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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 20, 2012

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 20, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

GATINEAU PARK

Ms. Nicole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many citizens concerning the protection of Gatineau Park.

It is the most visited park in Canada, and it is crucial that the government examine this issue and bring in legislation to protect the park for all time.

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today.

The first is from my constituents who ask that the government consider keeping Kingston as an EI processing hub under the EI modernization bill. The reason for this is that my constituents believe that, first, there is no representation of employment insurance processing for eastern Ontario east of Toronto, and, second, that because there is already a processing centre in Kingston, this is probably the most cost-effective place to put an EI processing centre. If the jobs were moved elsewhere, there would have to be a lot of retraining and relocating, which would be an additional and unnecessary expense.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from constituents who are asking that the government fund the Experimental Lakes Area so that freshwater ecosystems can be studied, understood and properly managed for the benefit of all Canadians, and that the government use the evidence and the data that comes from that research to protect freshwater for Canada and, indeed, provide the data to protect freshwater ecosystems around the world.

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by the good people of the wonderful community of Peterborough.

The petitioners are concerned about the issues of electoral fraud that happened in the 41st federal general election. They are calling for a full investigation to find out who was behind this, to ensure there is sufficient resources for this investigation so that Canada's electoral system that was put at risk through the reports of widespread electoral fraud will be dealt with, and to ensure Canadians confidence in our democratic voting system can be reasserted.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present five petitions on the issue of saving the funding for the Experimental Lakes Area. It has been a trust between the public and its government that these lakes would be used in this way and would be restored, and that the research would be made available to protect the environment Canada-wide and to help internationally. This is in the public interest. It is very much the government's role and responsibility. For the government to abdicate that role and toss this program aside is completely unacceptable.

The petitioners are pointing that out. I have five petitions to that effect.

PAY EQUITY FOR WOMEN

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today.

The first petition is signed by many residents of Thunder Bay and is on the issue of pay equity for working women. They note that women make up over 60% of the paid workforce and yet the reality is that women receive 21% less than men for doing the same work on average, and that 70% of women work in jobs which, despite being highly skilled, are sadly under-valued and frequently under-paid.

Government Orders

The petitioners are calling on the government to address this issue, which is long overdue.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is with regard to the tabling of my cellphone freedom bill.

The petitioners from Quebec feel that it is important to take the step to provide more consumer choice and to promote competition in the domestic wireless market by unlocking network locks on their cellphones.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

FIRST NATIONS FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-27, An Act to enhance the financial accountability and transparency of First Nations, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

• (1010)

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are three motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-27. Motions Nos. 1 to 3 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the Table.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-27 be amended by deleting Clause 1.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-27 be amended by deleting Clause 11.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-27 be amended by deleting Clause 13.

Mr. Speaker, for the public watching, Bill C-27 would:

...[provide] a legislative basis for the preparation and public disclosure of First Nations' audited consolidated financial statements and of remuneration, including salaries and expenses, that a First Nation or any entity that it controls pays to its elected officials.

Also, it would require that this information is published “on a website maintained by or for the First Nation.”. This is from the legislative summary prepared for the House.

I have proposed three amendments to the bill and I will speak specifically to those three amendments. One of them would delete the short title because, as always, the titles are often misleading.

When we are talking about financial accountability and transparency, one would expect that the government would provide resources so first nations would have the ability to do some of the things that are being requested of them, and that there would have been adequate consultation before this bill was put forward.

The two sections of the bill that I propose deleting include clause 11. This clause of the bill allows “...any person...may apply to a superior court for an order requiring the council to carry out the duties under that section...”. Through the bill, an additional burden is being placed on first nations by allowing members of the general public to take a first nation to court if they do not feel that the information is published as required under the legislation. Nobody would argue that leadership in first nations should not be accountable to their own members but the bigger concern is having anybody being able to put this additional burden on first nations.

The third clause that I suggest we delete is the administrative measures clause. It would vest far too much power with the minister. This would allow the minister to “withhold moneys payable as a grant or contribution to the First Nation...” if they are in breach of the legislation, and that the minister would be able to “terminate any agreement referred to in paragraph (b)”. We would see more power being vested in the minister, which is a dangerous trend that we see throughout the current government.

I will touch on where this legislation came from and why we as New Democrats have some serious problems with it. In the legislative summary, it is pointed out that currently first nations communities have an estimated average of 168 reports and that in some communities that goes up to 200 reports that are required by the federal government. In December 2006, the Auditor General pointed out that “AANDC alone obtains more than 60,000 reports a year from over 600 First Nations, [and the Auditor General] concluded that the resources devoted to the current reporting system could be better used to provide direct support to communities”.

Any of us who have first nations communities in our ridings can attest to the fact that we have serious problems in many communities, whether it is housing, drinking water or education, and we continue to see these problems grow. The government has not committed the resources, the attention or the building of the relationship to ensure some of these problems are dealt with.

The reporting burden on first nations is not new information. In 1996, the Auditor General issued a report dealing about the reporting, and that has gone on report after report. It is not just first nations and the Auditor General who are talking about the problems. We also have a Conservative blue ribbon panel from December 2006 which wrote a report entitled, “From Red Tape to Clear Results”. In that report, the panel devoted a special section to the first nations, Inuit, Métis and other aboriginal organizations.

The report states:

The panel is of the view that mechanisms other than grants or contributions for the funding of essential services such as health, education and social assistance in reserve communities are needed...

It went on to say:

Government Orders

[W]e were reminded that the current practice of treating these kinds of transfers to First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Aboriginal organizations as more or less standard contribution arrangements is fraught with problems and leads to a costly and often unnecessary reporting burden on recipients.

● (1015)

That was the Conservatives' own panel and we have not seen the kind of action needed to deal with these reporting requirements. The assistant auditor general appeared at committee with a prepared statement on October 29, 2012. He stated:

At that time, we met with first nations and were told that they were willing to explore ways to ensure that the information needs of Parliament were met, and they stressed the importance of internal accountability. From their perspective, accountability is non-hierarchical and is based on shared objectives. They stated that the reporting framework was of limited value to them, was onerous, and did little to enhance accountability to the community.

That is a very important point because the bill is being sold as enhancing accountability in communities. If I have an opportunity, I am going to read a statement by the Canadian Bar Association about why simply posting numbers on a website does not necessarily enhance reporting accountability within communities. I am sure many people in the House could speak to the fact that we also need resources provided to communities so that community members actually have the knowledge to interpret the financial statements.

Financial statements, in and of themselves, do not speak to whether people are getting good results for their dollars. They are not talking about benchmarking the number of houses built, the number of children attending school or the number of people who now have access to clean drinking water. A financial statement does not provide that information. People say that by putting numbers on a website, accountability is somehow miraculously going to occur.

First nation leadership and community members would all agree that it is important to have accountability between chiefs and councils and their membership. The Assembly of First Nations back in 2006 produced a position paper entitled, "Accountability for Results", which contains numerous suggestions about how accountability could be improved both from the federal government to first nations, because that is one accountability measure that is currently not in place, and second, from chiefs and councils to their memberships. It was an amendment the NDP proposed, but of course, it was voted down.

One of the proposals that the Assembly of First Nations made was that there should be an ombudsperson. The proposal stated:

[First Nations]-led and [First Nations]-specific institutions will be needed, as First Nation citizens must be empowered to hold both their local government and the Government of Canada to account. Such institutions include an Ombudsperson's office, so that individuals have a trusted venue to pursue accountability concerns outside of either the local or federal governments. They would also include a First Nations Auditor General who could both provide ongoing advice to assist [First Nations] governments in providing accountability and, at the same time, improve accountability by exposing problems and recommending solutions.

First nation leadership across this country has been at the table consistently proposing solutions to the government and the government has failed to act on any of them. One of the big sticking points about this piece of legislation is the fact that there was not appropriate consultation. I would be remiss if I did not quote from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 19 states:

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

Once again there is a piece of legislation before the House that does not have that free, prior and informed consent. One would think, given that the government almost a year ago committed to a new relationship, that it would have that free, prior and informed consent before bringing legislation forward. We are seeing bill after bill being introduced in the House without that kind of consent.

In fact, an official from the department yesterday talked about omnibus Bill C-45, clauses 206 to 209 in division 8, and said that it was fine for the government to go ahead without that free, prior and informed consent because, after all, they were just technical amendments. That is simply not good enough in this day and age. If the government is committed to a new relationship, it should make sure that it goes beyond engagement and consults with first nation communities across this country and ensures that legislation is what first nations are asking for.

● (1020)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. Having many first nation communities in my riding, what we see again and again is the absolute refusal of the government to set any kind of economic accountability or transparency within its own department. Therefore, we have seen agreements signed and the government walks away. We have seen contractors left without getting paid for basic jobs, which they were hired to do by Indian affairs.

One of the big issues is the refusal of the department to put ring fencing around project dollars, which is a basic accountability standard at any level, particularly in education, whether it is municipal or provincial. If we look at the K to 12 study or the Parliamentary Budget Officer study, the refusal to put ring fencing around capital projects meant that in 2007-08, \$121 million that should have been spent on grade schools for children was reallocated by the department and blown elsewhere. Therefore, there are no standards of accountability.

Does my hon. colleague think we might get a better set of benchmarks if we start holding the department to standards of accountability, having transparency and allowing citizens to ask the department how it is spending taxpayer money and why it is moving key dollars out of such basic issues as education and spending it on lawyers, consultants and spin doctors?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay is absolutely correct. We know that he has led the fight on schools for first nations children.

What is interesting is that we hear the government continue to talk about accountability and transparency, yet the Parliamentary Budget Officer has to threaten to go to the courts in order to get the information that he requires to do his job.

Government Orders

The member is correct that the government and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs has not demonstrated accountability back to first nation communities. Therefore, they make arbitrary decisions about where money will go and how it will be transferred without explaining how they are managing that money to first nations. There is not that accountability and transparency relationship from AANDC back to first nation communities, so often people are left proposing capital projects for schools or for water systems and then year after year these projects keep getting moved along the chain and people do not know why.

If we want to talk about accountability and transparency, let us make sure that people understand what the money is for, how it will be spent and when the community can expect to receive it.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the member's speech she alluded to no consultation with regard to first nations on the bill. However, we had several witnesses from the memberships of bands come to committee stating that they had tried to get remuneration expenses from chiefs and councillors but the system was too cumbersome. In fact, one of the biggest problems was that they had to divulge who they were. That becomes an intimidation factor for a lot of band members.

To say that we have not done consultations is one thing, but to have members of first nation communities come to committee saying there is a problem is another. Would the member like to comment on the fact that first nation members have to divulge their names to the chiefs and councillors and as a result are intimidated? Would she like to comment on the fact that this is a problem?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member's question reveals a lack of understanding of what "duty to consult" constitutes. Committee meetings are not a consultation process. The member well knows that the government has shifted its language from "consultation" to "engagement", because it recognizes that what it is doing is not consultation.

The member pointed out quite rightly that there have been some challenges with band members getting access to financial information. However, the member is also very well aware that the minister already has the power to provide that information to band members. In fact, the department could not give us an adequate summary of the scope of the problem.

Once again, what we have is a smoke and mirrors bill that is talking about dealing with accountability and transparency. The government has not identified the scope of the problem. It has not identified other potential solutions. Instead, it is using a process that continues to violate the agreement around duty to consult.

• (1025)

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): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to represent the concerns of my constituents from the great Kenora riding. That includes 42 first nations, 25 of which are isolated or not accessible by road.

I want to speak on just two things for the purposes of my 10 minutes.

First, on Motion No. 1, that Bill C-27 be amended by deleting clause 1,

[*Translation*]

If I have time, I will address the reporting requirements, the second issue raised by the opposition member.

[*English*]

Under debate is clause 1 of Bill C-27, first nations financial transparency act. The clause reads:

1. This Act may be cited as the *First Nations Financial Transparency Act*.

Essentially, Motion No. 1 goes to the very heart of Bill C-27 and so I would like to speak about the purpose of this legislation and why this is necessary and therefore its title.

In accordance with provisions in their funding agreements, first nation governments are already required to provide Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada audited consolidated financial statements and a schedule of remuneration and expenses for all elected officials. That deals with the redundancy piece that the member opposite keeps raising.

It is also a provision of these agreements that the audited consolidated financial statements be made available to the first nation membership in the community. On a large scale, this has not occurred. However, these agreements do not stipulate the manner and timing of disclosure. Many first nation governments have put into place sound accountability practices that ensure transparency and help to build confidence among members and other stakeholders.

I have said repeatedly at committee that, as often may be the case, the simple process of making these documents publicly accessible, in my respectful and humble view, will demonstrate that a great number of chiefs and councils are actually in full compliance and very competently managing their financial affairs, despite any challenges we hear. However, this bill is necessary because some first nations have not yet consistently developed and adopted these practices.

We have heard from first nations' constituency members and organizations with substantive and substantial concerns. As a result, questions have emerged about the financial decisions of first nations leaders and how first nations' monies are being spent; questions that can undermine the confidence of the public in all first nation governments, including those who are working to be transparent in their leadership. Indeed, at committee we heard from several witnesses who strive for that.

Ensuring the public disclosure of financial information would help to clarify the actual situation by explicitly stating the expectations of first nations in law with respect to accountability for the financial management of their governments and transparency in the remuneration and expenses that they incur in their roles as chief in council and any other activities with which they are involved. Greater transparency of financial information, including these notes for remuneration and expenses, would remove the speculation that currently exists and dispel rumours around the management of funds by first nation governments and the salaries of their leaders.

Government Orders

The bill would ensure that first nation community members have the information necessary to make informed decisions about their leadership and are better prepared to hold their government to account. The bill, and the easier access to financial information it promotes, would also support better policy development as it relates to first nation people.

One of the witnesses who appeared before the committee, John Graham of Patterson Creek Consulting, pointed out, "...public policy is always better if there is essentially good information".

However, while this information is currently provided to the department, it cannot be shared in any meaningful way to promote this kind of public discussion. We want that conversation to occur between community members and their government. We, as a department or a minister, would prefer not to get involved in it. This goes to the very essence of self-governance, that conversation taking place between those two constituents and not having the department and/or minister involved in it.

●(1030)

The public disclosure of financial information of first nations governments has another benefit of increasing the confidence of potential investments. That level of transparency, with more complete and accurate information about potential partners, joint ventures that we are hearing about and exciting business development on reserve can flourish when these kinds of building blocks are put in place in the first nation people around the concepts of governance in an effort to put it out there to their community members and to the public.

In particular, I am thinking of the potential for business parties to engage in what we know has the potential to be flourishing new relationships in all kinds of first nations communities, particularly in the isolated communities of the great Kenora riding and Timmins—James Bay. Some of these communities are landlocked by good economic opportunities. They are finding ways to do that. We are working in partnership with them, with small business centres across our vast region. We look forward to a more integrated level of participation by first nations communities in our resource sector and the likes. These kinds of businesses want to understand what the financial positions of their first nations governments are and build on the strength of that relationship, from things like that.

We see this as an opportunity to further develop relationships with the private sector in addition to strengthening the relationship with the private sector to strengthen their economy.

[*Translation*]

The second thing I would like to say on the subject of reporting requirements, which was mentioned earlier, is that there is no mention in this bill of the burden currently facing first nations when it comes to reporting. First nations already have to produce consolidated financial statements each year, which are audited by an independent, accredited professional auditor as a requirement of their funding agreements with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, or AANDC.

The bill's objective is to increase transparency and accountability, requiring that these financial statements be disclosed to members of the first nations community as well as the general public. Once these

practices become the norm, first nations will be in a much better position to prove that they deserve to benefit from more flexible funding arrangements. The purpose of the bill is to increase the financial transparency of first nations government, although we do expect this to reduce the reporting burden for many first nations in the medium and long term. This is not an immediate priority.

[*English*]

Bill C-27 is going to deal with the residual issues we have heard from some important stakeholders. We have heard from grassroots citizens across the country, the Peguis First Nation, first nations communities out in Nova Scotia and community members from the great Kenora riding, to name a few.

The private sector is excited about new relationships with first nations communities. We appreciate the critical mass of first nations communities that have chosen to lead by example and demonstrate to other orders of government processes for accountability. This includes furnishing these documents by way of public access, typically on the Internet for their members, disclosing salaries, honoraria and expenses associated with the operations of the chief and council specifically and ensuring information about community infrastructure and decision making would be easily accessible and available via the Internet and elsewhere as applicable.

Our government is not only confident that the bill will be supported by most first nations members seeking to improve the transparency and accountability of their band governments, but we also believe that first nations elected officials will welcome this opportunity, through the bill, to demonstrate that they are already operating as accountable governments. The next important step is simply to supply that information to their constituent members.

●(1035)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague, and in Timmins—James Bay, where we are pretty much one of the centres of international mining, now mining exploration and the Ring of Fire along the James Bay, we are dealing all the time with private sector and first nations, trying to work through consultation, and I would say the relationship has moved ahead dramatically.

We have a few bad actors out there who believe they can just go and they do not need to talk to any first nation, and that is an impediment. However, industry is asking, "Where is the job training? Where is the federal government? How will we get these projects up and running if first nation communities do not have the job training?" They wonder how they can do joint ventures between a multinational and a community with 300 people out in the bush when there is no capital for the community to put that in place.

Government Orders

The other thing I hear in terms of transparency is on resource revenue sharing, because we have had all these BIAs that have been signed, but what we do not have is a clear standard where everyone knows the rules, industry and first nations communities in terms of transparent resource revenue-sharing agreements. I ask what my hon. colleague thinks of that.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I think a lot of that. I think a lot of the member, actually, for asking that question.

As it turns out, this is one of those steps, one, parmi plusieurs d'autres, to address that kind of level playing field transparency that gives the private sector the kind of confidence it can have when it wants to work and establish a joint venture, establish a place in a small business centre. In a number of isolated first nations communities, that is occurring right in the great Kenora riding and right in the Timmins—James Bay riding as well.

It is true; the resource sector offers a dynamic legacy opportunity for first nations communities to participate in a fulsome, integrated way, and these steps, like the bill, provide a substantive opportunity to furnish information that would be available to its members to help actively participate in their government's decision making, whether it is infrastructure in their community or new relationships with the private sector.

Therefore, yes, we are looking forward to this and we see the bill as one critical step toward that goal.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start this question with something hypothetical. Imagine if the United Nations decided to force Canada to disclose all of its financial information, which may not be a bad idea considering the lack of transparency of the government. However, if the United Nations forced disclosure of financial information for the Government of Canada, all the crown corporations, all the business activities of civil servants and politicians, would that be something Canada would find acceptable? Would it be good for the governance of Canada?

My question is: Should it not be the case that the citizens of a first nation should decide and tell their government what things to disclose to them, and would that not be better in the long term for the development of good governance in any organization?

• (1040)

Mr. Greg Rickford: I think that was a lob, Mr. Speaker. Imagine this hypothetical question. If only the Liberal government had carried through on its governance provisions under one of the previous ministers in its caucus, who happened to be the member of Parliament for Kenora, when he brought those forward, and their leader and several caucus members did not have the intestinal fortitude to bring that governance act forward. That is why we are debating certain things like this.

Second, the member is actually spot on. If he had participated or even read some of the transcripts at committee for this instead of getting up and asking this kind of fluffy question, he would know that it is coming from first nation community members.

That is exactly why the bill is here, because it meets the requests of numerous first nations peoples and organizations who simply wanted the bands to provide information to them in a safe, public

forum so that they could understand what kinds of decisions their communities are making, and perhaps—imagine this—play a more vital role in that decision-making process.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in response to the last minute report stage amendments by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. What the member is trying to do is admirable in attempting to delete clauses 1, 11 and 13. I would also propose that we delete clauses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 as well. Bill C-27 is a bad bill from a bad place.

The minister went to the Whitecap Dakota First Nation to announce the legislation, but shortly thereafter Chief Darcy Bear had to write a letter to all members of committee, particularly the member whose bill this was based on, to express his complete dismay at being misled about what the bill was really all about.

Chief Darcy Bear, and all first nations, totally support the principles of financial transparency and accountability. That is the main objective of Bill C-27. However it is totally unacceptable for the bill to have come forward without any consultation with first nations. On that basis alone the Liberal Party has been very clear that it does not want to discuss in this chamber anything that has not already been subject to full consultations with first nations. The minister was clear that no consultation took place on this legislation. There was perhaps some consultation on the concerns raised by the private member's bill that preceded this legislation, but as the government has learned the hard way, this legislation goes way beyond the private member's bill. Therefore, Chief Darcy Bear was quite surprised to see in Bill C-27 the kinds of things that have necessitated the government amendments. Unfortunately, the government has refused to accept any opposition amendments dealing with some of the other concerns expressed by first nations.

Deleting clauses 1, 11 and 13 would at least remove the bill's draconian punishment of first nations that do not adhere to its provisions, and the situation would revert to one in which the minister could use his existing powers regarding compliance with contribution agreements and future funding based on that. First nations have been concerned about this kind of consequence being written into the bill. It removes the minister's discretion in the very complex and difficult issues raised by the bill.

On the Liberal side, we are still very concerned about what Chief Darcy Bear thought was the intention of making mandatory the release of the budgets and revenues and expenditures of first nations to their members.

Government Orders

•(1045)

This bill codifies the paternalism of the Indian Act in an even worse way. The minister already has the power to compel a first nation to release its documents to its band members. The minister has been totally unable to explain to us how often this happens or any commitment that this has been measured in a real way. The problem the bill is trying to fix has been very poorly articulated by the government. We know it is the responsibility of the chief and council to report to their people. When it is a democratically elected chief and council, then it is up to their people to turf out a government or a chief and council who are not complying with the need for transparency and fiscal accountability.

It is again with sadness that we continue to hear from first nations across this country that it has not even been a year since the Crown-first nations gathering, where the Prime Minister promised to reset the relationship. When the government signed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it agreed to free, prior and informed consent, yet this bill and so many others have come before the House without any consultation with first nations.

We in the Liberal Party believe that the principle of consultation is inherent to a government-to-government relationship. The government has no idea and is still treating first nations like little children that need a governess. It is totally insulting that the government has yet again refused to consult and is insisting on this kind of legislation and did not even have the courtesy of explaining the far-reaching nature of this legislation compared to the previous private member's bill to the very chief whose first nation they announced this legislation to.

We are grateful that the government has tried to improve this bad bill by clarifying the difference between salaries and expenses. We are pleased that it has tried to rectify the issue of band owned enterprises, but we still think that this is a bad bill and we hope that the government will at least support the initiative of the New Democratic Party by deleting clauses that impose draconian and insulting measures on first nations.

I look forward to debating the bill in full later, but the Liberal Party will support the last minute report stage amendments by the New Democratic Party.

•(1050)

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): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of points. On the issue of consultation, I wonder if Jean Chrétien consulted with first nations constituents when he drafted his white paper. I wonder about the eight or nine years I lived in isolated, remote first nations across Canada, where there were water and sewer treatment plants in need of repair if not replacement and schools that had burned down in communities and were never replaced or had never existed in the first place. I wonder if there was any consultation at that point.

We know what the Liberal Party's position is on accountability: \$40 million here, a \$55 billion slush fund for employment. It is no wonder they want all of these clauses deleted. I am not surprised.

We know about moving the bill forward in co-operation with the Whitecap Dakota First Nation, for example, which made substantive inputs because it has complex business operations and wanted these tightened up and addressed. We appreciated and received those amendments, and supported them at committee.

I think the bill has the essential components and I am wondering what the member has to say about things like accountability and the active participation of first nation community members in the decision-making of their chiefs and councils.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the member is forgetting a very important chapter. Just before the government took office, there were 18 months of consultation with first nations, Inuit and Métis leaders, as well as the provinces and territories, that led to the Kelowna accord. The accord had not only the \$5 billion budgeted for it, but it also had real targets and measurements as to how we would go forward on health, housing, education, economic development, as well as accountability.

