program is making a real difference in the lives of Canadians who need it most, lowering the welfare wall so people can keep more of their hard-earned money.

For example, without the WITB, a typical low-income, single parent in Manitoba would have only kept about 28¢ of every additional dollar earned between \$3,000 and \$1,000 due to reduced benefits in federal and provincial income-tested programs and taxes. Because of our government's action, the same family now keeps 53¢ of every additional dollar earned. Programs like WITB demonstrate our government's commitment to the most vulnerable Canadians. However, we did not stop there.

Recognizing that families are the cornerstone of our society, budget 2011 introduced measures to further reduce the tax burden on hard-working Canadians. Some families need extra help. For example, many Canadians have added responsibilities in caring for their parents and other family members. These family caregivers make enormous sacrifices, often leaving the workforce and forgoing employment income.

In support of these families that care for one another, our Conservative government introduced the family caregiver tax credit, which came into effect this year.

● (1820)

We also recognize that parents of children with severe disabilities face emotional strains and financial hardships that can be overwhelming. Based on the recommendations of the 2006 Expert Panel on Financial Security for Children with Severe Disabilities, we established the registered disability savings plan. It is designed to help parents save for the long-term financial security of a child with a severe disability. Last fall, the government launched a review of the RDSP program to ensure that RDSPs are continuing to meet the needs of Canadians with severe disabilities and their families. Based on the feedback received during the review, economic action plan 2012 proposed a number of measures to improve the RDSP, including greater access to hard-earned savings.

Another area that he talked about was how important jobs are. Despite the targeted action our government has taken to help low-income Canadians access greater opportunity, the economy and job creation remain our top priorities because we know without a doubt that they are the best way to ensure a brighter financial future for all Canadians. That is why economic action plan 2012 contains important measures to respond to current labour market challenges and meet longer-term labour market needs.

We are taking action to help under-represented Canadians, including immigrants, persons with disabilities, youth, aboriginal people and older Canadians, to find good jobs. For example, we increased funding to expand the ThirdQuarter project, an innovative initiative led by the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce to help employers find experienced workers who are over 50 by connecting them with potential employees. Furthermore, we are extending the temporary hiring credit for small businesses for one year, continuing an important incentive for job creation.

Private Members' Business

For younger workers, the government currently invests more than \$330 million annually to support young Canadians through the youth employment strategy, including youth at risk and recent post-secondary graduates. Last year alone this investment helped to connect nearly 70,000 youth with the work experience and skills training they needed to build the foundation for success in the job market. Our economic action plan 2012 builds on this investment by providing an additional \$50 million over two years to assist more young people in gaining tangible skills and experience. This funding will focus on connecting young Canadians with jobs in fields that are in high demand.

Our Conservative government has dedicated itself to helping low-income Canadians and I know we are on the right track to improving the economy for Canadian families. While the member for Kings—Hants wants to study income inequality, we are hard at work building a fair and prosperous Canada with opportunity for all Canadians.

In conclusion, I am very proud to be a part of a government that acts and does not sit and study and study issues. When action is required, it is not a right issue or a left issue, it is an issue that requires action. I am proud to be acting.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to discuss the hon. member for Kings—Hants' motion to undertake a study on income inequality.

First, I would like to congratulate the hon. member and tell him that this is a very good topic. Before I begin talking about the motion, I would really like to thank all of my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Finance who agreed to examine my motion on tax havens and tax evasion, whether they are on this side of the House or the other.

I would now like to come back to the motion in question and the studies that have been conducted. Contrary to what the government says, it is important to examine what is happening. Right now, it seems as though the government is not making decisions based on facts. It is saying that everything is fine and that the system is working. However, if we look at the facts and rely on the studies that have been done, we realize that the inequality between the rich and the poor is continuing to grow.

An OECD report dated December 5, 2011, clearly states:

The gap between rich and poor in OECD countries has reached its highest level in over 30 years, and governments must act quickly to tackle inequality.