In consulting with first nations, they came up with the idea of a first nations auditor general. That is what they wanted to do. Instead, they get this bill that comes out of nowhere, other than the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, and without any consultation with first nations at all. It is a disgrace.

It is really important that the government has to wear the fact that it did not listen to the consultations of the Kelowna accord and has refused to put in a first nations auditor general.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague about the clause that allows the minister to arbitrarily withhold funding from a first nation.

We know that last January the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development cut off education dollars to children in Attawapiskat to punish the community because it would not agree with the third party manager. The Federal Court found that the community was completely justified in opposing the third party management. The accusations made by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and the Prime Minister against Attawapiskat were completely unfounded.

The issue of using children and education dollars as hostage would be illegal in any system of government anywhere except, it seems, with the federal government relating to the treatment of first nations children.

What does my hon. colleague think this allows the minister to do now, if he is given carte blanche power to cut off money, whether it is for children, health care or social services?

Government Orders

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member. It is unacceptable to cut off education money or anything else. This *carte blanche* to the minister is wrong.

As the hon. member has pointed out many times, the former minister of Indian affairs, Chuck Strahl, said very clearly that the kinds of failed policies of third party management needed to be replaced. When the government got into trouble in Attawapiskat, it pulled the failed policy out of its back pocket and imposed the third party management and then lost in court.

This refusing to consult and “see you in court” mentality is absolutely destroying the relationships with first nations in Canada.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening this morning to the debate on the motions brought forward by the NDP members. I am surprised they are trying to delete the important accountability clauses that are contained within the legislation. I am not surprised at the Liberal Party, which goes further. It wants to delete every single clause in the bill. Accountability and the Liberal Party generally do not go hand in hand.

When I went to law school, we were told an old joke. It was: “If you have the law on your side, argue the law. If you have the facts on your side, argue the facts. If you don't have the facts and don't have the law, bang your hand on the table and shout louder”. That is what we are hearing from both of the opposition parties today. They do not have the law on their side, they do not have the facts on their side, so they bang their fists on the desk and argue about process. That is what they are left with.

They are going to say there was not enough consultation. That is not true. They know it is not true. In fact, the great member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar had extensive consultation on her Bill C-575. It was through the consultation with first nations that she brought forward the first incarnation of this legislation on financial transparency. There has been extensive consultation on this legislation.

In fact, it is first nations that want this to happen. I sat in committee and heard the stories from members of our first nations who said that when they had asked for information, it was not produced and they had been subject to intimidation and threats just for asking for the information. That is not acceptable.

By deleting clause 11, which is one of the proposals by the NDP, we would remove a very significant piece of accountability that is in the legislation. Section 11 states:

If a First Nation fails to publish any document under section 8, any person, including the Minister, may apply to a superior court for an order requiring the council to carry out the duties under that section within the period specified by the court.

How can anyone be opposed to that? It is an accountability mechanism that will be there for first nations in order to compel their council to produce information. How is someone against that? If a council is not publishing the salaries and remuneration of chiefs and councils and there is a mechanism here that is going to help them get that information, how can people in that small corner of the House stand and say that they are against it? I do not understand. The purpose of the clause is to ensure that anyone could require a first

nation to publish this information. It provides an avenue of redress for first nations.

We have also heard that many first nations have made complaints directly to the minister. The opposition parties say that is a perfect system, that they should just make the complaint to the minister and have the minister answer that question. That is not about transparency or accountability. The accountability has to come from the first nation itself, and a lot do it. I do not want to be accused of standing and saying that none of our first nations communities provide this information. That is not true. Many of them do a fantastic job of providing the information to their members and being accountable to their members for the money that is spent. That is not what the legislation is designed to get at. There are some members, some communities, that are not providing this information and that is what the legislation targets.

First nations residents deserve and expect transparency and accountability from their elected representatives when it comes to these issues. In fact, in December 2010 the Assembly of First Nations passed a resolution at its special chiefs assembly, affirming the need to publicly disclose salaries and expenses to their members. They also agreed to make this financial information available on the Internet, where applicable. Nearly two years later, just over half of the more than 600 first nations have a website. Of those that have a website, less than 20 had posted their salary and remuneration on the website and on the Internet.

• (1055)

This proves in and of itself that voluntary compliance is not the answer. We also know that complaining to the minister is not the answer. We want to give the power back to first nations community members to get this information so they do not have to go down those roads. Bill C-27, the first nations financial transparency act, would guarantee that all first nations members would be able to hold their elected governments to account.

In addition to the informal requests from the members to the minister to get the information, the department also receives formal complaints regarding the potential mismanagement or misappropriation of band funds and remuneration of officials. This legislation would ensure that the information would be easily accessible to everyone and it would remove the minister from the equation in many of these cases. That would promote direct lines of communication and accountability from first nation leaders to its members because it would take the minister out of the equation. It should not be a triangular approach where a first nation member complains to the minister's office, which then goes down and asks the first nation to produce it and the first nation then moves it across to the member. It should be a direct approach from a member directly to band council.

I want to make this clear as well. This is not to suggest that first nations are mismanaging their finances or are not accountable to their members because in many cases there are many examples of first nations that are doing exactly that. With the greater transparency that is offered here, many of the complaints to the minister would actually not continue because they would have the necessary information.

Government Orders

I listened to the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. She suggested that producing a financial statement was not the answer because it would not state how many houses were built or what progress was made on the school, and that is true. The financial statement will not say that. However, imagine trying to understand what is happening with the finances in a community without the financial statement, the salary, remuneration and benefits of the chief and council. It is a logic first step. Once people have the financial statement and know the remuneration, they can question where all the money went. For instance, if all this money had been received, why were houses not built?

It is false for the New Democrats to suggest that this is not the answer. It is the first logical step toward putting the power back into the hands of the people. That is what good accountable government is all about. We have that kind of accountability at the federal level. Our public finances are absolutely disclosed. Individuals can make all kinds of requests for information. However, that is not what is happening with our first nations.

I am proud to stand today in support of this legislation, not only because it is good legislation but because I personally heard the stories at committee of community members saying that enough was enough, that they needed help and they needed the problem solved.

• (1100)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with a lot of interest to my colleague's dissertation on public accountability. If the Parliamentary Budget Officer was listening to his comments on the open accessibility and transparency of his government, I wonder whether he might have choked on his ham and cheese sandwich, if that was what he was eating for lunch today.

Could my hon. colleague truly stand in the House and claim that the government is a model of accountability and accessibility? Further, how can he and his government hector and cajole other organizations that are trying to do their own due diligence and already have in place adequate and thorough transparency and accountability methods?

• (1105)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, perhaps my colleague did not hear me at the start when I said that if one has the law on one's side, one should argue the law. If one has the facts on one's side, one should argue the facts. If one does not, one should bang one's fist on the table and shout.

The member cannot even ask a question on the legislation before us. He has abandoned all hope of opposing it because he knows it is the right thing to do. What does he talk about? He makes some vague reference to non-accountability.

Mr. Speaker, your salary is posted. It is public, disclosed, as is mine. That is not what is happening on every first nation. If the member had taken the time to look at the legislation before he asked the question, he would know that is what it is about. Financial transparency is not happening, which is why we have put this legislation forward.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member could take a moment to elaborate on this. We heard a member from the Liberal Party talk about the Kelowna accord. I actually have never seen a copy of that

so I do not know if it even exists. The Liberals never put it in the budget. It shows a disrespect to first nations that a member would raise it.

Also, with transparency comes accountability and with accountability comes better use of taxpayer money, which is really what is funding most of what we are talking about. Could the member talk about accountability and taxpayer money as opposed to first nations?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, the amazing thing I have experienced, after being here for only a little over a year and a half, is how members of the Liberal Party seem to have all the answers now that they are not the government. They could have fixed everything if they had only had one or two more years, or another month. That is all they needed in order to solve all the nation's problems. They had all these great ideas. It is amazing. In 13 years they could not do these things but suddenly they have all the answers.

My colleague makes the very important point that transparency leads to good government. A fundamental part of transparency for first nations members is understanding their community's financial situation. How do we know how our government is doing if we do not know how any of the money is being spent? We in Ottawa have that accountability. We have the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We release a budget. We study the estimates in every department. This leads to good government.

That is what we are looking for in our first nations communities. We want a good level of transparency so they can deliver good government. If they are not delivering good government, the people will now know. They will have the wherewithal to understand the financial status of their community and decide they may need to make a change if things are not being run properly. That is exactly what this legislation is for.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the hon. member realizes that there are already policies in place that require first nations to submit to the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada annual audited consolidated financial statements for public funds provided to them. These include salaries, honoraria and travel expenses for all elected, appointed and senior unelected band officials. The latter includes unelected positions such as those of the executive director, band manager, senior program director and manager. First nations are also required to release these statements to their membership. That seems pretty thorough to me.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, if first nations are already doing all of this, then their number one argument that this is such a burden has now evaporated. Number two, why do they not post the information? That is what this legislation would do. They should deliver it to their members, not just to AANDC.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my speech in this House is a continuation of my previous speeches, which have been gradually bringing to light the government's interference in first nations' socio-economic issues. I say "gradually" because I sometimes talk about fairly obscure notions, and I understand that Canadians, in general, sometimes have difficulty following what I am saying. That is why I am bringing these issues to light gradually.

Based on my short experience here in the House and my experience with community management organizations and my band council, it is clear to me that the Conservatives are allowing a major problem to go unresolved. Despite the adversity that communities face, which is often fuelled by government initiatives that have been implemented over the past 200 years, the first nations have shown resilience and ingenuity. They have found ingenious ways of rising to the challenge and establishing an underground economy. I am not using the term "underground" in the sense of "hidden" or "secret" but in the sense of "unconventional" in that the communities have tried to penetrate markets and have developed tactics that are significantly different from the economic expansion observed throughout the country. It is a slightly different way of doing things, and that is also my approach. The whole context is different. As a result, the Conservatives and previous governments have often tried to underhandedly eradicate these innovative initiatives.

We are facing the same type of scenario here. The proposed legislative initiative and amendments are trying to underhandedly eradicate innovative initiatives, even if the interests of first nations members are technically being put first. I would like to address this issue in more depth later. Although we are trying to put beneficiaries—community members who will benefit from the availability of financial information—first, given what is happening, we see that the true beneficiaries are not first nations members but certain other groups here in Canada. These groups have even positioned themselves within the committee. When this subject was addressed in committee, some lobby groups spoke up. I still have doubts in this regard since it seems as though the Conservatives are trying to please a very specific segment of the Canadian population.

Much like the comments made during committee hearings about the disclosure of First Nations' financial statements, this type of legislative initiative appeals to the lowest common denominator and fuels the reactionary fringe groups that exist in Canada.

I will give a very concrete example of a reactionary fringe group. I often tend to rely on the empirical. When this issue was studied in committee, we heard from a number of witnesses, including the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. In a rather direct, even abrupt manner, as that is my style, I questioned the witness who had quite simply been proactive and decided to appear as a witness with the consent of the Conservatives on this committee. He came to tell us that his organization would be supporting and backing this bill because there should be public disclosure throughout Canada of the financial statements and documents of corporate entities that are jointly operated by band councils. I questioned this witness and simply told him that the last time the terms "taxpayers" and "Indians" had been used in the same sentence, they had been uttered

by a white supremacist in my riding. Such people do exist in Canada. We cannot ignore this reality.

This discussion could easily be hijacked. For that reason I asked the witness how he proposed to ensure that the discussion and the interest he was showing that day would not be hijacked by one of these fringe groups. I am not saying that these groups are in the majority across Canada; however, they do exist. The last time I heard about taxpayers and Indians was when a white supremacist asked me why Indians do not pay taxes. That was confrontational. What I was asking was how can we ensure that this discussion will not be hijacked because it could fuel rather extremist arguments.

What I am trying to prove is that the Conservatives are attempting to please a very specific segment of the population, not necessarily the extremist groups. However, it is a widely held view.

• (1110)

People who are perhaps only minimally informed about the ins and outs of the taxes paid by aboriginal peoples may justify themselves and justify the energy devoted to this kind of initiative by saying that everyone will benefit from this information. But in fact, and officially, the Conservatives announced that it was the members of the first nations who were trying to lighten the burden that ultimately rests on the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development when the members of the communities decided simply to circumvent their band council and go directly to the department. It is laudable to want to shift the responsibility for being accountable to the community leaders. However, doing it in a roundabout way is not. This pretext has been used to require disclosure of financial statements of a sort that does not apply Canada-wide.

Let us take the example of a private economic entity, a clearly defined corporate entity in Canada. It does not have to disclose its financial statements. However, with the initiative as it is proposed here, a corporate entity or a company that was operated jointly, or as a joint venture, with a band council would have to make its financial statements available to the public, and this would be a first.

I would note that the rule in Canada is that all laws and bills have to apply generally, uniformly and without distinction all across Canada. In this case, some companies in the communities will be forced to disclose their financial statements, and this is pretty deplorable and subject to challenge from a strictly legal point of view. Personally, I would challenge it, and there is a very good chance that will be done in the near future.

What has been called the aggressive challenge by outsiders to the communal dynamic, in support of the disclosure of the consolidated financial statements and independent revenue sources of the first nations, is enough in itself to call into question the goals and the intended beneficiaries of this bill.

Government Orders

Although the bill is officially an attempt to shift the burden on band councils of transmitting financial information to the members of the communities, what is really happening, and what I am afraid of after hearing what the groups who expressed an interest in this said in committee, is that this information is being hijacked by or directed to very narrow, very specific lobbies here in Canada. The disclosure is intended to make a segment of the public happy, for very partisan purposes. We have seen this in the past, and it has become the trademark of the Conservatives. Bills and initiatives are often hijacked in order to advance an agenda, a hidden agenda in this case, since there are very specific groups that will ultimately benefit from the disclosure of this information, which was initially intended to be communal and limited to the members of the communities, that certainly being a laudable goal.

And that is my submission.

●(1115)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments and the amendments being put forward.

One of the most significant concerns that I believe all Canadians would share is that there is an obligation to work in good faith with first nations leadership when bringing forward legislation that would have the impact that this legislation would have on first nations communities. That should be done out of respect. We in the Liberal Party have argued that we need to work directly with first nations leadership to assist in ensuring they are playing a leadership role when it comes to bringing forward legislation such as this. It would appear as though there has been very little, if any, consultation on this legislation. From what I understand, there definitely has not been consensus or thorough consultation.

I wonder if the member would comment on the importance of consulting prior to even introducing legislation of this nature and whether he believes that enough consultation was done on behalf of the Government of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. Some ideas were shared at a supposedly historic meeting in January—a meeting to which I was not invited; I ended up out on the sidewalk. Ideas were shared at this meeting, but it was all rhetoric to put on a show for the cameras.

As the member mentioned, there has been little consultation with the first nations on this very specific piece of legislation, the proposed amendments. Long before a consultation is planned, it is important to inform the community. There must be public information sessions, since the literacy rate is rather low. In the communities near me, the literacy rate is around 48% for adults.

It takes a grassroots effort. People must be informed of the ins and outs of these measures before a consultation can be planned. But in this case, there was no public information session or consultation. It is a unilateral initiative. We are starting to get used to this, since it seems to be the Conservatives' overall strategy. But it is a bit more obvious when it comes to "Indianness" issues.

●(1120)

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): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Manicouagan for his remarks. I visited his riding a few years ago when we made an announcement there.

I am wondering about something. He focused on a single witness. But there were many others, including ordinary people, the grassroots, as he said. People in the community said many times that they did not feel safe asking for financial documents in certain circumstances. I think it is important to allow public access for the residents of a given community.

Did he understand what the ordinary people in these communities had to say about being reluctant to ask for these financial documents during a forum with their community? I think that is a legitimate question.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question, and I agree with him. Indeed, there can be some problems. Given the overcrowding that exists in these communities, tensions can mount. I agree with that point.

Here, however, it is not a question of accountability to community members. The Conservatives are using an underhanded tactic to make this information available to the broader Canadian public. That is the problem.

I fully support the idea of sharing financial information with community members, in order to show that everyone's hands are clean. That is the bill's objective. However, ultimately, this is an underhanded way to please certain small, specific groups of Canadians, by allowing financial information on the corporate activities of private enterprises to be released to the public, in order to reinforce a negative image and demonstrate that aboriginal communities in Canada are guilty of poor management. That is more or less how this will be interpreted.

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to explain how Bill C-27 would improve sound fiscal management when first nations empower community members to hold their leaders to account.

To begin, I would like to respond to the hon. member's first motion to delete clause 1 of Bill C-27, the first nations financial transparency act. The clause reads: "This Act may be cited as the First Nations Financial Transparency Act." Essentially, the member's motion goes to the very heart of Bill C-27, so I would like to speak about the purpose of this legislation and why it is necessary.

Government Orders

In accordance with the provisions in their funding agreements, first nation governments are already required to provide to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada audited consolidated financial statements and a schedule of remuneration and expenses of all elected officials. These agreements also require that the audited consolidated financial statements be made available to first nations membership in the communities. These agreements do not, however, stipulate the manner or timing of disclosure.

Many first nation governments have put into place sound accounting practices that ensure transparency and help to build confidence among members and other stakeholders. Many prepare annual reports that are distributed to members' homes or made available in board offices or posted on the first nation's website. Many first nations governments strive to be accountable to their communities, their membership and to the federal government for the funds they receive.

Why then is the bill necessary? Some first nations governments have not yet consistently adopted these practices. As a result, questions occasionally emerge about the financial decision of first nations leaders and how first nation moneys are being spent, questions that can undermine the confidence of the public in all first nation governments, including those who are working hard to be transparent in their leadership.

Ensuring the public disclosure of financial information would help clarify the actual situation. By explicitly stating the expectations of first nations in law with respect to accountability for the financial management of their governments and transparency in the remuneration and expenses of their leaders, a minimum standard would be established and many of the aforementioned inconsistencies would disappear. Greater transparency of financial information and remuneration and expenses would remove the speculation that currently exists and dispel the rumours around the management of funds by first nation government and the salaries of first nation leaders.

The bill would ensure that first nation community members have the information necessary to make informed decisions about their leadership and are better prepared to hold their governments to account.

The bill and the easier access to financial information it promotes would also support better policy development as it relates to first nation peoples. As John Graham of Patterson Creek Consulting, one of the witnesses who appeared before committee, pointed out, "public policy is always better if there is essentially good information". While this information is currently provided to the department, it cannot be shared in any meaningful way to promote this kind of public discussion.

The public disclosure of financial information of first nation governments would also increase the confidence of potential investors. With more complete and accurate information about potential partners, investors would be in a better position to make informed decisions about investment opportunities, possibly contributing to improved economic well-being of first nation communities.

Most of the issues surrounding the bill were aired or debated in the context of private member's Bill C-575 in the previous Parliament. It also echoes the commitments made by the Assembly of First Nations chiefs-in-assembly in their December 2010 resolution. In it, the chiefs say they:

Choose to lead by example and demonstrate to other orders of government processes for accountability, including...Itemizing and publicly disclosing salaries, honoraria and expenses associated with the operations of Chief & Council' [and] Ensuring information about community finances and decision-making is easily accessible, and available via the internet where applicable.

• (1125)

The government is not only confident that the bill will be supported by most first nations members seeking to improve the transparency and accountability of their band governments, but also that first nations' elected officials will welcome the bill as an important tool to demonstrate how they are accountable to their members.

To summarize, Bill C-27 is a necessary piece of legislation and I support it fully. I therefore do not support the motion currently being considered.

This necessary and advantageous legislation fulfills the commitment of the government in the 2011 Speech from the Throne. Not only is this a promise fulfilled, it is also an important step forward strengthening governance at the community level, another in a series of building blocks brought forward by our government to support economic and social development in first nations.

This is indeed a worthy cause and is clearly necessary legislation, deserving of all-party support. I urge my hon. colleagues to back Bill C-27 to ensure that first nations members enjoy the same opportunities as all other Canadians.

To appreciate the importance of this legislation, we first need to acknowledge that the current system fails to meet the transparency test. It is no secret that there have been reports of questionable financial practices in some first nations and that community members cannot get answers to their questions about these practices.

There is also no question that in some instances there appears to be a genuine need for greater scrutiny of how public funds are being spent. We have heard complaints by first nations members who were unable to access information about spending in their communities. They want to know how their chiefs and councillors are spending band funds and the salaries of their elected officials publicly disclosed. The problem is not necessarily what first nations leaders are being paid, but the fact that their community members have no way of knowing what the compensation really is. Neither do community members currently know how such decisions are arrived at.

With any other level of government, a number of factors determine the level of pay and benefits for officials. These include such things as the nature of their responsibilities and duties, the size of the community, the complexity of operating the community and the level of its revenues.

Government Orders

In some situations, first nation budgets are almost entirely reliant on federal tax dollars. As part of the funding allocated to first nations every year, a portion is an unconditional grant known as band support funding. This money is intended to help cover costs such as salaries for elected and non-elected officials, telephones and fax machines and other office equipment.

In addition to federal transfers, a number of first nations generate some of their own revenues through band-owned businesses or funding arrangements with other orders of government. This extra money can be used in a variety of ways, including paying higher salaries for elected officials.

There is no reliable way for first nation members to verify they are getting value for money. That is why Bill C-27 is essential. It will enable first nation citizens to confirm whether the compensation levels of their leaders are reasonable and proportionate to the required duties and responsibilities.

All other Canadians are able to hold their leaders accountable in this way. The same standard should be guaranteed in law to first nations members. If the first nations financial transparency act is passed, it will guarantee these standards.

In conclusion, the first nations financial transparency act will enhance financial accountability and transparency. It will require the proactive disclosure of audited and consolidated financial statements, enabling first nations members to see first hand how funds received by first nations have been spent.

This necessary and advantageous legislation fulfills the commitment by this government in the 2011 Speech from the Throne. Not only is this a promise fulfilled, but it is also an important step forward in strengthening governance at the community level, another in a series of building blocks brought forward by our government to support economic and social development in first nations.

This is a worthy cause, and clearly this is necessary legislation, deserving all-party support. I urge my hon. colleagues to back Bill C-27 to ensure that first nations members enjoy the same opportunities as all other Canadians.

• (1130)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Conservative member, the same one I posed to the New Democratic Party.

It is about the obligation of the House of Commons to consult and work with first nations. Many would ultimately argue that the government did in fact drop the ball on this issue, that it was trying to take an issue it believed it might be able to score some political points on but where it put little effort into actually doing what it was supposed to do, which was to work with the first nations leadership before actually introducing the legislation.

Could the member inform the House of any consultation done prior to the introduction of the bill to the House of Commons?

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, there was a lot of discussion about the bill in the previous Parliament, when it was Bill C-575. At that time, the House prorogued and the bill was not passed. It has been brought forward again in this Parliament. There has been quite a bit of consultation with chiefs who appeared before the Standing

Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. There have been opportunities for dialogue, discussion and some debate. If we look back on the record, we will find that there has been a fair number of hours spent on the bill. Is it enough? Is it ever enough? All bills could enjoy more debate and dialogue if there were only more time.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question on a point that has been mentioned several times, specifically, that some businesses with ties to first nations will be forced to share some very sensitive information.

In the business and finance community, certain information cannot be disclosed to the public, because it could prove to be a disadvantage from a competitive standpoint. Does the member think this measure could put those businesses at a disadvantage? Could this measure deprive aboriginal communities of certain sums of money because businesses do not want some information to be shared?

The government is calling for improved conditions for aboriginals, but this measure will do exactly the opposite, since it could scare businesses away. What does the member think of the fact that this could reduce the amount of money available to these communities?

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, it is fair to say that in any given situation that involves public dollars there is disclosure and all companies are aware of that. If they are going to bid on government contracts, they will have their dollars examined at one point in the process of awarding contracts as to whether they are the most acceptable bid. With all due respect to the member, I suggest it is not unlike what happened with the first nation contracts dealing with the private sector. Disclosure is part and parcel of the bidding and awarding process.

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): Mr. Speaker, part of the problem I have with the narrative coming from across the floor is on this issue of the reporting burden. In one sense, we know that one of the central tenets of self-governance is that the conversation take place vis-à-vis accountability and transparency, and that it take place between the government and its constituents. The bill would help to facilitate that and furthermore, the reporting burdens would actually decrease if the communities put this out to their constituents for more flexible funding arrangements and a greater, stronger relationship.

Can the member talk about how the bill would actually lead to a reduction in reporting burdens for first nation communities?

Government Orders

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, all we can say on that is that we would enhance the reporting that is happening now. The enhancement would give more information to people about how money is spent and that is all good. Whether in government or in opposition, we want to know where the dollars go and this would help tell us where the dollars go.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmī (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their enthusiasm. I am honoured to speak today to Bill C-27, An Act to enhance the financial accountability and transparency of First Nations. This long title is quite pompous. The short title is the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. That sort of title should make us wary of the bill's intent since, as usual, the Conservative government is targeting a specific, well-defined section of the population.

There is one paradoxical reason for my interest in this subject: I represent a riding where there are no first nations communities and no first nations people. According to the official data from the latest census, conducted by Statistics Canada in 2011, only 5 persons in 100,000 reported speaking an aboriginal language. That was 5, not 5,000. In comparison, there were 345 individuals who reported speaking German, for example, which is not traditionally a language that stands out in Statistics Canada's figures.

That leads me to another remark: we know that, as of the latest census, the Conservative government abolished the long form census, technically known as form 2B. We can question the accuracy of the current figures, in relation to historic Canadian census figures, and of the conclusions based on these figures. The precision is no longer there because, even though the official statistics say that only 5 people in my riding of over 100,000 inhabitants speak an aboriginal language, I do think there are probably more than that.

And that is why I am interested in this issue. In a riding like mine, without any first nations, the perception of first nations communities is even more important, because it forms the basis for the idea of a nation—the Canadian nation—that wants to include various groups and ethnicities.

Canada is still quite young, as it was created in 1867. That is like one year compared to the multi-millennial history of some European nations. It is quite young. One of the important things in creating a nation is to fight prejudice and generalizations, and we must refrain from targeting specific groups and accusing them, with no evidence, of mismanaging public money. That is what we are talking about today at third reading of this bill.

Another aspect that worries me personally is that of the protection of personal information. Over the years in Canada we have been able to build legislation that protects personal privacy. This bill is something new, because it would disclose information—publicly and even on the Internet—that is truly personal. This kind of personal information is not requested of other groups, but will be specifically required from certain chosen, targeted groups. That also reminds me of a private member's bill, Bill C-377, which similarly targets a specific group, in that case unions. Through such bills the government is trying to increase red tape and create unnecessary work in order to target these groups. That is the complete opposite of

being inclusive and giving people a chance, assuming that people are not dishonest and organizations are not out to commit fraud.

● (1140)

If anyone wants to prove that a specific organization or group is committing fraud or misusing funds, it is up to the individual who makes that allegation to do so.

One of the amendments introduced by my NDP colleagues on the committee was to eliminate this additional burden that is being imposed solely on first nations, not on the population at large, as some of my colleagues have said. It is also important to emphasize that, under this act, the minister would be able to eliminate grants made to certain aboriginal groups based solely on speculation that funds had been misused. Once again, a mechanism is being permitted without the minister having to prove that there has been any misuse of public funds. Based solely on suspicion, he could cut grants and money that, as we saw in Attawapiskat, are sorely needed by the various communities.

Consistent with that logic, a number of reports will be required. In her speech this morning, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan said that some organizations had to prepare more than 200 reports, which vastly increases the amount of work they have to do and artificially creates work for people who could be providing services to the public.

Do people really read all those reports, or are they merely there to generate work artificially? That is the question I would ask. Those communities need schools and drinking water. The people in my riding cannot even imagine what life can be like in an aboriginal community, because they have access to basic services. Consequently, they do not understand this gap within a single nation, where we have, on the one hand, people who have no drinking water or basic services and, on the other, those who enjoy a relatively decent life.

One may indeed wonder whether people really read all these reports and whether they are not the paradox of the Conservative government, which, as we have seen in recent budgets, is making systematic cuts to services. The main argument, if not the only argument, is that they want to reduce the needless workload involved in those services. Paradoxically, the government is creating an additional workload for groups that have been specifically targeted. This is nothing but red tape that few people can understand. In practice, only accountants will be able to understand the actual management implications of figures on certain lines of a financial report, and only they will be able to determine whether those figures are genuinely indicative of mismanagement.

Government Orders

Once again, I still tend to give people the benefit of the doubt, to consider that organizations, by default, are not poor managers. Aboriginal organizations are not fraudulent, and it is up to those who claim the contrary to prove it, not to create an artificial workload for all the communities, associations and entities that manage public funds.

• (1145)

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): Mr. Speaker, how can the member say that the mayors in his riding, the premier of his province or anyone in any level of government must provide only their personal financial information, namely their salaries and work-related expenses?

Is the member saying that this does not apply to the other levels of government, especially when, in certain cases, first nations governments receive almost all of their funds from the federal government?

The only real question is this: can the government in question provide the financial documents that include salaries and expenses, and make them available to the public? I cannot imagine the member saying no.

• (1150)

Mr. Tarik Brahma: Mr. Speaker, some financial information is already available to the minister. It is not true that there is no information and no transparency.

By asking for more information than is necessary, information that could not be obtained through an investigation—for example if misappropriation or fraud is suspected—the person being questioned is placed in the position of being considered guilty of fraud or misappropriation from the outset. That brings me back to the idea of perception.

To build a nation, to build Canada, we must not target specific groups. When specific groups are asked to provide additional information that other groups do not have to provide, people—such as those in my riding who do not have any contact with aboriginal peoples—develop a negative perception that is not in tune with reality. When we have no contact with a group, there is a tendency to have preconceptions and to make assumptions. A responsible government must fight that.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member for his speech.

In his opinion, will the paternalistic tone of this bill appeal to first nations and improve our relationship with them in any way?

Mr. Tarik Brahma: Mr. Speaker, certainly not. This tone will not result in greater confidence.

We want the first nations to have more control over their own destiny and we want to see more economic development in their communities.

My colleagues raised the following argument: if other companies are given an unfair competitive advantage over a first nations business, one reaction may be to move that business outside the first

nations sphere. Such action could produce the opposite of the intended effect, or in other words, it could result in less economic development in first nations communities and the relocation of certain companies. These companies could generate revenue and economic development for people who need it and who need schools and basic services—things that the people of my riding take for granted.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives often play populist politics. They react to specific incidents and then introduce legislation. This is no way to manage a country and create laws.

What does the hon. member think about the approach the Conservatives are taking by reacting to incidents reported in the newspapers and then creating legislation that applies to all aboriginal communities in Canada? Does he think this is the right way to legislate?

Mr. Tarik Brahma: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question, even though he sometimes tries to take my speaking time, which is perfectly natural.

He mentioned populist politics, but in this case, we are also talking about lobbying. Some groups that take it upon themselves to speak on behalf of taxpayers have a certain agenda, and the government is reacting to that agenda. There is probably a populist aspect to it, but there is also a lobbying aspect, which, in my opinion, is inconsistent with this type of bill. Instead, the government should be seeking to improve our relationship with aboriginal communities.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are discussing Bill C-27 today, after it was examined by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

The government says the purpose of this bill is to improve the financial transparency of the first nations. I am going to ignore the irony of the situation, where we have the government talking about financial transparency. Everyone is aware of how grotesque that situation is without any comment being needed.

So this bill is supposed to enhance the financial transparency of the first nations by making it mandatory that their financial statements be prepared and disclosed. The information to be disclosed includes the details of the annual remuneration paid by a first nation, and by any entity that it controls, to its chief and each of its councillors, acting in their professional and personal capacity.

In addition to the obligation to report the salaries paid to chiefs and band councillors, the bill makes it mandatory to disclose complete audit reports and publish those documents on the first nation's website for 10 years.

On this side of the House, we consider many points in this bill to be problematic, and I think the members who spoke before me have summarized them very well. For that reason, I am instead going to focus not on the content of this bill, but on the administrative burden it represents for many first nations communities.

First, the band councils already submit audited annual financial statements under agreements with the government. This bill therefore serves no purpose other than to make everything even more complicated.

Government Orders

According to the figures in the Auditor General's 2006 report, a first nation has to produce, on average, 200 reports a year, when some communities have populations of 700 or 800 people—fewer than 1,000 people. This may raise some eyebrows.

If there still is not enough transparency, when first nations communities are being made to write an average of two reports a week, I would venture to suggest that the government perhaps needs to rethink the entire system. That would be more useful and more effective than adding another report on top of all the rest.

I watched the speech the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar gave when she introduced the bill; she had introduced the previous version of this bill in the last Parliament. According to her, the communities “go to great lengths to make this information available to community members. They display it on their community websites. They feature it in householder mailings. They post it in band offices.”

So the member is saying that chiefs and band councils are completely aware of the importance of transparency toward the members of their communities, and in fact they are already doing this very well without needing to be reminded by a humiliating and coercive bill.

A number of witnesses, including John Paul, a member of the Membertou First Nation, testified at the committee and also confirmed this. That witness told us: “...transparency, and disclosure of information...is very important to our leadership.... Over decades our community has provided full disclosure of our complete audit, and more recently on our website,...the complete details of compensation to all the members of council.”

I am going to digress for a moment. What about communities that, like those in my area, do not have Internet access at home? They will be forced to disclose information for 10 years on the community's website even though the community does not have Internet access. That is one of my questions that nobody has answered.

• (1155)

[English]

What have we learned from my Conservative colleague who introduced the bill in the last Parliament? We have learned that the chiefs and first nations elected officials recognize the value in ensuring the actions and decisions of elected officials are clearly visible to all and to the community. They recognize that their citizens share a fundamental right to know how their money is being spent. In fact, several first nations go to great lengths to make this information available to community members. Therefore, why is there a need for this humiliating and useless bill?

The bill finds its roots and origins in the racist assumption that all first nations are either corrupt or incompetent. I reject both of those assumptions. We need to stop those assumptions for good.

[Translation]

Band councils are already accountable to the government and they get the information out to their members. Why are we debating this bill? Is it because someone in the government decided that a 201st annual report would be amusing?

In the 2006 Auditor General's report, it was mentioned that 96% of first nations file their 200 annual reports on time, without any problem. The Auditor General's report did not include any kind of comment or criticism. Everything was fine. Only 1.7% of all first nations were put into third party management by the government because of financial management problems.

Are we talking about a chronic lack of transparency on the part of first nations? No, quite the contrary.

• (1200)

[English]

If one were to look at numbers and statistics, one would see there is nothing wrong with first nations' financial transparency. Of all first nations in this country, 96% submit their audits on time, without comments or criticism from the auditor. The lack of transparency is so minimal that I wonder why we are discussing this bill.

[Translation]

The truth is that all these reports, most of which are not even used by federal organizations, are a waste of time for first nations band councils, which could use that time to meet their population's needs. Yet, today we find ourselves debating the usefulness of a 201st annual report for our communities. Abitibi-Témiscamingue has five Algonquin First Nation communities, and some of them are seen as models of sound management and leading examples of development.

Take, for example, the Abitibiwinni band on the Pikogan reserve near Amos. Chief Kistabish and the council work very hard to ensure their community's prosperity and sustainability. Incidentally, they recently signed a historic agreement with their neighbours and a mining company. The Abitibiwinni band works in concert with stakeholders in regional development. Getting to this point took years of mutual trust. Now, the government is trying to stir up suspicion and misunderstanding.

Our Algonquin communities in Abitibi-Témiscamingue have nothing to gain from such a bill.

[English]

Other examples include Eagle Village from the Anishnabe Nation. Chief Madeleine Paul and her band council work so hard to ensure a healthy and wealthy community for future generations. She has to deal with the opportunities brought by a rare earth mining development and the danger of having Lake Kipawa polluted if things are not done properly. The Timiskaming First Nation and the new chief, Terence McBride, are also striving to seek new partnerships for their development.

[Translation]

I sincerely believe that there are other priorities. As we have seen, the financial transparency of first nations is not an issue in the vast majority of cases. Most are aware of the need for transparency and are already being transparent.

Government Orders

Most of my colleagues who have already spoken mentioned this, but I would like to talk about something that is extremely shocking to us: the lack of consultation with the first nations on this bill.

On a related note, and to conclude my speech, I would like to quote article 4 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

I remind all of my hon. colleagues that it is truly worthwhile to visit the first nations communities to see just how financially transparent they are, how proud we can be of how these communities are managed, and just how interested community members are in what is going on. A great many people go to band council meetings to find out exactly how their money is being spent. If we compare that to attendance at municipal council meetings in non-aboriginal cities and towns, I think that we can be proud of our aboriginal communities. People are interested in what is being done with their money, and these council leaders do their jobs diligently and provide all the information. It makes absolutely no sense to demand a 201st annual report, when they are already doing everything they can.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to put a question to my colleague, whom I congratulate on her speech.

The Conservatives often talk about red tape. They say they have to eliminate it as much as possible, but when the time comes for action, they do exactly the opposite. Bill C-377 generates even more red tape for the unions. And now the government is generating even more red tape for aboriginal people as well.

What can my colleague tell us about the Conservatives' doublespeak? When the time comes to take action, it does exactly the opposite and generates more red tape for communities.

• (1205)

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for that question.

The communities do have a lot of reporting requirements. Compared to what is asked of municipalities of 800 inhabitants like those in my riding, the fact that aboriginal communities are being asked to prepare all these reports is incredible, when they live in poverty and difficult conditions in many instances. We are asking them to deal with more red tape. There are ways to ensure the financial transparency of first nations communities without asking them to prepare more annual reports.

If federal government members travelled to the communities to see things for themselves, they would understand. When you take the time to travel, to go to those communities and to see the money that has been invested there and the repairs that have been made, you can see whether a community is properly managing its money.

The government might not need as many reports if it took the trouble to go and meet with them and talk to them.

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asked how first nations without a website would be able to

publish the requirements that are asked for in the bill. The legislation calls for public disclosure, consolidated financial statements and schedules of remuneration. Most of the data that is asked for, with very little additional data, is already supplied by people. It is not an onerous task. They are not required to pick up houses and move them or anything. It is entry off a keyboard. It is pretty straightforward.

It is important to note that posting documents on a website is insufficient to discharge a first nation's duty, but the first nation may charge a fee for providing copies if another first nation enters the other first nation's information. The fees may not exceed the cost of transmission. What was mentioned by the hon. member was a lot of little things that amount to very little and would in no way affect information transmission to members of the band. That is what the act is all about, to increase the information for band members.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, chiefs and band councils already submit financial information to the members of their communities. The members of the communities thus already have access to that information; that is already being done.

In my riding, for example, band chiefs are currently negotiating with mining giants that want to open mines on traditional lands. If the government decides that all the financial figures related to the contracts signed with mining companies have to be published on the Internet, then every time these people negotiate and try to get good contracts for their members, someone will point out that it says on the Internet that another first nation accepted such and such an amount. Companies will therefore tell bands to accept their offers and to keep quiet because what they are offering them is good. However, it does not work that way.

In no communities other than first nations communities would people be compelled to reveal what they have negotiated with big corporations. People who live in communities of 800, who have no diplomas or basic university degrees, are being asked to negotiate with big corporations and to publish the results of their negotiations on the Internet. That is utterly unacceptable, and no other community in Canada would be asked to do that.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to speak to Bill C-27. One of the things that I like about the bill is that it demonstrates very clearly the difference between two governments: a Conservative government and a Liberal government. In the Liberal government we saw a different approach to dealing with the important issues facing our aboriginal and, in particular, first nation communities. In the Conservative government we see an approach that the government knows best and that there is no need to do any sort of genuine consultation.

Government Orders

When I posed the question to the Conservative member on what sort of consultation was done, the member made reference to a previous bill and said that at committee we heard hours of debate. I believe he made reference to the fact that there were chiefs who made presentations at committee. I suspect that many members of the Conservative caucus have received a great deal of feedback on Bill C-27 or the bill that Bill C-27 is replacing because the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament a couple of years ago.

In the answer the government member continuously talked about post-introduction of the bill. Therein lies the difference between a Liberal government and a Conservative government. The Liberal government recognized the importance of working with first nations before we even introduced the legislation. Therein lies the difference.

If we look for leadership within the first nations prior to introducing the legislation or even prior to the drafting of the legislation, it is there. It needs to be emphasized that there is very strong leadership in our first nation communities. If the government chose to capitalize on that leadership, we would have better legislation than we have today. Unfortunately, we have the legislation, but it enables individuals like myself to demonstrate the difference between two ways of governing. One way has demonstrated far more success, that being for example the Paul Martin government in the creation of the Kelowna accord, which I will get to in a few moments.

Transparency and proactive disclosure are something that Canadians love and most politicians talk a great deal about. It is nothing new. It is something that is advocated but it is not only for first nations. I was a provincial MLA for many years and I tried to get to the bottom of how much money the NDP provincial government was paying the chair of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. At last count, I tallied over \$500,000 for one individual working within the civil service. The numbers we were hearing were well in excess of that. I remember trying to find out how much the provincial government was paying in pensions for that position. If we want to talk about challenges, there are huge challenges in terms of trying to draw out how much money is being allocated for one civil service position. Trust me, I could talk a great deal. The issue is accountability, not just for first nations—

• (1210)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Palliser is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I do not know if there is a question in this or not. I think we are into minute four with an impromptu speech—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Winnipeg North is up on debate rather than questions and comments. He is in fact halfway through his 10-minute speech.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I trust that the time for the point of order will not be taken out of my time.

The truth can sometimes make people feel a little uncomfortable but that is the reality. It is not just about the need for more

accountability and transparency within our first nations, the provincial governments or, moving on, the national government. We just need to look at this huge budget bill that we are talking about.

There are huge needs out there that need to be met around the whole issue of accountability and more transparency. We have seen that there is a need for more accountability and transparency with first nations but that is nothing new, just like it is not new for other levels of government.

This is where I will mention the Kelowna accord. Members will be familiar with the Kelowna accord. It is something agreed to under former prime minister Paul Martin, through months of discussion and dialogue with representatives and stakeholders from coast to coast to coast, which in good part was led by first nations themselves. Ultimately, a report which was agreed upon. A consensus that was achieved. Paul Martin, as the prime minister, took great effort in ensuring that our first nations communities led the dialogue in many different ways. As a result, we achieved the Kelowna accord.

People should be aware that within the Kelowna accord was an accountability framework. If we look at that accountability framework, it included a first nations auditor general. What sort of an impact would that have had?

I would argue that many of the concerns that people who live on reserves or off reserves have in regard to accountability, including the leadership of our first nations, would have been addressed through that first nations auditor general. This had support and it was encouraged through our first nations.

What did the government do when it had the opportunity to implement, for the first time, a first nations auditor general. It chose to tear up the agreement. It completely discarded what it was that the previous government had put in place, which would have taken into consideration the sensitive issues surrounding financial transparency and accountability.

Let us look at the whole issue of reports. The government seems to want to place the burden for reporting on first nations. On the surface one would say that there is an obligation for some sense of accountability and that part of that accountability means providing reports. However, what we also need to recognize is that the Canadian Auditor General has seen that the federal government has already put the burden on first nations in the number of reports it continues to demand that the first nations surrender.

• (1215)

If the government were genuine in wanting to achieve what it hopes to achieve with Bill C-27, it should have listened to what the Auditor General of Canada said in terms of easing the burden of some of the reports that are being requested. It should have taken that report, sat down with the leadership of our first nations people and come up with legislation that would have factored in what the Auditor General said. If it had listened to what our first nations leadership was saying, it could have brought forward better legislation for which the government would have received not only the support of all parties in this chamber, but would have had a much better base of support from the many different stakeholders.

Government Orders

•(1220)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague, but for the folks back home to know the difference between fiction and reality, we should look at the Liberal record. The member talks about how the Liberal government was one that listened to and spoke with first nations. I worked with the first nations in Quebec under a Liberal government and I was in this House under the Paul Martin government. The Liberals had their road map for progress, their round table for change and their blueprint for dialogue but things got worse every single year in the communities with which I worked.

I worked in Barriere Lake when an agreement was signed with the federal government in 1997, the memorandum of mutual intent. The government broke that agreement as soon as it signed it. It deposed the band council and used the same kind of brutal tactics that the present Conservative government does.

I know my hon. colleague is new in this House but I would remind him that the Kashechewan crisis of 2005 was as disastrous as the Attawapiskat crisis. At the time, we had the health minister from the Liberal government say, “We don't have federal water standards; we can't be held accountable”. He needs to get his facts correct.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the member would take such an attitude. If he wants to talk about the New Democrats, all he needs to do is look at the province of Manitoba where aboriginal communities are suing the provincial NDP government because of its irresponsible approach to flooding issues. The people are not even allowed to live in their own communities because of provincial NDP neglect. Do not try to take the high road as if the New Democrats are so gracious and they have the moral—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I would remind all hon. members to direct their comments to the Chair rather than to their colleagues. I appreciate this is an emotional—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Four majority governments in Manitoba.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary.

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): Mr. Speaker, earlier, one of the member's colleagues mentioned the Kelowna accord. We know a couple of things about that document. First, it was an 11th hour document when the Liberals were effectively on their way out the door because Canadians had rejected their version of accountability and transparency.

I am seeing some furrowed eyebrows down there and I am sure that is more out of frustration than anything.

Second, the Kelowna accord was not actually in a budget so it remains to be seen as to whether there was a genuine attempt here to deliver on some of the things.

Third, our government has gone far beyond the Kelowna accord, not just in terms of resources but in terms of the kinds of legislative

tools that would bring a modern first nations economy up to speed with many regions of this country.

This bill is important because accountability and transparency are central tenets of self-governance. It is a relationship between the chief and council and its citizens. It would get rid of the issue of having to go to the minister for this kind of public information.

Given the Liberals' poor track record on this, does the member not think that kind of accountability and transparency is what is important here, not the kind the Liberals delivered in days gone by?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I happen to have in my hands the actual Kelowna accord, just in case the member never received it.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Table the budget that it was in.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, he is asking for the tabling of the document. I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table the accord.

If government members or New Democratic members were to read the document, they would see that it is a document that the House of Commons should never have torn up, that it should have respected and acted upon it. It would have dealt with not only financial issues but a wide variety of issues. This is something on which Paul Martin, as prime minister, working in consultation with leaders of our first nations communities, was able to come up with a consensus and bring to the House of Common, which meant that there was widespread support for this document. That cannot be said, especially when it comes to consulting, with regard to the government of the day. That is why I say that it distinguishes a big difference between the Paul Martin era of governance versus what we see today.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask for leave to table the Kelowna accord.

•(1225)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-27, An Act to enhance the financial accountability and transparency of First Nations.

Those watching this debate at home may be scratching their heads about the title of the bill. Canadians know that if there is one thing the government has failed on, it is accountability and transparency. The Conservatives attack every group in the country that does not agree with their right-wing agenda and they enforce transparency and accountability rules that they refuse to follow.

Government Orders

We only need remind ourselves of the \$50 million spent in the G8-G20 debacle in the riding of the President of the Treasury Board. We are now debating the fact that the government spent millions, perhaps hundreds of millions, of dollars on a botched F-35 process that did not go out to public tender. The government has no credibility with regard to accountability and transparency. Canadians are right to be concerned about this. Certainly first nations communities have almost unanimously rejected the proposal before the House today.

A concern that we and many leaders in first nations communities have is the gathering of more power in the minister's office. We see this as a trend with the government. The Minister of Canadian Heritage is telling museums how to curate. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration wants to be the sole arbitrator on who is allowed to come to our country and who is not. The Minister of Public Safety wants to look at emails. Now, with this legislation, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development would be allowed to withhold funds to first nations communities if these onerous accountability and disclosure rules were not followed the way in which the legislation would require them to do.