This report examines what is happening in Canada and other countries, and points out that inequality is increasing quickly in the rest of the industrialized countries, including the United States. Thus, the gap between rich and poor continues to grow.

Personally, in my role as the member for Brossard—La Prairie, I have observed this trend. Some of my constituents are workers. The husband and the wife work, have children and must now use food banks. Why? Because, despite the fact they have jobs, they do not make enough to cover all the increases in the cost of living and housing. There is a problem.

It is deplorable when the government decides not to look at what is really happening, because it ignores the real problem and does not ask the right questions. Even my Liberal colleague has admitted that this problem was created not just by this government, but also by previous governments.

When we look at the numbers and how things have evolved over the years, we know that we are heading in the wrong direction, here in Canada and in other industrialized countries. Some countries, such as Denmark, are dealing with this gap. In Canada, the problem is that we are not considering it. The fact that the government does not want to conduct a study is somewhat disappointing.

In September 2011, another agency—the Conference Board of Canada—truly studied the problem. It pointed out that since the mid-1990s, income inequality has been growing faster in Canada than in the United States. We were under the impression that in Canada, everything was going well, and that our country ensured equality between the rich and the poor, but on the contrary, inequality is growing faster here. In the United States, there is truly a significant gap between the rich and the poor and that is where Canada is headed. If the government does not wake up and realize what is happening, we are going to hit a wall. The government also has to listen to what the population is saying.

Does the government realize that there are currently occupy movements in Canada? A number of people, students and families alike, are outraged. The population is speaking and they are saying there is a problem. Studying this problem, with this type of motion, is a start.

Unfortunately, we will have some work to do in order to amend the motion to take it a little further. However, this is a step in the right direction and we can work with the other parties in order to really ensure that we identify the problem and come up with solutions.

One of the things that the Conference Board of Canada looked at was the Gini index, which most people do not know about. Basically, it is a means of measuring the degree of income inequality in a given society. The Gini index ranges from zero to one, with zero meaning perfect equality and one meaning complete inequality. The goal should be to use this index, but unfortunately, Canada does not.

● (1830)

We know these numbers, but Canada does not use them. Furthermore, as the government did with Statistics Canada, it is taking away more and more information and facts that otherwise would allow us to really take stock. If we want to know what is really happening, we need tools like the Gini index.

The Conference Board of Canada is not overly left or right leaning, but I would have to say that it leans a little to the right, if anything. What matters is understanding the effects, the repercussions and what is happening right now, so we can respond.

That is why we will support a study on this. And simply to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but the time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. He will have about four and a half minutes left when this motion reappears on the order paper.

Adjournment Proceedings

The order is now dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am again rising to talk about the recent Auditor General's report, in particular, chapter 2, regarding the replacement of the CF-18s. The Auditor General's report laid bare not everything, but enough to confirm that the only responsible path to Canada's next fleet of fighter jets is by way of an open, transparent and competitive tender. The benefit of such a process is the truth, something which has been in short supply to date.

Parliament's independent watchdogs, the Auditor General and the Parliamentary Budget Officer, have been invaluable sources of information to Parliament, and by extension, to Canadians. Within the scope of their offices they have revealed important facts, figures and discrepancies, and pointed to even more. However, full disclosure would be the benefit of an open, transparent and competitive bidding process. What truths would be exposed by such a process?

The first casualty of the government's story to date would be the fiction that the F-35 is a fighter jet. Truth be told, it is at this point in time more a concept than a reality. Flight testing is only about 20% complete with the most challenging flight tests still years off. According to the March 2012 testimony of the U.S. Government Accountability Office, testing is still at the point of verifying that the plane "will work as intended".

The recent news that the F-35 does not meet at least one of its mandatory requirements missed the point that as of now and for some time into the future, the F-35 does not meet any of the mandatory requirements, unless general airworthiness is one of them.

This is, in essence, the second truth: Nobody really knows when we will be able to determine what requirements the F-35 is capable of meeting. This plane is still very early in its development. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the joint strike fighter's "mission systems and logistics systems are critical to realizing the operational and support capabilities expected by the war fighter, but the hardware and software for these systems are immature and unproven at this time".