This is the kind of thing the government does routinely. Whether it is an NGO, union or first nations community, the government looks for ways to keep these groups under the burden of massive accountability and disclosure regimes in order to hamstring them.

There are real issues in first nations communities, which first nations have brought up with the government. They and we on this side of the House expect the government to work with first nations communities to solve these problems and not just impose arbitrary rules on them, rules that are already in place. First nations communities are some of the most transparent organizations in the country and the rules are already on the books. However, what is not on the books is the fact that the government has failed first nations communities. It has failed to discuss issues and engage with first nations communities. It cannot simply impose these requirements on communities that have their own systems and governance, which are extremely transparent.

I also want to discuss the fact that while the government refuses to address key issues in first nations communities, in some cases it requires the governance of those communities to, for example, post private information on websites. How does this enhance accountability, especially when the First Nations Regional Health Survey found that only 51% of first nations homes had Internet access and that dropped to 36% in homes with incomes under \$25,000, the majority of which is on reserves?

● (1230)

That speaks to the issue of poverty and the lack of economic development and the lack of meaningful engagement on the part of the government with first nations communities to address the key concerns.

The government has told the management of band councils that it has to run through a million more hoops, put its information on a website in order to allow members to properly peruse the financial statements of first nations communities, when by and large the majority of the members on reserves would not be able to access that information online anyway. It begs the question as to how serious the

government really is about this issue and what the real motivations are behind this kind of bill. We see this time and time again. The government uses one small example and casts a shadow over an entire organization, or an entire group or an entire nation in this case.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, another right-wing Conservative-friendly group, likes to make outrageous claims about first nations salaries. The average salary for chiefs is \$60,000 and the average salary for councillors is \$31,000. Fifty per cent of chiefs earn less than \$60,000 and only five per cent earn more than \$100,000. We are not talking about a system of financial abuse here, but this is the spin that gets put on this to justify this kind of legislation.

It is also important to look at this in the context of other legislative bodies in our country. For example, in Nova Scotia summaries of ministers' expenses are located at the legislative library for public viewing. In the Northwest Territories the government only publishes travel expenses of ministers and does not require salary disclosure of elected officials or senior public servants.

More important, the rules are already in place that very much adjudicate the fulsome transparency that is required, that first nations communities expect for themselves. These requirements are strong and muscular and they also require communities to make these disclosures available to members.

What is confusing is the government has not really answered a question. If the government's intent is to make these disclosures more available to members, then we can have that discussion. However, nowhere in this have we had that discussion, especially if the way the delivery of this public information is online when roughly only 36% of those on reserves can access the Internet. That is not a plan for more widespread access to this information.

The government is not really being serious about this issue and part of the reason is because the information is already available. Under the current requirements, first nations must submit to an annual audited consolidated financial statement for the public funds provided for them. These include salaries, honoraria and travel expenses for all elected, appointed and senior unelected band officials. The latter includes unelected positions such as those of executive director, band manager, senior program director and manager. First nations are also required to release these statements to their membership.

We have heard throughout the day that rules are on the books right now for proper disclosure, but that this is about making it accessible to the membership. First, the rules are already in place to make this information available and accessible to the membership and this legislation does not nearly address the key concerns of the communities.

The fact that the minister himself or herself would have the ability to arbitrarily withhold funds for schools, for social services, for water is unacceptable to us on this side of the House.

Government Orders

•(1235)

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): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention of the member for Davenport. He is kind of a Mini-Me version of the member for Timmins—James Bay. He tried his best to figure out from Davenport what would be applicable to first nations communities in many vast regions of the country. He would know, or he should, that the government, just by way of example, invested more than \$80 million into state-of-the-art Internet service for communities covering Northern Ontario, which is an area larger than most European countries. We understand there are structural challenges and with respect to the bill, there are alternatives for supplying the information.

My question is in respect to his word “adjudicate”. The fact is that this information is not directly accessible by community members from their community. That creates the issue of self-governance. It is a conversation that needs to take place between the citizens living in a first nations community and their chief and council. It gets the minister out of it, which deals with the member's issue of gathering of power in the minister's office.

How can he reconcile his statements with the reality that the bill reflects the desires and wishes of first nations constituents asking this of their chief and council?

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, one of the fundamental ways in which communities access and get accountability is through dialogue and structures that are in place that are agreed upon by the community and not imposed upon them by the government. This is a huge issue. It is a historic problem and the government stepped right in that very same quagmire.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier I asked about the possibility of tabling the Kelowna accord. I realize I did not get the support to do that. However, it is also important for us to note that there was an aboriginal round table in regard to the Kelowna accord in 2004-05. It has a lot of support information in it.

Could my colleague talk about how important it is to take a better approach at consulting prior to introducing legislation? With Bill C-27, the consulting seemed to have been done after the bill was introduced.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, Canadians understand that the government's record on consultation means that it phones up some of its friends, gets a consensus and then imposes legislation with time allocation, rushing it through saying that it has properly consulted Canadians. This is a sham.

On our side, we introduced over a dozen amendments to the legislation in committee. Not one amendment to the bill from the NDP caucus was accepted or considered by the government. That is not broad consultation with Canadians. That is the government imposing its understanding of what is appropriate for first nations. It is the same paternalistic approach that governments of Canada have done with first nations throughout our history. It is not the way to go and it is not the way an NDP government would go.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to rise in this House to speak to the issues that are of concern to the people of Timmins—James Bay. I am particularly interested in speaking to Bill C-27.

I represent communities across the vast region of northern Ontario, and many of my communities are ground zero for the dysfunction in the relationship between the federal government and first nations.

In Kashechewan First Nation, we had two mass evacuations within one year. Not only the nation was shocked, but the world was shocked by the horrific conditions in Attawapiskat last year. Children in Attawapiskat, in a fight to get a basic grade school, had to take their fight all the way to the United Nations. We are talking about a very broken relationship. We talk about accountability. Accountability is a fundamental of re-establishing that relationship.

From my work within first nations and as a member of Parliament, I think that if the government were serious about addressing the fundamental dysfunction, it would start to shine the light of accountability within the Department of Indian Affairs, first and foremost. I have seen a black hole of accountability in that department. It shocks me that government after government continues on with the same broken old colonial system.

Getting basic numbers from Indian Affairs is an issue. The Conservatives talk about bands posting numbers. We are talking about budgets of hundreds of millions of dollars that have no accountability mechanisms to the people who should be receiving that accountability: the communities.

For example, I was trying to find out why we had such a lack of construction for schools. I was a school board trustee for the Northeastern Catholic District School Board, a little rural school board with some 15 schools spread over 400 kilometres.

Rural school board trustees have the same principles as trustees in a city like Toronto or Vancouver. They have to follow the rules. The rules are written. Literally they are the law of the land, because when children walk into a school, they have a set of rights. They do not even know what those rights are, but those rights are guaranteed in law—for example, the guarantee of a class size ratio, how much funding per pupil, how much funding to be set aside for teachers' salaries. The actual size of the classroom is written into law. Those things are all written in the laws of each of the provinces, and the funding is within ring fencing. Ring fencing is a fundamental principle of accountability.

For example, it would be impossible for the community of London, Ontario, to call its school board and tell the trustees that they are not getting a school, that the community is taking it because it has to give higher salaries to some of its staff, or that they cannot have the school because the community will be fixing some roads this year. That would be illegal.

Government Orders

That happens in the world of Indian Affairs all the time. The basic principle of ring fencing does not exist at Indian Affairs, because it does not want it to exist. What does that mean? Between 1999 and 2007, \$579 million was taken out of the capital facilities and maintenance program at Indian Affairs. This was \$579 million that would have been spent on schools, on water treatment plants and on housing.

It was roughly \$72 million a year that was pilfered from these communities. Where was it spent? An answer to an order paper question explained that it was spent on management, on legal services, litigation, public affairs and communication.

While our kids were going to school on the largest, contaminated, toxic brown field in North America and being exposed to levels of benzene that caused liver cancers, skin cancers and bone cancers, Indian Affairs was taking that money and blowing it on spin doctors and lawyers. That is its lack of accountability. Until that changes, nothing will begin to move forward in these communities.

The Conservatives talk about Canadians having a right to information while they are telling the Parliamentary Budget Officer to take them to court if he wants to know how they are spending money. It was the Parliamentary Budget Officer who had to shine a light on this government's absolute failure to protect the rights of children.

Let us go back to the issue of child rights. Every child in this country has a set of rights, unless they live on reserve. Then they get whatever Indian Affairs gives them.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer looked at the situation of education on reserves. What was found was appalling, that management of school assets was erratic, haphazard and without any coherent capital methodology whatsoever.

What does that mean? It means that in half of the provinces where the federal government has jurisdiction, the capital assets are not even monitored. It is not known if the schools are open, if they are full of mould or if they are shut.

● (1240)

It is not known that the Conservatives had taken over \$122 million out of school construction and spent it elsewhere. They said that half of the existing schools were in good condition, but they could not really tell because they had not investigated any of them. There were 77 schools listed as temporary structures. What the heck is a "temporary structure"? Is that a tent?

Canada is a signatory to international treaties on the rights of the child. Young Shannen Koostachin from Attawapiskat challenged the government. She asked why it was that because her skin was brown and she lived in Attawapiskat First Nation she was denied the rights that a child in Timmins or Toronto takes for granted.

The right to an education is not just the right to a school, which the children in Attawapiskat were not being given. I can say from a school board perspective that the right to an education is a plan for education. We have to have that plan and methodology. However, as the Parliamentary Budget Officer showed, year after year the government completely failed. It was not just this government. There has been a long-standing failure to address basic issues.

My community of Marten Falls is now seven years into a boiled water advisory, in a first world nation. This is a community that happens to be sitting right beside the Ring of Fire. I see Dalton McGuinty in Ontario saying that the Ring of Fire will save Ontario. Governments just cannot wait to get their money on those resources. I hear that from the federal government. Meanwhile, the people who are sitting beside the Ring of Fire have had to boil their water for seven years, and the government has just announced that it will cut off bottled water to the community because it is too expensive. That is a lack of accountability.

There was a plan this past summer in Attawapiskat to build 30 permanent houses. That would have gone a long way to alleviating the crisis in housing that still exists within that community. There was an agreement signed with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which does not sign agreements unless the financial wherewithal is there to pull them off. It was going to be a rent-to-own plan. It would have been a really good news story. This is what taxpayers want to hear. The government could have said that it has a rent-to-own plan with the people who are building the houses. The Indian affairs minister scuttled that deal. He scuttled it to punish the community because it made him look bad.

Under this bill, the minister gets to decide whether or not the government will withhold funds to a band that he decides he does not like. Let us talk about what that was like in Attawapiskat last January when the minister cut off education dollars to children. He used children in one of my communities as hostages to try to force the band council to its knees over the third party manager.

The third party manager finally went to federal court, which came out with a decision that the government's decision was indefensible and that it had no basis for the accusations it made against the community. However, throughout that, for three months, last January to March, the government cut off the funding to the children. That would be illegal anywhere else. That could not be done in the provincial system. If it was fighting with a town—

● (1245)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The parliamentary secretary is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, to say that the member is diverging from the topic we are debating is an understatement. I would ask him to refocus his comments on the actual bill and its contents as they were laid out by his own colleague in Motions Nos. 1, 2 and 3, which we heard the Speaker announce and ask us to speak to today.

An hon. member: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Greg Rickford: It is a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): As is the practice in this House, members are given significant latitude when debating a motion before this place. I would ask the hon. member, and all hon. members, to speak to the matter at hand and to address what is before the House.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am not asking for much latitude at all. I am speaking right to this bill, to the fact that the minister now has the power to withhold funding.

Government Orders

I know that the Conservatives play the dog whistle vote to their base to all the time about those bad native people, and that they would be able to punish those native communities sounds like a great thing. They punished the children of Attawapiskat for three solid months by cutting off funding to education. That would be illegal under the provincial system. They could not do it. They did that and had to go to federal court and lost. Now they are having to change the law so that they can impose those kinds of punishments on communities, and they think they will get away with it. Children cannot be held as hostages in the way the government did in Attawapiskat from January to March of 2012.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoulu, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay for his speech. It was very sensitive and very much in tune with his community in general and the aboriginal communities in his riding in particular.

For the government to claim that it is squeaky clean is totally ridiculous. If it showed as much zeal for strengthening the Canada Elections Act to give more powers to the Chief Electoral Officer, I would urge the government to exercise some restraint because I do not need to know the colour of every candidate's underwear during every election.

People need to realize that this bill goes way too far. It is very disturbing to see the fanatical zeal with which this government attacks specific groups in Canada. Take the example of the Canadian unions that are also the target of an initiative to disclose everything, including things that do not generally have to be disclosed in our society.

I would like the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay to say a few words about this disturbing zeal for attacking specific groups.

● (1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the failure of the government is it believes there is a quick, easy way to force through its agenda. That is not how change happens.

In my speech I asked for accountability at the Department of Indian Affairs because that has stopped so much development. There are basic issues, where agreements are in place that can move forward; those sit on somebody's desk and at the eleventh hour they get cancelled. That would never happen at the provincial level. It happens at Indian Affairs all the time. If we dealt with that, we would start to move ahead.

I think the issue of accountability and financial accountability is paramount. I certainly think we should work with this. Now agreements are being signed with mining companies. I would like to see transparent agreements. I would like to see transparent resource revenue sharing as our communities are developing, so everybody knows that if one is moving into a territory, these are the ground rules.

This is what companies have been asking for. They are saying they know there are going to be rules; they want to be shown what the rules are so everyone can work together. However, this government is picking one group, the first nations communities,

and treating them as the bad guys who have to be punished, as opposed to doing this in a coherent manner so we could actually move forward.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this member and other members bring forward arguments relating to why they think this is not good legislation. I am curious, because I come from northern Alberta. I have many relatives in first nations bands, treaty and status Indians. Even some past chiefs are related to me up in northern Alberta. I worked as a lawyer there, too. I saw first nations' plights first-hand. I saw how chiefs used moneys for their own benefit instead of for members. In particular, I even heard of cases where they would take band money, gamble with it and lose it, for their own gain or loss, as the case may be.

I heard some other arguments the hon. member has made. I have heard questions in the House from him before. Quite frankly, some of them seemed reasonable in the past. Even some of his comments now seem slightly reasonable in some respects.

Does the hon. member not see that this, in particular, is a first step for accountability in first nations, where chiefs and band leaders will be accountable to the members, and ultimately they will get better services? Band members will be treated with respect, while right now many of them have no respect. If they are not related or in some way connected to the chief, they have no rights. They have to leave the band under divorce cases or other things. Does he not see that this accountability, this step, would be the best thing for the people of Canada, the best thing for all members of all bands across the country? Does he not see that?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I can say I am quite proud that nobody is going to accuse the chiefs who represent my communities of taking band funds and going off and gambling that money. That might be a good stereotype. Maybe it has happened. I know it has happened at municipal levels, but it does not mean that we accuse every municipality of being corrupt and needing extra levels. We are asking what is only fair.

I would like to see the government meet the basic standards of accountability and transparency. We see there is a black hole of accountability within its departments. Before government members accuse native leaders of only helping people who are their relatives, and taking money and spending it on gambling, I think they would be well served to say to Canadians they will actually meet a standard of accountability and then ask other Canadians to meet it with them, rather than just throwing those kinds of smears around.

● (1255)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise on behalf of my constituents in Surrey North to speak on Bill C-27, an act to enhance the financial accountability and transparency of first nations.

I will speak to accountability and transparency in a moment, but I would first point out that the bill is fundamentally flawed in failing to address the real issues that we should be talking about in this House, the real issues affecting our first nation communities, including in northern British Columbia, Alberta and across the Prairies to Ontario and the rest of the country. Those real issues are housing, jobs, education and running water for our first nation young people.

Government Orders

It is a fundamental flaw in the bill that we are not discussing these issues that have affected our first nations for many years. We should be discussing these issues in the House to improve the lives of our first nation people. Yet, the Conservative government has failed to address any of these issues that need to be addressed.

Before starting out with a bill, it would make sense to consult the very people it would affect. We have heard in this House and at committee that the government has failed to address the concerns of first nations by listening to them, the very people the bill would affect.

It is not just about listening, but also about making changes to the bill to improve accountability and transparency. As we heard in committee, New Democrats produced a number of amendments that would have improved the bill, yet the Conservatives did not want to listen to them or make the changes.

From the Conservatives we have seen no accountability and transparency. There was no accountability by the Minister of Agriculture when it came to the XL Foods debacle. We saw no transparency or accountability from the Minister of National Defence or the Associate Minister of National Defence when it came to the F-35s. My colleague from northern Ontario talked about the lack of accountability in Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada in his speech, referring to a “black hole of accountability” there.

I think that accountability and transparency has to start with the government being accountable to the taxpayers of this country. However, the current Conservative government has failed to be accountable and transparent.

Despite hearing about transparency and accountability from the other side of the House, we have Bill C-38 and now Bill C-45, the omnibus budget bills. The Conservatives failed to properly consult on these bills and to put them into the right committees to look at the issues affecting Canadians. I am taken aback when Conservatives talk about accountability and transparency, because the current government has not shown any of that when it comes to a number of issues that have been raised in the House.

There are a number of so-called transparency and accountability issues the government brings up in the bill. I want to highlight them and look at whether there really is transparency and accountability and if things are in place already addressing some of those concerns.

The bill would require every first nation, except those with self-government regimes, to produce an audited annual consolidated financial statement; a separate annual schedule of remuneration covering the salaries, commissions, bonuses, fees, et cetera, paid by the first nation and any entity controlled by the first nation through its chief and each of its councillors in their professional and personal capacities; an auditor's written report respecting the consolidated financial statement; and an auditor's report respecting the schedule of remuneration.

● (1300)

For each of these four documents, the bill requires each first nation to provide it within four months upon request of any of its members, and to publish the document on its website and retain it there for over 10 years. Here is the kicker: the minister must also

publish the document on the website of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Failure of the first nation to comply with these requirements of the bill enables the minister to withhold any funds to first nations, and the minister can also terminate any funding agreement with first nations.

We heard from the previous speaker about the minister arbitrarily having these powers and the ability to withhold money for the very issues that we need to address. We saw him last winter withholding money for three months from first nation schools in northern Ontario communities.

There is a whole bunch of requirements now being put on first nations to report this stuff. I think these onerous requirements are already in place, because we can get that information already. However, I do know that the Conservatives have to play to their ideological base and interest groups to make it look like they are actually addressing the issues of first nations.

Again, if they were really concerned about addressing the real issues in our first nation communities, we would be discussing housing for first nations. We would be discussing education for every child and adult in first nations. We would be addressing water issues in first nation communities.

I have listed a number of requirements of the bill that will put an onerous burden on first nations. I also want to let the House and the people who are listening know that there are certain mechanisms in place that already incorporate some of these things. The current policy based requirements include the fact that the majority of the funding arrangements between Canada and first nations are in the form of fixed term contribution agreements under which first nations must satisfy certain conditions to ensure continued federal contribution payments. The requirements for financial reporting are also set out in AANDC's year-end financial reporting handbook. Under the year-end financial reporting handbook, first nations must submit to AANDC annual audited consolidated financial statements for which public funds are provided to them. These include the salary, honoraria, and travel expenses of all elected, appointed and senior unelected band officials. The latter basically include unelected positions, such as those of executive director and band manager.

Therefore, we already have in place arrangements where first nations provide this information when they sign agreements with the government for the funds available to them.

New Democrats are opposed to this legislation, as it will be imposed on first nations. We need to work in collaboration with first nations to come up with a framework to address the real issues that are of concern to them and Canadians. This has been going on for many years. We need to take a look at these issues. We should be discussing first nations' housing, education and running water. These are the real issues affecting our first nations, yet the government has consistently failed to address them.

Government Orders

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): Mr. Speaker, I feel that the member has moved the debate along a little bit. He should stay tuned in the next couple of days and weeks for legislation that I think he will support, because it will deal with the structural challenges around water and waste-water treatment, capacity reporting, monitoring and maintenance and, of course, replacing the infrastructure itself. We look forward to his support.

However, what he said is that these communities are already doing this. The problem is that they are doing it as an obligation to the department. We are saying that they should do it as an obligation to their constituents. I hear governance somewhere in there. I hear strengthening the ability between a constituent and its government, in the same way that the member's wages are posted and the same way mine are. In fact mine have to be posted even beyond any remuneration or expenses. The mayors of cities within the member's riding are posting their own as well. The premier has put most of his up in the recent past.

When a first nation's government receives a critical mass of its funds from another government, otherwise known as the taxpayer, why should it not simply turn to its community members and put that out to them? What fundamental problem would the member have with that concept?

• (1305)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am very happy that the government is bringing forward the real issues that we should be talking about in the House.

The Conservatives have been in government for six years. Prior to that my colleagues over there in the corner were in government for many years. The very issues that are facing first nations today have been problems for many years. The government has failed to address those conditions.

I am very happy that the government is bringing forward something that will address the real issues affecting our first nations communities.

In regard to the member's question, with any bill that is brought forward, I think the fundamental thing that needs to be done is to consult with the very people who will be affected. The government has failed to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague for his speech.

With regard to Bill C-27 currently before us, as the member said, we absolutely must not impose more restrictive standards on the first nations. The thing that strikes us is the notable lack of collaboration with the first nations when it comes to this bill. What is more, as the member said, this bill does nothing to address the real problem, namely that living conditions for first nations are getting worse.

My question has to do with the findings that the Auditor General released in June 2011. In her findings, she called for major structural

reforms in order to improve the federal government's policies and practices.

What does my colleague think? Can he comment on this?

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, again it pains me because I think we should be discussing issues that are very important to the first nation community. Those issues include education, water, and jobs for our young people.

This bill actually does not address any of that. A bill should begin with collaboration with the first nations to look at what their needs are and how we can address some of the issues in part of those communities.

My hon. colleagues talked about the former Auditor General and a number of recommendations in her report last year. We fully support those recommendations that would help advance our first nations and bring transparency and accountability to our first nations.

This bill is basically a smokescreen. It does not address accountability or transparency but does address the ideological base the government is catering to.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is almost trite to say but profoundly important to remember that governing is about priorities and choices. A majority government is in a unique position in this regard. A majority government can control the parliamentary agenda and research whatever issue it wishes. A majority government has access to full information and the resources of our civil service and departments. A majority government can put whatever legislation it wishes before the House.

For all Canadians watching today who care about what is going on in Parliament, the government has put Bill C-27 before us. This is what the bill would do. It would require all first nations, except those with self-governing regimes, to produce an audited annual consolidated financial statement and a separate annual schedule of remuneration that details the remuneration, salaries, wages, commissions, bonuses, fees, honoraria, dividends and expenses, including transportation, accommodation, meals, hospitality and incidentals, paid by first nations, and any entity controlled by a first nation, to its chief and each of the councillors in their professional and personal capacities. It requires an auditor's written report respecting the consolidated financial statements and an auditor's report respecting the schedule of remuneration. For each of these four documents, the bill would require each first nation to provide the document upon request to any of its members within 120 days, for the band to publish this information and documents on its website and to retain it on its website for 10 years.

Furthermore, the minister must publish the documents on the website of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Failure of a first nation to comply with these requirements would enable any first nation member to apply for a court order to the Superior Court; any person, including the minister, to apply for a court order to the Superior Court; and the minister to develop a so-called appropriate action plan to remedy the breach. The minister may withhold any funds to the first nation or terminate any funding agreement with that first nation.

Government Orders

As all Canadians can easily see, the bill deals with first nations. I ask everyone to consider all of the issues facing first nations people on reserve and in urban areas today. There are poverty rates facing first nations that are dramatically above non-aboriginals. There are incarceration rates, both men and in particular women, far exceeding the percentage of population that first nations comprise in our country. There are reserves across this country without safe drinking water. There are reserves across this country without proper housing, where multiple generations of families, sometimes 10 to 20 people, are crammed together, living in houses built for five. There are reserves without proper schools in this country. There are substandard and fewer education dollars and outcomes for aboriginals than there are for non-aboriginals.

Across this country on first nations reserves and in urban areas, there are epidemics of suicide, drug abuse and domestic violence. There are aboriginal people in Canada today who are living in third world conditions. This past summer, Canadians saw the Red Cross sending emergency aid to Canadians living on a reserve in Canada. The conditions on the ground are deplorable.

• (1310)

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The opposition tabled three motions that dealt with the substantive elements of Bill C-27. The member has not just deviated but has gone completely off the map in terms of what the House intended or contemplated speaking to today. I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to make a determination in this regard.

Mr. Don Davies: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Greg Rickford: It is a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. As I said earlier, it is the practice in this place that all hon. members are given significant latitude in terms of addressing the matter before the House. Having said that, I will once again take the opportunity to remind all hon. members that there is an agenda and would ask them to address it with their remarks.

The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, the member for Kenora has been wrong twice now. Only he and government members would stand up and say that talking about the conditions of first nations people in this country has nothing to do with a bill that deals with remuneration and disclosure to first nations people. That is something else.

The legal reality facing first nations in this country is this. We are dealing with an outmoded Indian Act, a paternalistic, ineffective vestige of colonialism. Despite billions of dollars spent by the Department of Indian Affairs, we have poor outcomes. Bands are being forced to go to court repeatedly to enforce basic rights over and over again. The government has an appalling record of violating treaties and failing to negotiate treaties with dozens of bands in Canada that have never ceded their rights, as they have in British Columbia, or signed a binding treaty nation to nation with Canada. Given all of these serious critical facts, what do the Conservatives decide is their priority to deal with when we talk about first nations? They want to go after what chiefs and councillors make.

We have done a bit of research. The average salary for chiefs of bands in this country is \$60,000. The average salary for band

councillors in this country is \$31,000. Fifty per cent of chiefs of bands in this country earn less than \$60,000 a year and only five per cent of chiefs in this country earn more than \$100,000.

Fifty per cent of first nations in this country have no Internet access, period. However, the Conservatives think the priority is to require bands to post financial information of what their chiefs and councillors make on their websites instead of being concerned with the thousands of first nations that have no access to the Internet. Really?

It is absolutely appalling to hear the Conservatives talk about the accountability of first nations. They sign trade deals negotiated behind closed doors and in secret, and then talk about wanting accountability for first nation bands. The Minister of Immigration spent \$750,000 of taxpayer dollars to conduct media monitoring of his own image, but the Conservatives want to crack down on first nation chiefs to make sure that taxpayer dollars are not wasted. The Conservative government brings in omnibus legislation that deprives parliamentarians of our ability to properly scrutinize laws, most of which have zero to do with the budget, but the government wants to talk about accountability. That is absolutely a joke.

New Democrats are opposed to the legislation because it was imposed on first nations without consultation and it runs counter to the Conservative pronouncements at the time of the Crown-first nations gathering that they would strive to work together with first nations. The inclusion of reporting of own-source revenues under the provision of federal legislation is unprecedented. Practically speaking, the requirement to publish detailed consolidated financial statements of first nation-controlled businesses may undermine their competitive abilities and financial success.

Now while the stated aims of Bill C-27 are to increase transparency to first nation citizens, the requirement for public posting on a first nation website along with posting on the AANDC website, and the allowance for any person, not just a member of a first nation, to apply to court for the disclosure of a financial statement and salary report, is an absolute violation of privacy. The Conservative government took away the long-form census because it thought that it was a violation of privacy to ask Canadians to anonymously disclose how many bedrooms they have in their house. However, the Conservatives do not care about forcing first nation bands to publish information about their expenses on a website without any concern for their privacy whatsoever.

The NDP does not support this legislation. The bill would not do anything to increase the accountability of first nation governments to their people. It would apply standards that are greater than those for elected officials in many other jurisdictions.

Government Orders

New Democrats want the government to work collaboratively with first nations to improve governance. Instead the Conservatives are cutting funding to institutions supporting governance, including the First Nations Statistical Institute and the National Centre for First Nations Governance. Changes to how audited statements are presented to first nations do not need legislation. It could be a requirement of funding arrangements with the department as each first nation government signs.

I want to conclude with something that the Assembly of First Nations said:

We all know what the problems are—they are not exorbitant salaries—they are decades of paternalism that have placed many First Nation leaders in a position where they are responsible for implementing decisions, but where the ultimate power to make decisions rests with the federal government (i.e., under the Indian Act). Not only does this continue to be patently inappropriate, it remains a recipe for poor outcomes.

• (1315)

Instead of the Conservatives playing politics and doing the bidding of their buddies at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, instead of making scapegoats of some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in society, why will the government not bring forth legislation to address the very real problems facing first nations in this country, and bring them up to the standards that every Canadian should expect?

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): Mr. Speaker, this debate is moving in the direction that we would want it to, and I appreciate the members across the way for doing that. We just heard the previous speaker talk about how happy he is to hear our priorities coming to the House and how supportive he would be of those. He said that the orientation to the department should focus rather on the people, so we are moving along.

At the outset of his speech, the member said that “governing is about priorities and choices” and that it can put whatever it chooses before us, which would be a budget and consolidated audited financial statements on past expenditures. Further we have a process of scrutiny from the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

In this case when we are talking about governance, I know the member wants to focus on one particular witness, but we heard from several first nations people, as private members' business and now as it is government legislation. These constituents from whom we heard had experienced intimidation and found it very problematic and almost impossible to get access to information on what the chief and council was spending. Why is that important? Because it helps them to govern. It helps them to make choices as a community.

I ask that the member reconcile that principle with what he said in his speech. It does not make any sense.

• (1320)

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, here is what I think the majority of Canadians would rather us be debating in the House today when we are talking about first nations. Instead of worrying about that infinitesimal number of chiefs who are making over \$100,000 year, they would rather we were sitting here discussing ways we can get

more food into the hands of first nations children. Canadians would rather we be sitting here debating money allocated to determine how we are going to build housing across this country on every single reserve, so every single first nation, missing not one, can live in dignified surroundings. They would rather parliamentarians be in the House talking about how we can ensure we have safe drinking water for every single Canadian, when in 2012 we still face the appalling reality that many first nations do not have that. Those are the kinds of choices that I think Canadians would rather parliamentarians be making and discussing today, not this stereotyping, scapegoating, paternalistic non-issue that the government is pursuing.

If the Conservatives want to talk about accountability, they can start by practising some themselves.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to ask my colleague a question.

The government is asking the first nations to provide information to their own members. It should be noted that sometimes it is difficult for some members to get certain information. However, is the solution really to make that information public and available to everyone? When information is posted on a website, everyone in the world has access to it.

Is a website that everyone has access to really the solution for ensuring that every member has access to this information? Businesses on the reserves could take advantage of that information.

Is this really the solution?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, of course it is not desirable. We have to consider the privacy and policy implications of every decision we make in the House. As a solid opposition that is what we are doing. We are bringing to the Conservatives' attention that by compelling first nations to publish detailed financial expenses, personal incomes and expenditures of band members on websites, and permitting any single person across this country to take the band to court, is a recipe for a violation not only of privacy laws or of perhaps commercial projects, but also perhaps even the charter itself.

In Nova Scotia, summaries of expenses of ministers are located at the legislative library for public viewing. The Government of the Northwest Territories only publishes travel expenses of ministers and does not require salary disclosure of elected officials or senior public servants, and neither Yukon nor Prince Edward Island disclose salaries of elected officials. That involves many more public servants than are at issue here.

Maybe we could start with ensuring that governments across this country are disclosing adequately to their citizens. However, at this point, with the amount of profound and dramatic problems facing first nations, I am grossly disappointed that, while there are serious problems to be dealt with, the Conservatives have chosen an issue that really will not make life better for any first nations.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House to speak about Bill C-27.

This bill is of particular interest to me, not because there are a lot of aboriginal communities in my riding, but because I put myself in the shoes of everyday Canadians who are concerned about the problems faced by the first nations, as described by my colleague, and consider the bill from that perspective.

Once again, the government foisted legislation on us without any consultative process. There is nothing new about what we are seeing today: it is common practice for the Conservative government to fail to consult those affected by its bills.

This bill is testament to the government's inability to engage in a consultative process before imposing measures. The bill will most certainly have an impact on those concerned— people who could have brought something positive to the debate. These people are better informed than we are as legislators. A consultative process enables us to put ourselves in the shoes of the people who are directly affected, who work and are active in the field on a daily basis. That is why consultations are important. The government has never bothered to hold consultations before drafting legislation.

As I said earlier, this government is often driven by a populist approach. It responds to certain specific events. In this particular case, newspapers reported that a few first nations chiefs had extremely high salaries. As usual, the Conservatives are reacting to very specific issues and introducing legislation accordingly. In my opinion, that way of legislating is not good for our country and does not help us to move forward. The government is simply reacting to small-scale events that have no broad application in Canada.

In our opinion, it is unprecedented that a federal statute would prescribe the disclosure of an independent source of income. I think this will hurt the first nations. The government claims that the bill is designed to help them and that its intentions are good, but the bill could have the opposite effect.

If that much information is disclosed, a number of businesses and companies working on reserve will have to make public more information than their counterparts. These companies will have to disclose this information to the public at large. This means posting information on a website for the whole world to see. Anybody who has access to the Internet, in Canada or elsewhere, will have access to the information. It will obviously give companies that have access to privileged information regarding other companies an unfair advantage. Businesses that are forced to publish more information will lose their competitive edge.

We believe that this will actually achieve the opposite of what the Conservatives want. This will not help the communities in any way, because those businesses will not want to remain associated with first nations, since that would put them at a disadvantage in Canadian markets. We think the opposite will occur: businesses will steer clear of first nations and the money will disappear. This means even fewer resources for first nations, which is definitely not a good thing.

Judith Sayers, who holds the national aboriginal economic development chair at the University of Victoria, gives an interesting explanation:

The fallout of this is that in an effort to remove a First Nation business from the need to publish its financial statements publicly, the business is too far removed from the First Nation and has no connection or accountability to the members of the First Nation. This whole provision needs to be seriously rethought with a business perspective as well as one of equality of other companies and businesses out there that do not need to publish their financial statements for the world to see.

We are talking about entrepreneurship, which sometimes gets the Conservatives' attention. Fairness for all companies in Canada is diminishing. Some companies will be subject to certain requirements, while others will not. It is simply unfair to those businesses.

The other point I wanted to address is the fact that accountability should exist among local governments, first nations and the population. We do not understand why this information should be made public. The goal of the bill was to make this information available to the members of aboriginal communities, not to the entire world.

● (1325)

This measure will disadvantage these first nations. How can the goal of this bill be achieved when countless aboriginal communities simply do not have access to the Internet? The government is missing the point here. It says the information will be posted on a website, but there are people who do not even have access to the Internet. I do not have the exact figures, but a large proportion of aboriginal communities, which are often in remote areas, do not even have access to the Internet. The government is not solving a problem. It is creating a false problem and appears to be trying to solve it in order to satisfy special interests.

I would add that accountability between the first nations and their members is already covered by section 69 of the Indian Act. Measures are already in place whereby the first nations must produce reports for the department and share the information with their members. This is already included in provisions, in laws. This bill does nothing but satisfy some lobby group, probably. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation often comes up. As I was saying earlier, because of one specific incident, the government seems to be trying to change the legislation in order to satisfy a particular group that took exception to some figures a few years ago.

In my view, this bill goes against two rulings by the Federal Court. As I was saying, it has already been said that there needs to be accountability. Two rulings mention it, including the ruling in *Montana Band of Indians v. Canada (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs)*, where the court found that first nations' financial statements were confidential information within the meaning of paragraph 20(1)(b) of the Access to Information Act and, accordingly, were not required to be disclosed. This bill contradicts federal legislation, namely the Access to Information Act.

We have a number of questions about access to information legislation. Will this be protected? The Privacy Act might be affected as well.

Government Orders

There was also *Sawridge Band v. Canada* (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs). The court ruled that these financial statements are not confidential vis-à-vis the members of a first nations band, since the members of a band can have access to the financial statements of their own band under the Indian Bands Revenue Moneys Regulations.

This Federal Court ruling explained that these documents were already accessible to band members. In theory, Bill C-27 is not needed to gain access to this information. Laws and court rulings have already granted this access.

The government of a first nation must be accountable to its members. This bill is merely a reaction to newspaper articles. As I said earlier, the Conservatives like to react to specific incidents in this manner.

Members spoke about the salaries of first nations leaders, lumping them all together. However, as mentioned earlier, the reality is that the average salary of chiefs is \$60,000 and the average salary of councillors is \$31,000. It is important to note that 50% of chiefs earn less than \$60,000 and that only 5% of them earn more than \$100,000. I mentioned that the government was reacting to specific incidents that do not reflect the general reality in Canada. Only 5% of chiefs earn over \$100,000. Here in the House, we all know our salary: we earn over \$150,000. Should these chiefs, who are responsible for their bands, be making less than \$60,000 or \$30,000? This raises some questions.

Of course, the NDP supports transparency and accountability at all levels of government. We oppose useless measures that will serve only to increase red tape for first nations. I spoke about red tape a little earlier when I asked my colleague a question. The government says that all red tape must be eliminated because it costs too much and it is not good. However, there are two bills before the House that will increase red tape for unions and first nations: private member's Bill C-377 and Bill C-27, respectively. A government that prides itself on eliminating red tape in this country is thus doing the exact opposite, and creating red tape for specific target groups in Canada.

Unfortunately, the government did not work with us in committee at all. I said earlier that the government never consulted the first nations. When it comes to consulting the opposition, the government is even worse. The government always refuses to work with us.

● (1330)

We proposed 18 amendments that the Conservatives never considered. As a result, we are going to vote against this bill. I welcome any questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it never ceases to amaze me that when we bring a bill forward, such as this one, which seeks to provide transparency and open government for first nations, something that I think all members in the House would consider laudable, the opposition members simply cannot see their way clear to doing what is right. In this case, they say that they support transparency, accountability and first nations members being able to understand the financial dealings of their band council but that they just cannot support it in the bill.

That is a cop-out. They simply cannot say that they support transparency and accountability but then vote against them every time they come up in the House.

Why do members of the NDP believe that transparency and accountability are not owed to each and every first nations band member?

● (1335)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thought I was quite clear in my speech. I will repeat a little of what I said. This information is already available for first nations; it is already sent to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. I was able to provide the figures regarding average salaries because that information is already available and first nations can therefore consult it.

I agree that we need to find a solution to make those documents available to some members of first nations who do not have access to them for various reasons. However, I do not think that the solution is to put those documents on a website that anyone and everyone can consult. This will have the opposite effect and will harm first nations by putting many businesses on reserves at a disadvantage compared to others. This will definitely be harmful to them. The Conservatives are certainly in no position to give lessons on government transparency.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his comments, the government member asked how we in the opposition could vote against accountability. The first thing that came across my mind was what I had talked about earlier when I was addressing the bill, and that was the accountability portion within the Kelowna accord. That accountability had, for example, first nations support for the establishment of a first nations auditor general. However, the present government tore up that agreement and did not respect that. Does that mean that the government does not support accountability?

The issue before us on this particular bill, at least in most part, is the fact that the government did not do its homework by consulting with first nations and leaders within our first nations communities before the drafting of the bill so that it would have that level of expertise and a better understanding of what it should be tabling here in the House.

Would the member not agree that the single biggest flaw in the legislation is the fact that the government did not do its homework in terms of its obligation to consult with first nations?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I agree, and as I said earlier, this is not the first time a Conservative government has brought in legislation without doing any consultation. This cannot produce anything of substance. A good government does its homework and consults the public before introducing a bill.

Government Orders

In this case, it is as if the government is introducing the bill and then sitting back and watching the reactions. That is the opposite of how it should proceed. A government should consult first and draft a bill based on what it learned. If it had done any consultation, it would have learned that this could put some companies at a disadvantage. It would have known about everything I said in my speech. Perhaps it would not have introduced this bill in its current form and maybe it would have had a little more support from the opposition, if it had done its homework.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first allow me to congratulate the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan for her work on first nations issues.

Bill C-27 concerns an issue that is not very familiar to many members of this House. I must admit that there is no reserve in my riding. In matters relating to first nations, I rely on my colleagues who have experience with this issue and on my own experience gained through discussions.

Just by chance, last Friday I was on the wonderful Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg reserve in the beautiful Gatineau valley in the Pontiac, home to an Algonquin First Nation. The hon. member for Pontiac is doing excellent work there as well. As our justice critic, I discussed various justice-related issues with a number of people from that reserve.

I was able to meet some really extraordinary people, including Chief Gilbert Whiteduck who acted as both our tour guide and our spiritual guide, so that we could get a better understanding, even in that short time, of a number of things that are happening on that reserve. We also met councillors Caitlin Tolley and Bill Ottawa. I applaud Caitlin Tolley, a young woman of 22, who has become involved in governance on the reserve. I was very pleased to meet her and councillor Bill Ottawa.

We were also able to visit Waseya House and meet the front-line workers there, Lynn Buckshot and Sue Thran.

Meeting the chief of police was also very interesting. The police force is located on the reserve and controlled by band members. The chief, Gordon McGregor, and the officers are doing extraordinary work under rather difficult circumstances. We also met the director of health and social services, Robin Decontie.

Another extremely important meeting was with Bridget Tolley and Laurie Odjick, who are heavily involved in the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women. They work tirelessly. One of them lost her mother in an accident that the police have still not finished investigating, perhaps because lions that escape reserves get more attention than any people there, especially first nations women. Laurie Odjick's daughter disappeared six or seven years ago. These women will never give up until all the necessary investigations are complete. Where there is life, there is hope.

I am telling you about all this because all these meetings were held in complete transparency. These people are not afraid to show who they are. However, as a proud nation, they would certainly like to be consulted when we make decisions from on high, here in these hallowed halls but far from their lands. Here we appear to say that the first nations are as important as the anglophones and francophones across this country, but when it comes time to give

them full self-determination, we constantly put obstacles in their way.

Everything I have heard in the speeches since this morning has made me shudder—it is as if I am watching the *Twilight Zone*, a program people from my generation might be familiar with.

The government members—in their speeches and questions—have spent the whole morning talking about transparency and accountability. This is ridiculous and surely cannot be coming out of the mouths of the members opposite—because day after day we struggle to get the Conservatives to be even the slightest bit transparent and accountable. It is as if these words are not even part of their vocabulary, except when they chose to foist them on others. It is always easier to point the finger at others.

It is not a negligible problem, nor a cop-out, as some members opposite have claimed—it is a major problem.

● (1340)

Everybody is in favour of the principle of transparency. Everybody is in favour of the principle of accountability. However, there is one thing that we are not in favour of—and it is not just a matter of style or appearance, it is about substance. If the first nation's right to self-determination is to be recognized, it must be respected and abided by. This also means consulting those who are affected.

Engaging and consulting are quite different concepts in the eyes of the law. We must not be taken for fools, as is this government's wont.

What frustrates me the most is that introducing this kind of bill on the financial transparency of the first nations suggests that the first nations are not being transparent. This perpetuates negative stereotypes that are bandied about on our radio stations, or among people who, like me—at least before this Friday—have never visited a reserve, have no idea what they are talking about and cannot stop mouthing off. They think that all the chiefs are lining their pockets, that people are getting the wool pulled over their eyes, that billions of dollars are being handed over, and that we have no idea what is being done with the money. They are perpetuating this kind of prejudice, these kinds of bogus and extremely negative rumours that remain etched in people's psyches.

Indeed, I would wager anyone in this House that if I ventured out into the street, I would easily stumble upon nine people out of ten who would respond negatively if asked whether they thought that the first nations on reserve are transparent. Ninety percent of those I asked would probably say that no, there is no transparency whatsoever. Why is that? It is because we are allowing this kind of stereotype to be perpetuated. It is extremely condescending.

When a government claims that a people form a nation, and in the same breath imposes its own methods, that certainly does not show a willingness to deal nation to nation with people to whom we owe a lot. In fact, as Chief Whiteduck told me, even Parliament is on their territory. People may not agree on ancestral lands, on what belongs to whom, but that said, up until now, discussions among the parties has always been Canada's method of choice.

Government Orders

One particular aspect of this issue is especially frightening. During our meeting last Friday, when we met to talk about human trafficking—kidnapping and prostitution—and about criminal justice on reserves, no one spoke about the lack of transparency of their band council. What they spoke about were the pressing needs, those that the Auditor General herself found a few years ago and made recommendations about. There are huge needs. Poverty rates are through the roof. There are economic problems.

On the one hand, we want transparency, yet on the other hand, we are leaving them in the poorest regions, in absolutely terrible conditions. Sometimes, these are conditions we would not even subject an animal to.

I look at the problems that the police chief raised during our visit, such as the drug problem. It worries me that the Minister of Health is authorizing certain prescription medications that will cause problems on our streets and even more problems on our reserves. However, there are other problems, such as the disappearance of aboriginal women.

I will conclude by reading something that was given to me by Ms. Tolley and Ms. Odjick.

• (1345)

[*English*]

I am writing today to express my concern over the lack of government response to the plight of missing aboriginal women in Canada. The statistics are shocking, 580 women have been lost since 1970, more than half of that number since 2000.

It goes on to say that while the Government of Canada announced \$10 million worth of funds to address this issue in the March 2010 budget, families and communities are still waiting for justice. It goes on to say that it is time for the Government of Canada to respond to the needs of families of missing and murdered aboriginal women by ensuring access to healing and justice services, and that it is time for a national plan of action to end violence against aboriginal women.

I would add that it is time for the government to be transparent with first nations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her speech.

People have mentioned the Conservatives' double-talk on transparency. On the one hand, they claim to want greater transparency in local and first nation governments and, on the other hand, they do the exact opposite when it comes to their own policies.

Are they applying the “Do as we say, not as we do” rule? What does my colleague have to say about transparency? Is the government in a position to lecture us?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, the government certainly has nothing to teach us. Consider the budget and the volume of information released.

Indeed, lack of transparency, information and consultation also includes releasing a huge volume of documents, then giving people about two hours to read them. That is not exactly transparency. That is not a genuine exchange of views or a consultation process, and it does not reflect any interest in other people's opinions.

We constantly see this pattern with international treaties, for example, because we do not know which criteria are used. Everything is always done and decided behind closed doors, particularly the Prime Minister's doors. His ministers are even told what to say in front of the cameras, even though they know they are about to spread falsehoods.

There is something unhealthy here. Therefore, to have the nerve to introduce a bill known as the “First Nations Financial Transparency Act” is simply ridiculous.

• (1350)

[*English*]

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member for Gatineau if she recalls the recent Crown-first nations gathering and what looked to be some goodwill coming out of that meeting about Crown-first nations relationships and mutual respect as a basis for moving forward.

How does the member think the bill might relate to what we heard the government say at the end of that event?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: That is an excellent question, Mr. Speaker. Usually I am an optimist, but after that conference, I was not that optimistic because there were too many generalities.

I think the first nations hoped, in good faith, that the government would stick with what it seemed to look like it would do, but the way government members have acted on this legislation toward first nations just proves my point.

There is not an ounce of serious will to definitely respect, and respect is more a question of delivering the real goods than being here and apologizing. The Conservatives can apologize all they want, but if they do not mean that apology and go outside of these doors and do the opposite of what they have apologized for, there is a problem of credibility.

I humbly submit that fundamentally it is the problem of credibility with the government. Government members speak, say words, utter sentences, but nobody believes them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask a second question which still has to do with double-talk. It is interesting to see the government's way of doing things. This time, I am referring to double-talk regarding red tape.

On the one hand, departments are saying we must eliminate red tape. Ministers tell us they are trying to cut red tape. But then the government turns around and imposes even more red tape on first nations.

Could the hon. member comment on this aspect of the Conservatives' double-talk?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief because I know I am running out of time. Indeed, this is more double-talk. As far as red tape is concerned, it is a joke.