In fact, only 4% of testing has been completed on these critical systems. Similarly, its stealth capabilities are far from proven. According to a recent report in *Aviation Week*, test flights at design speed in December caused the stealth fibre matting to peel and bubble.

When the Department of National Defence justified sole sourcing the CF-18 replacement on the basis of only one contractor being able to perform the contract, it sole sourced the contract on a fiction. The

truth of the matter is that no contractor has a plane capable of performing the contract. It is an open question of whether Lockheed Martin ever will be able to perform the contract and whether it will be able to do so by 2020 when the CF-18 gets grounded. It is best to put this out to tender.

• (1835)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure to rise in the House to reply to my hon. friend, the member for Beaches—East York, on the important questions that he has raised.

There are two important programs that are priorities for the Government of Canada that have been referred to in the question. One is the development of a new fighter jet capability, not just for Canada, but for nine countries, all of them allies of ours around the world. It is intended to be the backbone of the fighter jet capacity for our Royal Canadian Air Force; for the U.S. military, not just the U.S. air force; and for seven other allies. The number could well grow by the time this aircraft reaches production. We are talking here, obviously, of the F-35.

I have to take exception to something the hon. member said. It is one thing to dump on the project, to express skepticism about this aircraft, and even to deny its existence, as the hon. member's leader, the leader of the opposition, has done. Hundreds of jobs across Canada, in over 60 companies, actually exist because of the investments Canada has made in this developmental aircraft. All of those facts are beyond dispute. We say these things almost every day. They deny them. However, it is particularly egregious to say that it only exists in concept. One can go on YouTube, or go down to the United States, to the Texas coast, where the physical aircraft is flying. There are not just one or two, but dozens. These are not just the standard version, which Canada may be acquiring in the future, but a much more complex version of the aircraft, which is meant for aircraft carriers. It has apparently landed 87 times on aircraft carriers in recent tests.

This project is important. Canada is committed to developing this aircraft with its allies, but this is just one of the two programs to which the hon. member referred. The other is the program to replace the aging CF-18 fleet that performs invaluable missions for Canada around the world, but particularly at home in protecting our sovereignty and protecting North America.

This is a separate project. It is a procurement project. It must, and will, take place under the laws, policies and regulations governing procurement in Canada. As such, it is under the leadership of the Minister of Public Works.

As many of us on this side have said in recent weeks, the Government of Canada is absolutely determined to hit the same high standards of integrity, transparency and accountability in this project as we have in other important military procurement projects, such as the national shipbuilding strategy and others, which are unprecedented in the recent history of Canada, but which tend to be voted against by the member opposite's party. He knows that as well as I do. It is nice for him to show concern about these things, but the bottom line is, his party does not support this program, and we have come to no longer expect his party's support.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our recent announcement was that this procurement will now be led by a secretariat, involving all the relevant departments. Costs will be for the full life cycle. They will be estimated comprehensively and will be verified. All of this will take place in strict conformity to the procurement laws of Canada. Treasury Board will see to it.

• (1840)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his response, but it is indeed a worrying response. Two things were fundamentally missed in all of that. First, is the very central point that the Auditor General makes in chapter 2 of his recent report, which is that these two programs have been linked in practical and real terms, that the investment and commitment of almost \$1 billion in this developmental program is understood by the Auditor General to be, in reality and practice, actually a commitment by the government to the second program, which is the procurement program.

That is the second worry. If this is really the priority of the government, it has gone around a very troubling and strange way of fulfilling a priority by putting all of its marbles in the F-35 bag.

I would recommend to my colleague that he read the GAO report which talks at length about all the technical difficulties that still call into question, ultimately, the very existence of this plane as a fighter jet.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Madam Speaker, I do not think anyone in the U.S. navy, the U.S. marine corps in any branches of the U.S. military who actually worked on this project is questioning the existence of the dozens of F-35 prototypes that are now flying.