Statements by Members

When I read the bill, when I looked at the notes and listened to the speeches, I thought to myself, there is no way that billions of dollars are being sent to help the first nations serve their members and people who stay on reserve, without any accountability. Agreements and audits are already in place.

All the government is doing is adding layers in order to create obstacles. The truth is that the government does not want more transparency. It wants to humiliate the first nations by introducing this type of bill without consultation, without giving them a chance to say a word about it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There are five minutes left before statements by members.

The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-27, which requires every first nations community to provide the following: annual consolidated financial statements; a separate schedule of annual remuneration paid by the first nation, and by any entity controlled by the first nation, to its chief and each of its councillors in their professional and personal capacities; the auditor's written report respecting the consolidated financial statements; and the auditor's report respecting the schedule of remuneration.

The Conservatives are trying to teach the first nations a lesson about transparency. He who can, does; he who cannot, teaches. That saying is quite appropriate in my opinion because the government is very closed and not transparent and does not even want to provide crucial information to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who needs it in order to be transparent with Canadians and tell them what the federal government is spending taxpayers' money on. The Conservatives are not even doing this much and they are asking first nations to do more. The first nations already have to submit more than 200 reports to the federal government, which is huge.

One of the most troubling aspects of this bill is that it directly affects the first nations. As an MP, when working on a bill that affects a certain group, I will consult that group. However, this is something that the government does not seem to understand. What does it mean to consult someone? It is not just listening to witnesses in committee, who do not speak for very long. It means going to see the groups, the first nations, before drafting a bill. In that way, they can say what they would like to see in the bill, what measures do not work and what will disadvantage first nations communities.

Consequently, we are very disappointed because first nations should be consulted and especially because consultations are mandatory under a UN declaration ratified by Canada. It is important that we honour our commitments. It is not just a matter of will; it is about meeting our legal obligations.

Another paradox is that the government wants to reduce the paper burden. Huge cuts were made because the government wants to eliminate red tape and increase efficiency. However, all those measures that the government wants to implement will require huge resources and result in a waste of time and money.

Right now, in our own country, people are living in crises and in appalling conditions. I am thinking of communities such as Attawapiskat, which the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay is

defending so well in the House. These communities do not have schools, and they do not have safe housing. It is cold in northern Ontario and people are freezing in houses that are totally inadequate.

The government should tackle these issues instead. It should ensure that every young person—and I emphasize the term “every” because we are aware of the current situation—living in a first nation community can attend school. Going to school is a basic and essential need. Why are we not debating this issue? It is because this government's first bill on first nations seeks to impose transparency measures on them, without consulting them, without consulting those who will be most affected. The government is not dealing with critical issues such as drinking water and food. Incidentally, food is not available at an affordable price in northern rural communities. People must pay exorbitant prices for fresh food.

The government says it wants to eliminate red tape to increase efficiency. However, when other governments already have to file 200 reports and will have to produce more, the Conservatives do not even take into consideration the fact that this may impair these governments' ability to provide direct services to citizens who really need them.

My time is up. I will continue later.

• (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for debate has expired. The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville has five minutes left.

We will now proceed to Statements by Members. The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to celebrate the contributions of four individuals from Etobicoke—Lakeshore in making our community, our country and the world a better place.

First, I wish to recognize Leah Houston. Leah is the artistic director of MABELLEarts in Etobicoke. She has been cultivating a community-based arts practice for over eight years, incorporating visual arts, theatre and performance. She brings together people of all ages and backgrounds to creatively transform the Mabelle community.

Second, I wish to recognize Toronto police inspector Tim Crone. In 2011, Tim signed up to serve with the RCMP mission to train and mentor Afghan National Police officers. He left family and home for one year to help build a secure future for the people of Afghanistan. We salute his courage and dedication.

Last, I wish to recognize Liz and Carl Porritt. Liz and Carl are the owner-operators of Porritt Real Estate in Long Branch. Their volunteer activities include serving on the board of the Long Branch Business Improvement Area and organizing the Etobicoke Lakeshore Christmas Parade, recognized as one of the best parades in Ontario.

For their contributions, these individuals have been awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

* * *

•(1400)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with Bill C-38, new employment insurance measures were implemented and we had to deal with the definition of "real job search".

The Conservative government lacked transparency by failing to inform the public of the real effect that these new rules would have. It is disrespectful to inform people of new requirements as they receive their cheques—that is, when they get one. This government takes people for dishonest slackers when it asks them for actual proof of interviews with potential employers. The Conservatives discredit workers, treat them like children and humiliate them. They must prove they are looking for work, not to mention that someone from Forestville must now report for an interview in Baie-Comeau, an hour's drive away.

There is no real job creation solution. At the end of the race in the regions, we will be seeing an exodus of skilled workers. The Conservatives are jeopardizing the efforts of the economic players in those regions. The minister can see that for herself if she comes to Haute-Côte-Nord or Charlevoix. For the seasonal industry back home, winter is winter.

* * *

[English]

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize a very special milestone for Caledon's senior statesman, Alex Raeburn, who will celebrate his 100th birthday on November 26, 2012.

This long-time resident in my riding of Dufferin—Caledon has made countless contributions to our community through his many years of public service to various municipal and provincial bodies and organizations. He has dedicated his life to educating his fellow citizens on the natural beauty and rich heritage of Caledon.

Alex's countless contributions have made our community a better place to live, work and play. In appreciation for his exceptional efforts, he was honoured with a spot on the Caledon Walk of Fame in 2008.

I encourage everyone to join me in wishing Alex Raeburn a very happy 100th birthday.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

NATIONAL CHILD DAY

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is National Child Day. On November 20 of every year, we commemorate and celebrate Canada's signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

With its 193 signatory states, it is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, proof that the problems of children transcend political opportunism. Many of those countries have implemented the Convention on the Rights of the Child with the aid of a commissioner for children, and nine of Canada's 10 provinces have advocates for children and youth.

[English]

On December 5, I hope that members of all sides of the House agree on the importance of putting our children ahead of our politics and vote for Bill C-420. With this, we can continue working toward establishing a federal commissioner for children and young people in Canada, making Canada a global beacon for children's rights.

* * *

HORTICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this month I had the pleasure of making an announcement in Beamsville, Ontario, calling for new funding for the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre. This investment includes \$382,000 to cultivate new international market opportunities, as well as to invest in biocontrol research. This promising announcement reaffirms the government's commitment to the Canadian horticulture industry and the small and mid-size businesses it supports.

The funding will be spent on a number of projects and initiatives to increase innovation and boost profits. One of the investments will assist the Canadian Ornamental Horticulture Alliance in developing innovative strategies for the flower, nursery and landscape sectors.

A second project with the Vineland Centre is to develop an innovative grape-drying process that concentrates flavours. This innovative process will help Canadian growers and processors break into new wine markets and strengthen Canada's wine industry. These projects will advance the productivity, profitability and competition of the Canadian horticultural industry.

This is one more example of our government's commitment to the horticulture sector, small and mid-size businesses, and the positive impact it is making on businesses and on the lives of Canadians.

* * *

•(1405)

[Translation]

HONORÉ-MERCIER

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the pleasure of speaking with many people in my riding.

Statements by Members

How can I forget the wonderful bowling fundraiser for those in need hosted by the Association Marie-Reine d'Anjou? In Rivière-des-Prairies, I met with two youth organizations. The first meeting was held as part of the Carrefour jeunesse-emploi's anniversary and the second took place at the Maison des jeunes de Rivière-des-Prairies.

I would like to thank the workers, parents and teachers for their work and for making young people their focus. These adults listen to young people and use their life experience to show young people that they can make their dreams come true.

However, reality is not always easy to deal with. The director of the Centre de la famille haïtienne et interculturel de Rivière-des-Prairies is well aware of this fact. This year, she lost one of her staff members as a result of budget cuts, something we are all familiar with. She shared with us her concerns about the deterioration of the services for newcomers and their families.

The work being done by the Table des élus de l'Est is thus more important than ever. We represent all parties at all levels of government. Together, we are trying to find ways to solve the problems facing eastern Montreal. We met last week.

* * *

[English]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is proposing a carbon tax that would cost \$21 billion. President Obama rejects a carbon tax. White House press secretary, Jay Carney, rejects a carbon tax. The Fort St. John & District Chamber of Commerce rejects a carbon tax. The BC Grain Producers Association rejects a carbon tax. The Fort Nelson Chamber of Commerce rejects a carbon tax. The BC Fruit Growers' Association rejects a carbon tax. Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform rejects a carbon tax. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation rejects a carbon tax.

A carbon tax kills jobs. A carbon tax kills investment. A carbon tax kills growth. Reject the NDP carbon tax.

* * *

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate a great Edmontonian who has served our city and raised Edmonton's national and international presence by leaps and bounds over the past two decades.

Mr. Martin Salloum has served for 18 years as president and CEO of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce and has announced that he will be leaving this position, unfortunately, in March 2013.

During his time as president of the chamber, Martin has transformed the organization from a struggling association to what is today the largest chamber in the country. The Edmonton chamber is nationally recognized as one of the most effective and influential business organizations in Canada. He has served over 30 years promoting business and working with chambers at both the municipal and provincial level in Alberta.

Martin is in Ottawa today as part of the Edmonton Chamber's EEDC annual delegation to Parliament Hill. I would like to take this

opportunity, on behalf of all my colleagues, especially those from Edmonton, to thank Martin for his 18 years of vision and leadership for the city of Edmonton. I wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

* * *

TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize November 20 as Transgender Day of Remembrance. People in communities across Canada and around the world will gather today to remember victims of transphobic violence and to dedicate themselves to working to end discrimination against transgender, transsexual and gender variant people.

Last year, more than 265 transpeople were murdered and countless others were victims of violence and discrimination. Not only are transCanadians more likely to be victims of hate crimes, those hate crimes are more than twice as likely to be violent. This year, the list of those murdered includes the tragic loss of January Marie Lapuz, a transwoman in B.C.

However, in Canada, we are beginning to turn this tide. Consideration of Bill C-279, which would protect transgender rights in Canada, begins in the justice committee today. As well, legislation was just introduced this morning in the Nova Scotia legislature that will add Nova Scotia to the Northwest Territories, Ontario and Manitoba as jurisdictions where transrights are explicitly protected. We should all be proud to see Canada assuming a leadership role on this issue of equal rights.

On this Transgender Day of Remembrance let us continue to make progress in ensuring that in Canada transrights are human rights.

* * *

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I invite members to unite in one voice to offer best wishes and the heartiest of congratulations to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh on their 65th wedding anniversary. I wish them long life and continued happiness.

As they celebrate their life together, may they know that they are held warmly in the hearts of Canadians across this land.

Statements by Members

● (1410)

[Translation]

TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, November 20, is the Trans Day of Remembrance when transgender and transsexual people, and their supporters, gather to commemorate the victims of transphobic violence. It is important to remember that trans people are subject to much more discrimination than the rest of the population.

In the case of young trans people, the numbers are staggering. According to a recent study by Egale, 74% of trans students say they are harassed because of their gender expression, and 47% of them were physically attacked.

I truly hope that, as a society, we become more tolerant towards one another, look beyond our differences and accept others for who they really are. Resorting to violence, whether physical or psychological, is unacceptable. We are not animals. We must treat our fellow men with kindness, not hatred.

It is very appropriate that this week we will be voting on my national bullying prevention strategy. Neither adults nor children should engage in bullying, regardless of their victim's difference.

I hope my colleagues in the House will think about that when they vote.

* * *

[English]

FIGURE SKATING

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in March 2013, all eyes will be on London, Ontario, as we welcome the world's best figure skaters at Budweiser Gardens located in my riding of London North Centre.

The World Figure Skating Championships will bring together top figure skaters from around the world to compete for the world championships and, with that, comes a boost to London's economy.

Our government is the single largest contributor to sport in this country and is proud to support and host international sporting events in Canada as they leave long-lasting economic sport and infrastructure legacies for Canadians.

Who could forget Joannie Rochette's inspirational bronze medal performance at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics, or London's very own Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir's gold medal winning performance, or Patrick Chan's consistent brilliance on the ice earning him two world championships?

I have no doubt that these Canadian icons will once again make us proud at the 2013 World Figure Skating Championships. I am proud of my city of London and encourage everyone to visit our city to watch this great event.

Go Canada Go.

SIR WILFRID LAURIER

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Sir Wilfrid Laurier was born on this day, November 21, 1841. When Sir John A. Macdonald passed away, the most eloquent eulogy came from his political opponent, Sir Wilfrid, who said, "...he was also endowed with those inner, subtle, undefinable graces of soul which win and keep the hearts of men". We can say that Laurier had these same qualities.

[Translation]

Like Macdonald before him, Laurier was a great prime minister and a great party leader. He cared deeply about the country's nature and identity, and he never let divisive regional, racial, religious or partisan policies prevent him from making difficult decisions.

[English]

Laurier's eloquence will long be remembered. He reminded us that faith is stronger than doubt and love is stronger than hate. His political motto was always "Canada first, Canada last, Canada always". A good motto for all of us.

He was, of course, a great Liberal but, above all, he was a fine human being and a passionate Canadian. It is only right that on this occasion we should praise this worthy and famous man.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that the NDP is out of touch with hard-working Canadians. Let us take the 2011 NDP election platform. It proposes a \$21 billion carbon tax.

[Translation]

This is merely a suggestion by the leader of the opposition, but perhaps he should try a new strategy such as, for example, put the question to Canadians.

The last time I consulted with my constituents, they did not ask for heavier taxes, fewer jobs or higher prices. In fact, they are asking for the exact opposite.

[English]

Instead of listening to their buddies at the Broadbent Institute, perhaps the New Democrats should listen to hard-working Canadians. They may be surprised by what they hear.

I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to put a pin in his reckless policy idea and come back down to earth where hard-working Canadians can tell him, no carbon tax.

[Translation]

No carbon tax.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives came to power, they showered their rich corporate friends with tax cuts. As a result of these favours, last year, these businesses paid the same amount in taxes as they paid six years ago.

Oral Questions

But what about Canadians, the people the government is supposed to be working for? Last year, my constituents paid \$8 billion in service charges. That is \$2 billion more than in 2005.

Over the past four years, their tax contributions to government revenues have increased by \$40 billion. The Conservatives told us that their policies would create wealth, but if that is truly the case, who is benefiting? The reality is that six years later, people are more in debt.

The personal debt rate has reached record highs because salaries have not increased and good jobs are hard to come by. The Conservatives could try to restore a balance to encourage our prosperity, but instead, they are wasting their time making up stories about the NDP.

Frankly, Canadians deserve better, and in 2015 the Conservatives will get what is coming to them.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the House learned yesterday, the NDP and Exxon have aligned in support of the NDP leader's \$21 billion carbon tax. Why is Exxon supporting the NDP leader's plan? It is because a carbon tax would allow gas companies like Exxon to charge Canadians more at the pump, 10¢ a litre to be precise.

On this side of the House, we think that Canadians give enough of their hard-earned dollars to government and do not want gas stations and the NDP imposing higher carbon taxes and prices on Canadians. That is why we will continue to fight the Exxon-backed NDP carbon tax.

ORAL QUESTIONS

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for generations Canada has been a voice for peace and democracy in the world, but the Prime Minister is abandoning that proud legacy. The Conservatives' new foreign policy plan, crafted in secret, includes no vision for human rights, no vision for peace and security, no vision for aid and international development, no vision for Canada as an even-handed leader on the world stage.

The Prime Minister once said, "I don't think Canadians want us to sell out...our belief in democracy, freedom, human rights...to the almighty dollar".

Why are Conservatives doing exactly that now?

[English]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, the leader of the NDP is quoting a document that is not government policy. In any case, the government's policy when it comes to Canada's international position remains clear. It is a policy based on several pillars:

creating prosperity, and not just for Canadians here at home but obviously through international assistance spreading that elsewhere in the world; and as well, promoting peace and security and our democratic values. These are three very important pillars of our foreign policy and our government pursues them in every one of our international relationships.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. Today in the Democratic Republic of Congo, near the city of Goma, tens of thousands of civilians are fleeing violence. Sexual assault has become a weapon of war. Yet the Canada of the Conservatives is not showing any leadership in Africa.

According to the Prime Minister's new foreign policy, as obtained by the CBC, economic considerations will take precedence over our Canadian values of peace, democracy and human rights.

What are their priorities? Profiting financially from the emerging markets in Africa, despite unspeakable suffering, or promoting democracy and security as prerequisites?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is exactly the opposite. I recently attended the Summit of the Francophonie in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and I stated our position concerning the violation of human rights. In that country, I met with representatives of civil society and the opposition to show our support.

We have also announced the creation of programs to support peace and aid measures for vulnerable peoples. These priorities are still very important to the Democratic Republic of Congo and other countries.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives simply do not have the right to sacrifice Canada's historic democratic values in order to make short-term economic gains.

This is what the Prime Minister said in 2006: "I don't think Canadians want us to sell out important Canadian values, our belief in democracy, freedom, human rights. They don't want to sell that out to the almighty dollar."

Now his foreign policy statement says exactly the opposite. Why is the Prime Minister trading away our fundamental values for a fistful of dollars?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada's foreign policy priorities remain the promotion of our prosperity, our democracy and democratic values, as well as peace and security.

Since the NDP is against enhancing prosperity, perhaps it thinks that is a policy of values. We must promote our prosperity and our values at the same time.

*Oral Questions***INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Council of the Federation's international economic forum begins this Friday in Halifax.

The governor of the Bank of Canada will be there to talk about the economic outlook for Europe, the United States and Canada. The provincial and territorial premiers will talk about the fiscal gap.

Since the Prime Minister is rarely in the House on Fridays anyway, why does he not go meet with his provincial counterparts?
[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, of course, meets regularly with the premiers. There have been over 250 meetings and phone calls since 2006. I, of course, meet with the finance ministers regularly. We will have our federal-provincial-territorial finance ministers' meeting later in December, as we usually do. I just finished a lengthy meeting with the minister of finance from Ontario.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the premiers of this country are getting together to discuss, among other things, the economy, but the Prime Minister is refusing to join them.

According to the IMF, we will have fallen behind the U.S. in growth by 2015. Greece's economy is expected to grow faster than ours. Addressing serious problems—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park has the floor.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, addressing serious problems means engaging in serious discussion. It means give and take. Co-operative federalism means listening to ideas that are not necessarily one's own. Why is the Prime Minister refusing to meet with the premiers?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now we know where the opposition sets the bar for its fiscal performance. It is to try to catch up with Greece. We aim higher on this side of the House.

We are a leading economy in the G7, as acknowledged throughout industrialized societies. We are looking forward to the economic growth that we have in Canada and in the United States, being aware always of the turbulence that is out there in the U.S. and in Europe.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister's statement last week showed that the economy is slowing, that revenues are slower and less than before, and that it is affecting all levels of government, the provinces as well as municipalities.

In light of the request from municipalities that there be a clear statement from the government with respect to future plans on infrastructure, I wonder if the Prime Minister would consider giving the municipalities the full flow of the gas tax so that they in fact will be able to plan their own capital investments as time goes on.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously those matters are the subject of some consultation, but I am a bit surprised by the question. Our government is the one that made the gas tax transfer to our municipalities permanent so that they can indeed borrow against those revenues and plan for the future. Obviously, that is a policy that we will continue to keep in place.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government can take credit for the policy of Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Martin, but the problem remains. The problem is that the economy is slowing down. We see this everywhere. We see it in all the economic figures. The municipalities are responsible for 60% of the country's infrastructure.

I ask the question again: can the government assure us that budget 2013 will include an important announcement about a partnership between the federal government and municipalities concerning infrastructure?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, with regard to the gas tax for funding infrastructure, it was our party that proposed that measure, it was our party that increased that measure, and it was our party that made that measure a permanent part of Canada's budget. This policy is greatly appreciated by the municipalities and we intend to maintain it.

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always thought that the Liberal Party, from what I was told, was in power in 2005 when that measure was in fact brought in. We are not resting on our laurels; we are looking forward to the future. What we see in the future is an economy that is slowing down.

Now I know that the Prime Minister is getting his advice from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is leaning over with his comments, but I want to ask him: Does he not recognize that the economy is in fact slowing down and that the municipalities need a clear commitment on infrastructure?

There would be no clearer way of doing that than doubling the gas tax flow to the provinces and letting the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Liberal Party were merely resting on its laurels, it would be doing much better than it is today.

This is a fascinating proposition coming from the Liberal Party when in fact it has opposed this government's moves on the gas tax transfer and has opposed making that a permanent measure for the municipalities. The Liberal Party voted against those very measures when we brought them forward as part of our budgets. We are proud of them and we will continue in that direction.

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN INVESTMENT**

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today Canadians found out through anonymous leaks that CNOOC has agreed to meet the federal government's request. What request? This is the first time Canadians have heard of any request coming from the federal government on CNOOC.

The government refuses to be transparent, refuses to be accountable, refuses to have respect for Canadians, so what is the government respecting of CNOOC and why is it doing it in secret? Why is it doing it behind closed doors?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me just address that very briefly. The Minister of Industry has been very clear. The government's policy on these matters, while we welcome foreign investment, is to scrutinize every individual foreign investment to ensure they are in the best interests of our country.

On the one hand, the position of the NDP, as we know, is to be against all of these investments. The position of the Liberal Party, as reiterated yesterday, is to rubber-stamp every one of them.

We think Canadians expect us to examine these investments carefully and ensure they are in the best interests of Canada.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is the Prime Minister and the Conservatives are not credible on this issue.

The Conservatives allowed Falconbridge to—

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Credible and foreign investment.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. There is already far too much noise going back and forth. The members are putting the questions and answering, so let us try to get a bit more order for the rest of question period.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the truth certainly does hurt.

The Conservatives allowed Falconbridge to be taken over by Xstrata with the promise that there would be no job losses. The result was that hundreds of jobs were lost, with zero consequence and no action from the government.

It was the same thing when Inco was taken over by Vale. Hundreds of jobs were lost. U.S. Steel took over Stelco and hundreds of jobs were lost. Rio Tinto took over Alcan and hundreds of jobs were lost.

Why do the Conservatives consistently fail to stand up for Canadians on these takeovers?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know the NDP is opposed to every actual or potential foreign investment. The reality is that we have strengthened the Investment Canada Act to be able to secure the undertakings that are made as part of those transactions.

However, the reality of this government's record is absolutely clear. As a consequence of this government's measures, over 800,000 net new jobs have been created.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' culture of secrecy and their mismanagement have angered investors and are hurting the economy.

The Vale and U.S. Steel investments were approved, but we still do not know why those companies were not penalized when jobs were lost.

There has been no explanation as to why BHP's offer for PotashCorp was rejected. We have received no explanation as to why Petronas' offer was rejected in the middle of the night. As a result of well-orchestrated leaks, we are learning that some requirements were not met, but which ones?

Why not simply explain what we are demanding of foreign corporations?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unbelievable that the opposition is trying to politicize the reviews and the process so that it can impose its radical, anti-trade program, which would make foreign investors flee, whereas foreign investment can make our businesses part of the global value chain and create employment.

Under our economic action plan, 820,000 net new jobs have been created in Canada.

The legislation is clear. Certain factors are considered in our reviews. We will look at whether the deal provides a net benefit for Canada, in the best interests of Canadians. That is how we always proceed.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we just want to know what requirements and conditions are being set.

Canadians can no longer trust this government. Since the Conservatives came to power, Canada's trade deficit has exploded and they have caused 500,000 good manufacturing jobs to be lost.

Given their record, we are not surprised they want to do this in secret. However, Canadians do not want a secret deal with CNOOC.

Will the minister explain to us under what conditions Chinese state-owned corporations will be able to take control of our natural resources?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. We have repeatedly said that all foreign investment decisions are made in the same best interests of Canada. That is how our government has always acted. Since 2006, we have created guidelines for foreign state-owned corporations, and we have established additional provisions for national security issues.

This transaction will be carefully scrutinized. However, we will not use a trade or manufacturing policy like that of the NDP, which would like to impose a \$21.5 billion carbon tax on the backs of Canadians.