Yes, there is a link between the two programs. The F-35 developmental aircraft is clearly a candidate, and we have stated it to be so, for procurement to replace the aging fleet of CF-18s. However, that procurement, which has not taken place and for which funding is frozen for the time being, will only happen in strict conformity with our procurement laws once the secretariat has done its work, once full life-cycle costs are presented to Parliament, not just for one year but in the successive years to come.

The member opposite will have the full benefit of that information, just as our government will. The F-35, while remaining developmental, is nevertheless real, just as Canada's needs for a replacement to the aging CF-18s are absolutely real.

I would remind the member opposite that the Auditor General's report, and this is the report to which we give priority because it is a Canadian report and our procurement will take place in accordance with Canadian rules, did not call for a competition or a re-opening of tenders. It called for—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. We will have to leave the debate on this for now.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have come here this evening to raise this matter in greater detail and look forward to the response from the government. This is a matter that touches every aboriginal community in our country.

When I put my question to the government, in his wisdom, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development rose and spoke to it. However, I intended it to be directed to either the current Minister of the Environment or the Minister of Natural Resources, who appears to be speaking on behalf of the Minister of the Environment these days. My question raised concerns about the Canadian Environment Assessment Agency reducing to less than a quarter the funds available to consult with aboriginal peoples in the review of major resource projects.

I followed up with a question to the government about how it could defend against not only the cutbacks in the resources available to aboriginal communities to participate in these reviews, but there was very clear decision by the Minister of Natural Resources to throw unfounded assertions and name-calling of aboriginal communities about their motives for being involved in the review of major projects, such as the northern gateway pipeline.

It is important for the government to understand that when cases are brought before our courts and rulings are made by the courts, the government errs in law by not considering important information. It is incumbent upon it to respond according to the direction of the courts.

There was a very important recent Federal Court ruling a year ago—last summer—which held that the then Minister of the Environment had erred in law by deciding that he did not have to consider the impacts of his decisions related to threats to endangered species. He did not have to consider any potential impacts to aboriginal treaty and rights. The court further ordered the minister to go back and reconsider his decision.

In that case the government still has not fully delivered in that responsibility and has been taken to court again. It is my understanding that the ruling has not yet come down.

Why do I raise this important matter? Nobody makes it more clear how important it is that the government deliver on its responsibility for advanced, thorough, direct consultation with aboriginal peoples and to consider and accommodate their interests than the current National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

I will share with the House the recent words by the National Chief. He said:

Currently, First Nations are often the last to know about major resource development. This relegates our communities to few options, usually resulting in confrontation. So we end up with protests and legal battles that frustrate opportunities for everyone and deepen tensions...We are not opposed to development, but we must be involved at the outset...about exploration, ownership, participation in production, and long-term sustainability of our environment, our communities and our futures.

He said that economic partnership and direct consultation should be the cornerstone of the true reconciliation promised by the government.

I look forward to the response of the government to these serious concerns being raised by our aboriginal peoples.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1845)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the member for Edmonton—Strathcona's question.

Our government wishes to fulfill its legal obligation to consult by carrying out meaningful consultations directly with aboriginal communities to ensure that their opinions are taken into account when the time comes to make a decision about a project that could compromise their rights.

Currently, the northern gateway pipeline project is at the environmental assessment stage. I would like to assure the member that consultation with aboriginals is a key part of the assessment.

The Government of Canada, through the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, employs a government-wide approach by collaborating closely with federal regulatory bodies to ensure that consultation with aboriginals is integrated into the environmental assessment and regulatory approval process.

The health and safety of all Canadians as well as the environment are priorities for our government. Understanding and minimizing cumulative impacts is a key part of environmental management and the overall governance of Canada's lands and resources.

We are aware that Canada has a legal duty to consult and accommodate aboriginal groups in certain instances and our government takes its consultation obligations seriously. We consult aboriginal groups where a federal activity may have an adverse impact on an aboriginal or treaty right. We believe consultation is an important part of good governance, sound policy development and decision-making.