That kills jobs, but that is not what we do: we create them.

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is no answer. That is no transparency, no accountability, no respect for Canadians. Canadians deserve better because Canadian jobs are on the line, including jobs in downtown Calgary. Conservatives and Liberals are all in favour of letting CNOOC and Chinese state-owned companies buy a controlling interest in our oil industry. Why do they not actually talk to Canadians before they agree to this deal?

Thousands of jobs have been lost in the past on these takeovers. Why is the government not pushing for job guarantees? Why are the Conservatives approving this takeover behind closed doors?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is not credible is the opposition trying to politicize these reviews. With those members' anti-trade, job-killing agenda, this is what we will not do. What we will do is to evaluate whether these transactions are likely to provide a net benefit for Canada, always in the best interests of Canadians. We will not politicize this stuff, we will do it properly. With our economic action plan, we created 820,000 net new jobs. This is results.

* * *

[Translation]

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we in the NDP are in favour of trade, but trade that protects our jobs, that protects our resources, that protects our energy, and is in the interests of Canadians. The official opposition is not going to let this happen.

This is not the only issue where there are problems when it comes to the Conservatives. In the election fraud case, the evidence is mounting. Elections Canada is saying it: there were fraudulent calls. Employees of call centres have signed affidavits confirming that it was the Conservatives who were making those calls. The Internet is full of complaints from voters who say they received fraudulent calls from telephone numbers associated with the Conservatives. Their fingerprints are all over this tale.

Instead of covering up for the cheats and fraud artists, are they going to support our bill to strengthen the election rules?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the specific concern that the hon. member is raising was addressed by the Conservative Party over a year ago. The allegation he is making is false.

With regard to the riding of Guelph, we are working proactively with Elections Canada to find out what happened there.

Speaking of transparency, I would like to ask the member to stand in the House and state whether or not, after all the donations he made to the separatists, he is federalist.

● (1435)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting answer. It is not unlike what his colleague from Beauce said. They are at about the same level.

I have a problem with the Conservatives' attitude in this case and in general. The NDP moved a motion to tighten the electoral rules. The Conservatives supported it, but after that they did nothing. They did not act on it, and they are twiddling their thumbs.

The NDP has introduced a bill to ensure that this kind of election fraud does not happen again, and they do not seem to be prepared to support it. The time has come to make a choice: either the Conservatives support our initiative and act on our recommendations or they support election fraud.

Which side are they on?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes reference to the comments of the member for Beauce who was simply quoting from a proposal put forward by the NDP in the transportation committee. It proposes a new value-added sales tax, line number four on page two.

What I find so troubling is that the member does not have the same degree of generosity with taxpayers that he did 29 times with his separatist friends back home.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Conservatives tried to claim that, "No one from the national campaign ever told anyone that a poll had changed locations". However, that is exactly what the documents from Elections Canada say and it traces the calls right back to Conservative Party headquarters. The affidavits now show us that was what the script said and the Conservative lawyers confirmed that the calls had been made. That is not a clean and ethical campaign.

Will the Conservatives tell us who at Conservative Party headquarters ran these Watergate burglars, who ran the dirty tricks campaign?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the specific concern the member referenced in his question was addressed by the Conservative Party to Elections Canada well over a year ago. The allegation is completely false.

In the riding of Guelph, we are working with Elections Canada proactively to ascertain what exactly happened.

The member talks about dirty tricks. In fact, it was he who played a dirty trick on his own constituents after promising election after election to oppose the long gun registry. When he had the chance, he betrayed his word, he changed his position, he flip-flopped. That is a dirty trick.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): My friend the duck hunter, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Questions

I am glad he brought up Guelph because we will turn attention to the Guelph campaign and the member for Labrador, the minister, who yesterday refused to say why he hired a key Guelph operative to work in his office and refused to explain why he was now the director of parliamentary affairs.

Yesterday we found out the Conservatives said that they were glad that the minister had been hiding out in his riding rather than doing his job across Canada.

I have a simple question for this minister. Was the hiring of Guelph operative Chris Crawford a political payoff to keep him out of the limelight in the office of what the Conservatives hoped was the most quiet minister on the Hill?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, neither the minister nor any member of this government will ever apologize for spending time in our own communities. The people we represent deserve to see us there.

It is precisely because he reaches out to the good people of Labrador that he represents their values of hard work and common sense in the House of Commons.

Maybe if that member did the same in his constituency, he would know that the good rural people in his riding do not want a wasteful, billion dollar long gun registry that harasses duck hunters and farmers.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives refuse to answer serious questions about the robocall scandal, despite the fact that we know now that they knew about it before the election.

No minister over there has the guts to touch this issue. All we are getting is baffle-gab from the parliamentary secretary, who has so discredited himself by trying to dismiss the in and out affair until the conviction.

What is the Conservative government trying to hide, and when will it have the guts to turn over the unredacted emails?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the specific concern the member raised was addressed with Elections Canada more than a year ago.

As it relates to Guelph, we continue to work with Elections Canada, proactively, to ascertain exactly what happened there.

Right now the only party in Canada that has been found guilty of illegal robocalls is the Liberal Party of Canada. If that member really wants to know what happened in Guelph with regard to illegal calls, he just needs to walk three seats over and ask his friend, Frank.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1440)

The Speaker: Order, please. I will remind the hon. member not to use proper names, but titles or ridings.

The hon. member for Avalon.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a funny thing, that parliamentary secretary used to run a political calling company himself. He ran robocalls without address tag lines and broke CRTC rules. Maybe he should look at his own history when it comes to robocalls.

Let us be frank. When will the Conservatives stop dodging, diverting, deflecting and playing the victim and come clean with Canadians about their role in the election fraud scandal?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that only one party has been found guilty of illegal robocalls.

I have always been very frank, but I do not want to be frank like that member over there. In fact, I do not think anybody in the House of Commons wants to be that frank.

The member needs to know how to follow the rules and frankly we will do anything we can to teach him what those rules are.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Labrador has had every opportunity to clear his name about anonymous and corporate donations, about interest-free loans, about illegally discounted air travel and about spending way over his campaign limit. His official agent even said that when he signed off on the paperwork, everything was okay.

How can that minister sit in the front row and act as though nothing had happened? How can the Prime Minister turn a blind eye to all of this? Is there no shame in the government?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister in question continues to work hard to represent both the people of Labrador and, more broadly, the people of Canada. However, he need not take any lectures about loans from the party that continues to have almost \$500,000 in illegal outstanding loans that have become donations well over the limit.

It is time for the Liberal Party to finally take responsibility for its rule breaking and pay those loans back.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been three years since the Auditor General identified serious problems with the temporary foreign worker program. Despite years to fix it, the program is still a mess. Conservative mismanagement of this program puts jobs for Canadian workers at risk.

Oral Questions

When will this problem get fixed and how much longer do Canadians have to wait until they can get the first crack at Canadian jobs?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very firmly of the belief that Canadians must have first crack at all job opportunities in this country. That is why we brought in programs to help them identify what jobs are available in their skill ranges and areas. We have a whole program to connect Canadians with jobs. We are also looking at the temporary foreign worker program to make sure that it does uphold our values. However, while we are trying to help Canadians get to work, the NDP keeps voting against everything that we are trying to do.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked a question about the closure of 19 regional Citizenship and Immigration Canada offices, but all I got in response was a feeble attempt to justify the wasteful spending of taxpayers' money simply to stroke the minister's ego.

So I will ask the question again: considering the minister's lavish spending on his own image, how can he justify the cuts to immigration services? Does the minister think it is acceptable that, because of the cuts, the response rate for the Montreal call centre was only 9%?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is ridiculous. Yes, our government is doing more to ensure that we hear from various ethnocultural media groups in order to examine the issues that are important to Canadians from cultural communities. In any case, we can have a more efficient immigration system thanks to the use of computer technology, without having all the offices. In fact, this means we can save money in order to improve the services provided to visitors and immigrants to Canada.

* * *

• (1445)

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations' responses during the final days of the Sri Lankan civil war were highlighted in the Petrie report. The deep tragedy and high civilian cost of the conflict is clear. Sri Lanka's human rights record continues to cause concern around the world. Improvements are nowhere in sight.

Unless concrete action is taken for an independent, impartial international human rights violations inquiry, will the Conservatives commit to boycotting next year's commonwealth summit in Sri Lanka and encourage other member states to do the same?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government around the world, no leader of any government around the world more than this Prime Minister has fought harder to ensure that there is genuine reconciliation in Sri

Lanka. No government has fought harder to ensure that there is accountability for the terrible and disgraceful events that happened near the end of the civil war and no government has spoken up more forcefully against the ongoing and deteriorating human rights situation in many parts of that country.

This government will continue to do what is best to promote the interests of people in Sri Lanka, including the Tamil population. We have not yet made a decision as to what will happen at the commonwealth summit, but I can say that the House and all Canadians can count on this government doing the strong and principled thing to ensure the support of Sri Lankan people.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this UN report is clear. Responsibility for the atrocities lies both with the Sri Lankan government and the rebels. However, the report also found serious failures at the United Nations. The report states the UN failed to stand up for the rights of people it was mandated to assist.

What is the minister doing to ensure the implementation of these recommendations so that this never happens again?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think this is a first. We have the official opposition running down the United Nations on the floor of the House of Commons.

I can assure the House that we will work with our international partners and with the United Nations. We believe this is a thoughtful and intelligent report that points to the need for all of us to ensure we do our best. Canadians can count on this Prime Minister and this government to do what is best on this issue.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has a strong record of putting victims first, getting tough on serious and violent offenders, and keeping our streets and communities safe. For too long, Canadians have lost confidence in our justice system because those who commit crimes such as sexual assault, kidnapping or arson would only be sentenced to house arrest. Those of us on the government side believe that people who burn other people's houses down should not be allowed to serve out their sentences in the comfort of their own homes.

Can the Minister of Justice please provide the House with an update on our government's legislation to eliminate house arrest for serious crimes?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to inform the House that today our government's legislation to eliminate the use of house arrest for serious crimes comes into force. This means that the Safe Streets and Communities Act is now in force in its entirety. Thanks to this government, conditional sentences or house arrest will no longer be available for serious crimes such as sexual assault, kidnapping, arson or human trafficking.

Oral Questions

We are cracking down on the use of house arrest despite years of opposition from across the aisle. We will continue with our record of standing up for victims and law-abiding Canadians.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to supporting victims of crime, Conservatives have been long on rhetoric and short on action. Only after a public plea did the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime finally get any funding at all. What it did get does not even cover the cost of one full-time staff person. This group cannot continue to provide much-needed services to victims with unpredictable funding.

Will the minister stand up now and commit today to providing stable, long-term funding to the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime so that they can continue to give victims of crime the help they need and deserve?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the member seems to forget is that it was our government that put \$40 million annually into funding for the National Crime Prevention Centre, which was created by our government. We put \$37.5 million into funding for the youth gang prevention fund. We made the programming permanent with \$7.5 million in ongoing funding.

What did the member opposite do? He voted against those programs.

• (1450)

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, victims do not want partisan politics; they want services. They deserve a lot more than the Conservatives' grand promises.

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime needs \$115,000 a year to provide services to victims. That is peanuts in a \$6 billion budget.

Instead of trying to score political points, will the minister commit to ensuring long-term, stable funding to the centre and to other victim support groups?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP likes to talk about crime prevention measures, but when it really counts, it has consistently voted against these very measures. It is our Conservative government that created programs like the national crime prevention strategy and the youth gang prevention fund. I hope the member opposite will finally stop the double-talk and get serious about supporting our measures to support victims.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are not tough on crime, they are cheap on crime.

Our justice system is crumbling under the weight of the Conservatives' inaction. Our courts are full to the brim, we do not have enough judges, wait times are growing longer and longer, and legal aid is underfunded. The provinces and territories already spoke out about these cuts at the last meeting of the ministers of justice.

Will the Conservatives finally commit to solving these urgent problems by ensuring the sustainability of our justice system?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we have been doing over these six years. We consider all requests from the provinces, as we have over the years. It is too bad that every single one of our efforts to crack down on crime and to stand up for victims and law-abiding Canadians is consistently opposed by the NDP. When is the NDP going to get its act together and start standing up for law-abiding Canadians? When?

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just because the hon. member is yelling his answer does not necessarily mean people are going to take him more seriously. Either the minister did not listen to my question or he decided to deliberately disregard it. This type of defence does not stand up in court.

The Conservatives are introducing bills without taking into account their consequences. They are not even aware of the consequences because they are imposing gag orders left and right and they are not examining these bills properly. Then, when it comes time to do damage control, they stick their heads in the sand. Our courtrooms are overburdened and underfunded, and the situation is growing worse every day.

Why is the Minister of Justice opposed to providing adequate funding to our justice system so that it can run properly?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the hon. member has been, but we have increased the number of judges in this country for the first time in many years, recently with two new judges for Nunavut. None of this got the attention of the opposition. They were so busy fighting us on all our crime agenda, I am sure it was completely lost on them. Any requests for additional judges or additional resources are always considered seriously by this government, because we make this a priority.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the documents from the Shawanaga First Nation's school make the first nation student funding gap crystal clear. Yesterday, the minister tried to defend the indefensible by calling the funding gap apples to oranges. First nations know better. The comparison is apples to apples. Students living off reserve get a full apple. Students on reserve get half an apple. When will the government stop misleading Canadians and fund first nation students at the same level as students off reserve?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our numbers reflect the total spending per student. The member opposite is only including partial expenses that reflect only a portion of the costs for on-reserve schools. Every year our government is investing \$1.7 billion for 117,000 students on reserve. Since 2006, we have invested in 263 school projects, including 33 new schools. We are proud to support first nation students toward their career goals and the prosperity they seek.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, alarming evidence now links energy drinks to severe illness and death in children and youth. A year ago, the minister's own expert panel warned her of the high risk of energy drinks, advising her to regulate them to behind the counter and prohibit sales to persons under 18. She ignored their advice, opting for industry self-regulation.

The minister's responsibility is to protect the health of Canadians. Why does she continue to choose the best interests of industry over the well-being of Canada's children and youth?

• (1455)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Health Canada has been very clear that caffeinated energy drinks are not recommended for children. Last year our government announced a new approach to regulating energy drinks that would include limits on the levels of caffeine in these products. It also includes improved labelling in order to support consumers and parents in making informed decisions. The new measures will help Canadians make informed decisions about the amount of caffeine they consume.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in committee yesterday, the Minister of the Environment responded to one of my questions with a trivial statement.

When I asked him about the cost of the ineffective sector-by-sector approach adopted by the Conservatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the minister said that the figures were not important.

Let us be clear: either the minister has no idea of the cost of his policies, or he wants to hide it.

Since I like to be courteous, I will give him another chance. How much is the Conservatives' sector-by-sector approach going to cost taxpayers?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a slight mischaracterization of our exchange yesterday in committee.

Our sector-by-sector plan to reduce GHG emissions started with the regulation of the two sectors that contribute the greatest number

of megatonnes every year: tailpipe emissions and coal-fired electricity. The cost-benefit estimates of those regulations can be found on the Environment Canada website with the regulatory impact assessment statement.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a mischaracterization? We have the transcripts.

The minister seems to know a lot more about made up NDP policies than he does about his own portfolio. Experts confirm that his sector-by-sector approach is not working. It is the least effective and the most expensive approach to GHG reductions. Six months ago we asked the minister how much the plan costs. There was no answer. Yesterday, he said that to him the numbers really are not that important.

Is the minister hiding the answer or does he really not know the cost?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously my colleague was not listening to my previous question and was not in attendance at the committee meeting yesterday. The first two sectors have been regulated. The cost-benefits are available. A total number cannot be given until we regulate all of the other sectors in our sector-by-sector plan.

The number that Canadians are interested in is the proposed \$21 billion carbon tax that the NDP would pick out of the pockets of hard-working Canadian taxpayers.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is Universal Children's Day, a day devoted to promoting the welfare of children around the world. Our government is committed to protecting our children and safeguarding the well-being of these most vulnerable citizens.

Could the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs responsible for the Americas and Consular Affairs please tell the House about her latest efforts to help left-behind parents and protect Canadian children wrongfully abducted abroad?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the engagement of my colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook on this important issue.

Our thoughts are with those who have had a child abducted by the other parent. It is truly a heartbreaking experience. To help, today we launched a new publication entitled, "International Child Abduction: A Guidebook for Left-Behind Parents". I encourage all members of the House to visit travel.gc.ca to read this manual and to order copies for their riding offices.

Children are our most important resource and this government is doing its utmost to protect and defend them.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

ETHICS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how can the Minister of State for Democratic Reform tolerate that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, right in the middle of the federal election, asked his department to assess his popularity and to report on partisan events?

Will the minister ask the Public Service Commission of Canada to investigate this serious affront to democracy? How many times has the government undermined the neutrality of the public service and attempted to subject it to the Conservative Party?

• (1500)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these questions are absolutely ridiculous.

The former Liberal government did not spend a cent on monitoring ethnocultural media because the Liberals were not interested in the opinions of new Canadians and members of cultural communities.

This government has addressed the priorities of new Canadians, in part by listening to the voices of new Canadians in ethnocultural media. The department manages the media monitoring contracts. This government, unlike the previous Liberal government, is addressing the priorities of new Canadians.

* * *

[English]

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with a storage capacity of 1.2 million tonnes, Thunder Bay is North America's largest grain port, contributing over \$28 million a year in federal taxes. Yet the government wants to jeopardize this world-renowned asset by cutting hundreds of jobs at the Canadian Grain Commission. These cuts will be added to Conservative firings at Veterans Affairs, the coast guard, the military, Service Canada, the CRA and Citizenship and Immigration in Thunder Bay.

Why are Conservatives bleeding services in Thunder Bay? Why are they destroying the economic link between the Prairies and central Canada?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are on track when it comes to making sure that government spends within its means. We are doing so because that creates jobs and opportunity in the private sector, including in northern Ontario.

We have a great record in Thunder Bay and the surrounding region. FedNor and other federal agencies have been working with local proponents to create new jobs and new opportunities and research in the mining sector and other natural resource sectors, including forestry. We are proud of our record in Thunder Bay. We will continue to work with local officials to make sure that we get more jobs and opportunity there.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is Universal Children's Day.

The maternal, newborn and child health initiative is just one of the many ways that our government is supporting children in need. Could the Minister of International Cooperation please update the House on our results?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to helping the world's most vulnerable children survive and lead a better life. We are achieving tangible results for those most in need. For example, in Afghanistan, 7.8 million children have been vaccinated against polio. In Bangladesh we have helped more than 120,000 vulnerable children involved in child labour to improve their literacy and life skills. In South Sudan we have helped provide over 15,000 at risk youth with education and life skills so they can find jobs and improve their livelihoods.

Ensuring that children are safe, healthy and educated is—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

* * *

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on this National Child Day, we recognize the importance of our young people, who represent the future of our communities. Unfortunately, young people do not all have the same rights, and the government is still neglecting the youth of Kanesatake.

[English]

Kanesatake's national child benefit reinvestment was unexpectedly cut. The investment meant that children would not go without food all day long and that there were after school programs to keep teens off the streets.

Why are Conservatives undermining Kanesatake's future generations and leaving first nations' children behind?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the investments we have made in child and family services across the country are paying dividends. The preventive model we put in place is working to keep families together, including the extended family. We are proud of the results and will continue to work in that direction.

Government Orders

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, unhappy with the obstacles facing pipeline projects to the United States and the west, the oil industry now wants to reverse the flow of a pipeline between Ontario and Quebec in order to be able to transport oil from the oil sands to us.

Before even having the agreement of Quebec, the Minister of Natural Resources said he was enthusiastic about the plan. But the Quebec government is clear: any such plan will have to meet Quebec's environmental standards and be thoroughly reviewed.

Will the Minister of Natural Resources commit to respecting Quebec's environmental assessment and its energy choices on its own territory, yes or no?

• (1505)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government supports the principle of building a pipeline to the east, west and south, subject to regulatory approval. Sending oil to eastern Canada will help create jobs in this country and will strengthen our economy by giving refineries in Quebec and New Brunswick the opportunity to refine Canadian oil at a reduced cost.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to submit, in both official languages, a document from the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. I will be seeking support to help out the Conservatives, who continued in question period today to misrepresent the fundamental facts about what the member for Trinity—Spadina has uttered. Being shamed in the pages of *Macleans*, *The Globe and Mail* and on CTV does not stop the Conservatives from perpetuating this. I seek to submit the committee hearing so they can understand what was actually said—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Does the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley have the unanimous consent of the House to table his document?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to do likewise, submitting before the House the document entitled, "Infrastructure Funding Study Proposal", presented by the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, in which the member and the NDP provide suggestions such as a value-added sales tax, local sales taxes that are common in Europe, south-east Asia and the United States. I am sure the House would be happy to accept it.

The Speaker: Is the document in both official languages?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The parliamentary secretary does not need unanimous consent then.

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WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 14

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved that a ways and means motion to amend the Income Tax Act, the Excise Tax Act and related legislation be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

FIRST NATIONS FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-27, An Act to enhance the financial accountability and transparency of First Nations, as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of motions 1 to 3.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the problem is that first nations communities across Canada must already submit many reports. I want to read some sections related to what is required by AADNC's Year-end Financial Reporting Handbook.

In accordance with section 6.4.1 of that handbook, "The [first nations] must disclose to members of the organization and to INAC compensation earned or accrued by elected or appointed senior officials."

In accordance with section 6.4.2, the remuneration amounts earned or accrued by elected or appointed officials that are to be disclosed "must be from all sources within the recipient's financial reporting entity including amounts from, but not limited to, economic development and other types of business corporations."

As you can see, measures and mechanisms are already in place to ensure that this information is disclosed. This bill goes too far. These resources should be allocated for the welfare of the community because we know it is experiencing difficulties.

I would like to emphasize once again that this government has a great deal of work to do with regard to first nations communities. We are not there yet. In some places, there are still no schools, and people still do not have access to drinking water, which is essential for survival. As my colleague pointed out, some communities have had to boil their water for seven years now so that they can drink it. Why not address that before taking a stand on the governance of first nations communities?

Government Orders

I also want to read the recommendations that the Auditor General made to this government on the same subject. Those recommendations have not been respected and are not reflected in this bill. In a report dating back to June 2011, the Auditor General noted that the reporting burden placed on first nations in recent years has increased. The Office of the Auditor General of Canada has recommended on numerous occasions that the reporting burden be reduced and that there be a better understanding of the demands placed on first nations since a number of those reports are not even used by federal government departments.

So we already have a lot of reports; we already demand an enormous amount of resources, time, money and energy that could be better used elsewhere. We are now demanding even more, and the Office of the Auditor General of Canada said that some reports were not even being used. He requested major structural reforms to improve the federal government's policies and practices, including advocating clear and measurable service standards for products and responsibilities; enacting basic statutory measures for key support services, including education, housing and drinking water; and measures respecting delays in issuing grants and funding thus complicating long-term planning. Those are the recommendations that have been made directly to this government.

I see I have little time left, and I will close by saying this. We consulted the first nations communities, which this government completely failed to do. We know where the real problem lies: it does not come from exorbitant salaries, but rather from decades of paternalism which have put first nations chiefs in a position in which they are responsible for implementing decisions made by the federal government, in other words, under the Indian Act. Not only is that clearly inappropriate, but it is still a recipe for poor results.

• (1510)

[*English*]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just a short while ago, the member across said that her party had consulted with first nations. I wonder if she consulted with those first nations that have made it very clear that they are concerned with the amount of money that is not being divulged by chiefs and councillors across Canada.

I wonder if she could speak to the people who she did speak to who were concerned about that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I believe the situation is somewhat exaggerated. The truth is that the average salary of first nations chiefs is \$60,000, and the average salary of council members is \$31,000. Fifty percent of chiefs earn less than \$60,000 and only 5% earn more than \$100,000.