Currently, we are working with aboriginal groups, provinces and territories to develop collaborative processes on consultation and accommodation that will result in efficient decision-making and reduce or eliminate duplication with other jurisdictions.

The role of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada is to support and advise federal officials on fulfilling the legal duty to consult. A designate lead Crown consultation coordinator is identified for each project providing a whole-of-government approach to aboriginal consultation. This meaningful consultation supports the Canadian economy by moving projects forward.

Our government continues to work in concert with aboriginal people in both the development and implementation of strategies to ensure informed decisions are made to meet today's needs and those of future generations.

•(1850)

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, there are a lot of generalities, but what I am still looking for are the specifics. The specifics are becoming increasingly apparent, as laid forth by the Minister of Natural Resources mostly in speaking to industry and in response to questions that we raise in the House.

It has now been revealed by the government of the day that it intends to reduce down federal assessment of major projects to just three agencies. While previously agencies such as aboriginal affairs had been invisible in reviews of major projects, including resource projects in Alberta, it is now apparent that they will not be involved at all.

Who then in the federal government will actually stand up and speak for the rights of aboriginal peoples to have a voice in decisions which directly impact them, their lands, their waters and their future interests?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Rickford: Madam Speaker, as I have already said, our government takes its obligation to consult very seriously. As the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona knows, the Crown has a legal obligation to carry out consultations and to provide assistance if a project could potentially compromise ancestral treaty rights. That is exactly what we are doing.

We take our obligation to consult very seriously. The northern gateway pipeline is at the environmental assessment and environmental impact review stage. This review includes consultation with aboriginals, which is exactly what the government is committed to doing. We will fulfill that obligation.

FLOODING IN MONTRÉGIE

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Madam Speaker, on February 10 of this year, I asked the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to tell me what he thought about the request by a group of flood victims from the Richelieu valley for authorization to launch a class action suit and what he intended to do about it.

I asked this question following a press conference held in Montreal on February 9 by the Arsenault and Lemieux law firm. Oddly enough, the parliamentary secretary told me that she sympathized with the flood victims in Manitoba, her home province. First, I would like to say that I too sympathize with the flood victims in Manitoba. The Minister of Industry also answered my question. He said: "there are disaster mitigation programs that the provinces and federal government are constantly working on".

However, my question was not about Manitoba, public safety or even industry. My question was for the minister responsible for infrastructure, who did not provide me with an answer. That is why I am asking the question again this evening.

I would first like to talk about the situation of Mr. and Mrs. Dupuis, the couple who are behind this class action suit.

Adjournment Proceedings

Before April 23, 2011, Mr. Dupuis' property had never flooded. The applicant's certificate of location shows that the property is not considered to be in a flood zone. Mr. and Mrs. Dupuis were forced to leave their home on April 23, 2011, as a result of springtime flooding, which caused 14 inches of water to accumulate in their home, which is quite a bit. They were unable to return to their home until December 28, 2011, eight months later. To date, they have spent \$135,000 on repairs and they have received only \$30,000 from the Ministère de la Sécurité publique du Québec. It is this specific case that initiated the request.

What are the plaintiffs' allegations?

Let me provide a little background. Since 1963, there have been 25 floods over 100 feet recorded at the reference point in Rouses Point, New York.

On April 1, 1937—this goes back quite a while—the Government of Canada applied for the right to build a work and set aside \$500,000. On June 10, 1937, the joint international commission approved the construction of the Fryers Island dam and stated that the construction would also involve dredging.

On January 5, 1976, the Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada stipulated that the Government of Quebec would build the dam and maintain it, including dredging, pursuant to an agreement reached with the Government of Canada. That is the history and the request.

What are the claimants asking for?

They are mainly calling on the government to finally keep a promise made in 1937 to complete this infrastructure, and to carry out the dredging to compensate for the reduced water flow that has resulted from various interventions on the river. Because of this reduced water flow, the entire Richelieu valley is being flooded every time water levels rise.

• (1855)

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address the hon. member's question regarding disaster assistance for provinces and territories for flooding in 2011, including those in the flood-affected Richelieu valley in Quebec. I am very pleased to clarify for the member the federal responsibilities and the federal commitment that our government has made and continues to follow through on.

The 2011 flood season highlighted the importance of this government's continued commitment to strengthen the safety, security and resilience of communities across Canada. In the case of flooding, as with all emergencies, the provinces and territories are primarily responsible for the design and delivery of financial assistance to those directly affected by a given disaster. The primary mechanism that the government uses to support the provinces and territories in post-disaster recovery is the disaster financial assistance arrangements. Since its inception in 1970, the Government of Canada has provided over \$2.1 billion in federal financial assistance under the disaster financial assistance arrangements, or DFAA, across the country, of which over \$970 million have been provided to the Government of Quebec to administer.

In respect of provincial and territorial jurisdiction, individuals who have not yet received assistance should contact their provincial or territorial emergency measures organization. This will allow our officials to process provincial requests for assistance in the most efficient and expedient manner. The Province of Quebec has submitted its request for assistance under the disaster financial assistance arrangements. Public Safety Canada officials are working with provincial officials to move forward with the request as quickly as possible, as is the process. Should the application for DFAA be approved, Public Safety Canada will then work to review provincial expenditures in support of an advanced payment in accordance with existing guidelines.

In order to eliminate or reduce the impact and risks of hazards, some provinces made proactive permanent mitigation investments in advance of the 2011 flood season. The Government of Canada is committed to sustainable investments in disaster mitigation. For mitigative measures taken in advance of the 2011 flood season, the Government of Canada has agreed to cost share these investments with the provinces on a fifty-fifty basis.

The Prime Minister also stated that the Government of Canada was committed to discussing a long-term national mitigation strategy. The member opposite will also know that budget 2012 provided up to \$99.2 million over three years to assist the provinces and territories with the cost of permanent flood mitigation measures undertaken in advance of the 2011 floods. That is the budget he did not support. He should have stood up for his constituents in Quebec and supported budget 2012 to help with mitigation costs.

Disaster mitigation is recognized as one of the most effective means to address and/or eliminate disaster risks. Investment in mitigation reduces the impact of disasters on the lives of Canadians. Additionally, it is an effective approach in reducing the financial burden on governments, businesses, communities and individuals who are affected economically by disasters.

The government is committed to the safety and security of our citizens. Through our collaborative approach to working with our federal, provincial and territorial partners, we will continue to make our communities more resilient to all types of natural disasters.

• (1900)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahm: Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the parliamentary secretary's answer, which did not touch on infrastructure. She spoke about the \$99 million allocated over three years. She is answering a question about the past with a question about the future. I am not asking what investments will be made in the future; I am talking about a promise that was made in 1937 and then repeated by various federal governments, a promise that the federal government would do dredging in order to compensate for the lower flow of the river. I would like her to respond to this first point.

There is a second question she has not answered. What will the government do if a class action suit is accepted? This suit could be looking for up to \$200 million for the people who were affected by the 2011 floods.

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Madam Speaker, we will continue to be committed to the safety, security and resilience of Canadians. Working with our federal, provincial and territorial partners, we will continue to make our communities more resilient to all types of natural disasters. The Government of Canada supports victims of natural disasters in the provinces and territories through the disaster financial assistance arrangements, which is administered by the provinces.

Public Safety Canada has received a request for assistance under the DFAA from the Province of Quebec and officials from both governments are working together in moving this request forward.

I again would remind the member opposite that budget 2012 provided up to \$99.2 million over three years to assist the provinces

and territories, like Quebec, with the cost of permanent flood mitigation measures undertaken in advance of the 2011 floods. I also remind the member that he did not support the budget. He should have stood up for his constituents and supported budget 2012.

The government remains committed to closely working with the provinces and territories and affected communities to increase resilience and help return them to normal life as quickly as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: 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 7:03 p.m.)

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