It is all well and good to generalize, to create stereotypes by saying that so and so made a mistake, but Conservative members have also made mistakes. Will stereotypes be created based on that? No. We must examine cases individually and assess the matter properly. In view of those figures, this is not a big problem.

• (1515)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to my hon. colleague. There appear to be certain

patterns among the Conservatives, and that is what I want to talk about.

First of all, I just about choked on the title, because it seems to me that even though the bill is called the financial transparency act, this is not something we have come to expect from the Conservatives. So why demand that others provide what we cannot get here in the House? That is a problem for me. I also think that this bill is a response to one unfortunate exception that has been taken as a general rule and that this bill is somewhat out of proportion and much broader than the problem it is intended to solve.

Does the hon. member agree with me that this kind of pattern has been repeated many times by the Conservative government?

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague pointed out during his remarks, someone who is not transparent is asking the first nations to be transparent. The Conservatives themselves are not providing the Parliamentary Budget Officer with the required information. He needs the information. It is his mandate to obtain the data, and he is having to go to court to get them.

I think it is illogical and rather paradoxical that the government is asking for such data and such transparency, when it is incapable of achieving that level of transparency.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I would like her opinion on one point. Very rarely in some aboriginal communities do we see that community members do not have access to certain documents. It is very rare. According to the Conservatives, the solution is to publish the information on a website for everyone to see. We know that the Internet is available across the world. It is possible to give this information to everyone in the world, which might not be to the advantage of some business people. I spoke about that earlier today.

Is that the solution? Of course, there must be a way to make this information available to all members of the first nation community, but this is not necessarily an effective method and it will be bad for aboriginal communities.

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Obviously, that would be worrisome for businesses. I also want to point out that this bill could create problems under the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act, two legislative measures that we promote and adhere to, here in Canada.

If a business has to disclose all of its expenses and financial information, it will be at a great disadvantage compared to other businesses. If I were to start a business, I would not be bound by the same laws. The result is to further disadvantage a population that is already severely handicapped. That is simply not fair.

Government Orders

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join in this debate today.

I want to speak directly to the motions that were brought forward. First of all, the clause under debate is clause 11 of Bill C-27, first nations financial transparency act. This clause reads:

If a First Nation fails to publish any document under section 8, any person, including the Minister, may apply to a superior court for an order requiring the council to carry out the duties under that section within the period specified by the court.

The purpose of this clause in the bill is to ensure that anyone, including the minister, could ask a court to require a first nation to publish its consolidated financial statements and schedules of remuneration and expenses, if the first nation government failed to act in accordance with the provisions of Bill C-27. This clause is necessary, as it would provide an avenue of redress when a first nation fails to comply with the proposed act by failing to publish its financial documents.

As we all know, governments in Canada, whether they be the federal government, provincial governments or municipal governments, must adhere to legislation, which ensures that the financial statements of the government and its entities and the remuneration paid and expenses reimbursed to its elected leaders are shared with the public. There are different means of achieving this, but the end result is the same. The financial information relating to governments at every level in Canada are available to the general public; that is, governments with the exception of first nation governments operating under the Indian Act.

Bill C-27 would simply address this gap. In doing so, the bill would also address a situation that blurs the lines of accountability between first nation councils and their own members.

As we have heard, if a first nation member cannot access the financial information relating to his or her band, he or she can ask the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to release the information. Each year, AANDC receives many such requests from first nation individuals looking for basic financial information relating to their community, which they should be able to access directly from their band. In addition to these informal requests for information, the department also receives formal complaints regarding the potential mismanagement or misappropriation of band funds and remuneration of officials.

Legislation that ensures this information is easily accessible to everyone would remove the minister from the equation in many of these cases, thereby promoting more direct lines of accountability of a first nation leader to its members. In short, the bill aims to shift the accountability bargain between first nation governments and their communities.

This is not to suggest that first nations are mismanaging their finances or are not accountable to their members. In fact, there are many examples of first nations that are not only meeting the basic expectations of a government but are exceeding them. Unfortunately, there remain many that are not, as these requests and complaints to the department demonstrate.

However, with the greater transparency that would be provided by the bill, many of these requests and complaints would likely not be necessary, as information would be publicly available. Furthermore, with the greater transparency around publication of remuneration and expenses, the speculation that currently exists on these issues would be removed, which would dispel the rumours around the salaries of first nation leaders.

All first nation leaders should be applauding this, as there are many whose reputations are unfairly tarnished by the actions or inactions of others.

Perhaps even more importantly, Bill C-27 would also mean that first nation individuals would no longer feel intimidated when they ask for financial information relating to their bands, and intimidation does indeed occur, as was described to the committee by representatives of the Peguis Accountability Coalition and others, just for challenging their governments about how their money is being spent or simply asking for copies of the band's financial statements.

Without clause 11 in the bill, first nation members who are unable access basic financial information relating to their own band would still need to challenge their chief and council for this information through the courts, creating a tense situation for many people. However, this is not the only reason why clause 11 of the bill is required.

• (1520)

An adequate enforcement mechanism would ensure that these documents are made available to all Canadians. Making sure this information is available to everyone would mean that all Canadians would see the reality of how first nations governments are funded.

During her appearance before the committee, Jody Wilson-Raybould of the AFN stated:

...having consolidated financial statements and disclosing revenue or investments does...actually recognize and expose the reality of what our first nations are having to bear in terms of supporting our own governments beyond the federal transfers...

Bill C-27 is a necessary piece of legislation. A key part of how this legislation would be successful is clause 11.

Bill C-27 would strengthen transparency and accountability by requiring that the audited consolidated financial statements and schedules of remuneration and expenses of the first nation be shared with the members of each first nation community, as well as the general public.

The clause under debate is clause 13 of Bill C-27, the first nations financial transparency act. This clause provides for administrative measures if a first nation fails to prepare and publish its consolidated financial statements, auditor reports and schedule of remuneration and expenses. In other words, this provision encourages first nations to comply with the act so as to avoid these measures being imposed.

Although we believe that all first nations governments will comply with this legislation, as it strengthens their accountability to their members, in the event of the refusal of a first nation's leadership to publish its audited consolidated financial statements, the first nations financial transparency act provides the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development three options.

Government Orders

The minister may require the council of the affected first nation to develop an appropriate action plan, ensuring the release of the financial information in a timely and organized fashion.

The minister may also withhold funding that would normally go to the first nation under active grant and contribution agreements. These withheld funds would be released immediately upon the publication of the first nation's audited consolidated financial statements.

Finally, the minister may completely terminate active grant and contribution agreements should a first nation refuse to provide AANDC with its audited consolidated financial statements.

There is nothing new here. First nations are already required to produce annual consolidated financial statements, which are audited by independent accredited professional auditors, and report the remuneration and expenses, in separate categories, paid to chiefs and councillors as part of their funding agreements with AANDC. Also, the measures being proposed in clause 13 of Bill C-27 are already available to the minister under the grants and contribution agreements.

As for clause 13(2), this clause provides that any monies the minister has withheld from a first nation for non-compliance of this act are considered a charge under the Financial Administration Act. This provision simply provides the mechanism by which funds withheld from a first nation can be paid to the first nation once compliance is achieved, even if the payment occurs in a subsequent year.

Section 37.1(1) of the Financial Administration Act states:

Subject to such directions as the Treasury Board may make, a debt incurred by Her Majesty for work performed, goods received or services rendered before the end of a fiscal year, and any amount due or owing under a contract, contribution or other similar arrangement entered into before the end of the fiscal year that remains unpaid at the end of the fiscal year, shall be recorded as a charge against the appropriation to which it relates.

Clause 13(2) of the bill is a technical administrative measure that allows for any funds that have been withheld under this act to be repaid, yet NDP Motion No. 3 proposes to remove all of these administrative measures. Without this clause, first nations individuals could continue to be subject to intimidation when they ask for financial information relating to their bands.

In conclusion, Bill C-27 is a necessary piece of legislation. A key part of how this legislation would be successful would be the provisions outlined in the clauses I have mentioned during this debate.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is quite simple. Why are the criteria created for first nations so much more stringent than those for other Canadians?

The former auditor general pointed out, years ago, that one of the main problems facing first nations band councils was their duty to fill out tons of paperwork. This proposed solution would actually make things worse.

How can our Conservative colleague justify asking for even more information when—as confirmed by the former auditor general—

government officials do not even examine the documents they already receive?

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, it is very important to note that nothing in this bill adds to the existing reporting burden faced by first nations. Instead, this bill represents the minimum set of standards with respect to financial transparency, which are not currently being followed by many first nations.

We expect many first nations will adapt easily and, in fact, will go further than the basic requirements laid out in this bill. Many will take this as an opportunity to put into place their own practices, which aim to enhance the overall accountability of their government. In this way, this bill would serve as a catalyst for change in many communities, which would lead to greater confidence in many first nations governments.

Greater confidence and transparency result in increased opportunities for flexible multi-year agreements, which will come with streamlined reporting. Over time, as these practices become commonplace, first nations will be in a much stronger position to demonstrate that they are candidates for more flexible funding arrangements.

• (1530)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General of Canada has made it fairly clear, not once but on several occasions, that the government needs to take some form of action to reduce unnecessary first nations reports, where it can. I listened to the member's comments, and what she fails to recognize is that there was a responsibility for the government to work in co-operation with first nations leaders in the drafting of this legislation. One thing the government should have taken into consideration was what the Auditor General of Canada was recommending, which was to find ways to reduce the number of reporting mechanisms.

I am wondering if she could comment on what I and my party believe is a lost opportunity.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, two years ago I introduced a private member's bill addressing first nations financial accountability and transparency. For the last two years, there have been many conversations and discussions held regarding the requirements that would need to be put in place to ensure greater accountability and transparency. Indeed, it was due to many complaints I received from first nations members that I introduced that private member's bill in the first place.

We know that all of the reporting we are asking first nations governments to include in their reports to the government and to make public are already happening, as I already said in my answer to the previous questioner. We know that governments, with the exception of first nations governments operating under the Indian Act—provincial, federal and municipal governments—in Canada must adhere to legislation that ensures the transparency of the financial statements of the government and its entities and the remuneration paid to its elected leaders. That is what this legislation is calling for, and I believe it is what first nations members deserve.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we are discussing Bill C-27, which claims to promote financial transparency on the part of the first nations. I am very proud to be firmly opposed to this bill, which does not enhance the accountability of first nations governments to their people.

Essentially, Bill C-27 lays the legislative groundwork for the preparation and disclosure of first nations' consolidated financial statements and disclosure of the remuneration, in salaries and expenses, paid by the first nations to their elected leaders. The bill would apply to more than 600 first nations communities.

As I said, the NDP opposes this bill, even though we are actively working to improve transparency and accountability at all levels of governance. First, we oppose this bill because it was imposed on the first nations without consultation and because it is contrary to the commitment made by the Prime Minister in January 2012 to work with the first nations. The approach taken by the government is a paternalistic one. In fact, the Conservatives have introduced other bills in this House that were drafted without proper consultation with the first nations.

Second, we oppose measures that would add further to the burden that the first nations bear when it comes to disclosure. We know that the first nations are already buried in paperwork. The former auditor general, Sheila Fraser, in fact, came out in favour of streamlining the tasks associated with disclosure of financial information that the first nations have to complete. She thought that the paperwork had gotten worse in recent years and pointed out that the first nations were already required to file a number of reports that were not even used by the ministers of the federal government.

In 2002, she estimated that four federal organizations alone required at least 168 reports a year from first nations communities, many of which had populations of less than 500. In a subsequent investigation by the Office of the Auditor General, representatives of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada revealed that in a single year, that department alone received more than 60,000 reports prepared by more than 600 first nations. That is an unbelievable figure. Why is the Conservative government demanding more and more of these pointless forms and reports?

Aboriginal leaders need to be able to devote their energies to the urgent problems affecting their communities: education, access to clean drinking water and housing.

Much has been said about the new requirements regarding disclosure of the salaries paid to leaders of aboriginal communities. Bill C-27 requires that the first nations disclose the details of the remuneration—salaries, commissions, bonuses, fees and so on—paid by the first nation and by any entity controlled by the first nation to its chief and each of its councillors in their professional and personal capacities.

I see a lot of hypocrisy in this situation. First, in accordance with the year-end financial reporting handbook, the first nations have to submit audited consolidated financial statements to the minister annually concerning the public funds they receive, including salaries, honoraria and travel expenses for all elected or appointed officials and all unelected senior officials of the band. In addition, the first

nations have to distribute those financial statements to their members.

I say hypocrisy because, in reality, the average salary of aboriginal leaders in Canada is not exorbitant. We are talking about approximately \$60,000 a year for the chiefs and \$31,000 for the councillors. In addition, I should point out that in many cases, more is demanded of the leaders of aboriginal communities than of other public officials.

Consider the example of Nigel Wright, the Prime Minister's chief of staff, or his other close advisors. Although their salaries are governed by Treasury Board standards, the public has no access to information on how much they earn or the total amount they receive annually in expense reimbursements. Yet this is what is required of the elected representatives and senior officials of aboriginal communities.

● (1535)

How can the Prime Minister demand transparency from others and not from his own office? It smacks of a double standard. In my opinion, what is good for the goose should be good for the gander.

It is important to understand that under federal law, aboriginal communities already have to disclose their audited financial statements to the federal government, including the salaries, honoraria and travel expenses of the elected representatives of the band.

The first nations already publish their audit reports, and some regularly hold consultations with their members. In some respects, I would venture to say that the bill is even pointless. For example, should the government wish to change the way first nations' financial statements are presented, it could simply revise the funding agreement requirements. That is what the NDP is proposing. Moreover, it should be pointed out that the first nations were not spared this Conservative government's irresponsible cuts.

On this side of the House, we want to see the government work alongside the first nations in order to improve governance, which has not been done in this case. The Conservatives eliminated funding for institutions that support governance, including the First Nations Statistical Institute and the National Centre for First Nations Governance. Clearly, the government pays lip service to improving governance in aboriginal communities, while simultaneously doing away with the tools required for good governance.

It is particularly ironic that the government feels the need to lecture the first nations about transparency when this Conservative government is probably the most opaque in Canada's history. How can the government talk about transparency when it has introduced two omnibus bills comprising over 800 pages in an attempt to avoid parliamentary scrutiny? Indeed, I would remind members that Bill C-45 reduces the powers of the Auditor General and ensures that 12 government agencies will no longer be subject to any oversight whatsoever.

Government Orders

Moreover, I would like to remind members that Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, is having to take the Conservative government to court to force the departments to disclose the impact of the budget cuts on services and programs for Canadians.

Speaking of hypocrisy, let us talk about the Conservatives' lack of transparency around the approval process for the CNOOC-Nexen deal. From the get-go, the Conservatives have refused to inform parliamentarians and the public at large as to the impact of the takeover. We still do not know if CNOOC will protect Canadian jobs and the headquarters in Canada. Neither do we know the extent to which Canada will be able to enforce its own environmental standards. By studying this transaction behind closed doors and failing to specify the criteria they are using to determine what constitutes a net benefit to Canada, the Conservatives are demonstrating a shameful lack of transparency.

In turn, Auditor General of Canada Michael Ferguson is accusing both the Department of National Defence and Public Works of concealing the actual costs of the F-35 and circumventing the government's own procurement rules. Worse still, the Auditor General's report clearly states that the Conservatives knew the total costs of the F-35, \$25 billion, and chose not to share that information with the House. The Conservatives can say they support transparency, but they show a great lack of transparency in the House.

If I have digressed, it is only to show how despicable it is for the Conservatives to give anyone lessons on transparency when they themselves show such strong contempt for accountability. We attempted to minimize the negative impacts of this bill in committee by bringing forward amendments, all of which were rejected by the government.

For these reasons, I am proud to oppose this bill in the House, and I look forward to answering hon. members' questions.

• (1540)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member might provide some comment on the fact that many first nations leaders across the country have also recognized the importance of transparency and accountability and would have loved to have had the opportunity to present their ideas and thoughts on the issue before the government actually drafted and introduced the bill to the House of Commons.

As I have said in this place and will continue to say, it was a lost opportunity by the government to not have consulted the first nations leaders. I wonder if the member might provide comment on that specific point.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. Indeed, we see goodwill in aboriginal communities. However, this government has taken a very paternalistic attitude towards first nations as we can see in the bills that are introduced in the House without any consultation with first nations.

Furthermore, the government does not address fundamental issues that would improve the quality of life for first nations. For example, it fails to talk in the House about the housing shortage and the lack of

jobs on reserves. It ignores these communities' real needs, something we find profoundly disappointing.

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government is demanding more and more paperwork and justifications from first nations and from anyone who does not share its political views. On the other hand, it does not hold to account polluters, those who contaminate the environment.

Why is there such a double standard, with one set of rules for friends of the government and another set of rules for other people?

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. Once again, we see a double standard at work. The government is asking first nations officials to show more transparency, while the Prime Minister's office is not transparent at all when it comes to its staff's salaries.

I would like to touch briefly on the Auditor General's comments from June 2011, as they seem very relevant to this debate. She called for major structural reforms to improve the federal government's policies and practices. Unfortunately, the government ignored those recommendations.

Among other things, the Auditor General recommended establishing clear and measurable service standards, products and responsibilities. She also suggested enacting basic legislation for key services, including education, housing and drinking water. Furthermore, she suggested paying attention to uncertainties and delays surrounding grants and funding, as they make long-term planning more difficult.

I am calling on the government to consider the Auditor General's clear and meaningful recommendations.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am a little saddened to rise in this House and speak to this bill, particularly in the context of what we see in first nations communities across the country. Just a few months ago, members of the NDP caucus went up to Attawapiskat where we saw the appalling state of housing. We were in communities where many families live in shoddy housing. We have seen problems of funding for first nations schools and the children are in appalling conditions. What we are seeing systematically by the Conservatives is the cutting of funding to first nations communities, those communities that depend on federal government funding in order to establish the schools and have adequate housing.

Instead of putting forward a bill that would deal with the dire shortages of adequate housing and schooling, the government has put forward, as it has done in a number of other sectors, a bill that tries to strangle first nations communities. We saw this with Bill C-377 as well. With the labour unions, which are democratically run and members have the full ability to influence their course of events, the Conservatives wanted to strangle those labour unions with red tape. We see the same thing here with Bill C-27. With inadequate resources that are the fault of the Conservative government, it is trying to strangle the first nations communities.

Government Orders

The government members try to pretend that they are actually concerned about accountability. Here is some accountability for them. In 2006, the Assembly of First Nations said that it wanted to establish an effective financial control system for first nations communities across the country. It wanted an auditor general and an ombudsperson for first nations so that those in the community could follow up with the ombudsperson and, at the same time, it could have an auditor general looking at the finances of first nations, most of which are extremely well run, and ensure that the moneys that are forwarded are put to adequate use. That is common sense. An NDP government would have said that it made a lot of sense and it would support it and put it into place.

Six years later, is there a first nations auditor general? No. Six years later, is there a first nations ombudsperson? No. The whole pretense of the Conservative government to somehow be interested in financial accountability goes right out the window because for six years it has not done what the Assembly of First Nations has said is a solution to this issue. We support those solutions but the Conservatives refuse to do it. Instead, they put forward a bill on which there has been no consultations with first nations at all and a bill that would strangle those already underfunded first nations with the red tape that only the Conservatives know how to impose.

We see this targeting of communities, groups or organizations that the Conservatives do not like. However, let us talk about the accountability of the Conservative government. It cut back on the Auditor General's department. It says that it wants nothing to do with the accountability mechanism that exists for it and that, through underfinancing, it will strangle the Auditor General's department so it cannot look into the expenditures of the government.

We have seen the government attack systematically the Parliamentary Budget Officer. The Parliamentary Budget Officer protects the public's interests. The people watching today understand that we need to have an impartial officer of Parliament who looks into whether the government fudges the numbers. What has the government been doing systematically? Because the Parliamentary Budget Officer has been doing what is for the Conservatives the worst possible sin they can think of, which is telling the truth, he has been under vicious and unrelenting attack by the government.

● (1550)

The government wants nothing to do with accountability, nothing to do with actually having a system of checks and balances. The government relentlessly attacks any independent budget officer, any independent agent like the Auditor General. It does everything it can to undermine that impartial work. Those officers are working in the best interests of the public. The Conservatives are saying that they want nothing to do with accountability and transparency.

What is the result? How accurate is the financial information that we get from the Conservatives? How accurate is the information that they actually provide to Canadians? Let us take just one file, the F-35s. I think that is an adequate representation of how bad the Conservatives are at financial management. This is an untendered contract that they put forward. Originally it was supposed to cost \$9 billion. We found out subsequently through the Parliamentary Budget Officer that it had gone from \$9 billion to \$20 billion to \$30 billion. The last estimate before they tried to hide it under their cloak

and let things just blow over was nearly \$40 billion for the F-35s. There is no accountability there. They did not even tender the contract. Their attempt now to retreat on this issue just underscores their ineptitude and incompetence when it comes to financial matters.

As a former financial administrator, I know when one is putting together the books, one does not cook the books. We need to be honest, whether we are talking about an NGO, a business, a labour organization or a government. The Conservative government cooks the books on an ongoing basis repeatedly. The Conservatives simply do not respect the public's right to know, and the F-35 is one example.

How about the Muskoka summit? We now know, because of a variety of interventions by the NDP, that the summit cost over \$1 billion. There is no accountability there. The government just decided to throw that money around and did not even have a paper trail in many cases. When it comes to accountability and transparency, the government gets an *f*.

Let us look at the West Block renovations that my colleague, the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, has been questioning. The West Block renovations, which were supposed to cost \$750 million, are now at somewhere around \$1.5 billion. Again, there was no accountability and no transparency. The government throws money around like there is no tomorrow when it comes to its lobbyist friends or when it comes to its pet projects. It does not understand accountability or transparency.

Then we see the actions of individual ministers. We were all appalled by the former member for Durham, Bev Oda, the minister who decided to move to another hotel, hire limousines and pay \$16 for a glass of orange juice. When knocking on doors in Durham on Sunday night, all people wanted to talk about was how the Conservatives are so egregiously bad when it comes to entitlement. In fact, one Conservative voter told me that the Conservatives were as bad as the Liberals. We can only agree. The Conservatives are as bad as the Liberals when it comes to entitlement.

What else? We had the Minister of National Defence flying around on Canadian Forces jets and helicopters. When the Prime Minister was in India, he had his limousine flown in from halfway around the world instead of renting limousines that exist everywhere in India. I have been to India and it has a lot of great limousines. We do not even know how much was spent. It could have been a half a million dollars or a million dollars. We have no idea because under the government there is no transparency and no accountability.

We have a government that is trying to strangle first nations. It has put forward suggestions that are clearly a resolution of the problem instead of looking at itself. The government is the least accountable and the least transparent in Canadian history. I . Accountability is something that the Conservatives should be embracing but they are not, which is why we are saying to them—

Government Orders

• (1555)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It may just have been a lack of clarity on the part of the member and maybe he will want to bring some clarity to it, but he did use the phrase that we are trying to strangle first nations. I do not want that to leave a bad impression that somehow there is strangling going on. The member may want to clarify what he means by that statement.

The Deputy Speaker: I am not sure that is a point of order.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster has about 20 seconds.

Mr. Peter Julian: It is not, Mr. Speaker. Conservatives are financially strangling first nations, as they are financially strangling democratically-elected labour movements. Both of those approaches are bad and they need to walk the talk. Conservatives need to be accountable to Canadians. It is about time they actually started setting an example.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was following quite attentively what the member was saying and then he kind of lost me when he made reference to the Liberals being worse than the Conservatives. My first thought was that I would take any opportunity in any forum to talk about previous leaders of both the Liberals and New Democrats, standards of transparency and public accountability for their personal behaviour. I would challenge the member to engage in that discussion in an open and transparent fashion.

Would the member comment on the importance of consulting prior to drafting legislation, which seems to have been lacking with regard to this bill?

• (1600)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, here is the issue. The Assembly of First Nations put forward very clear solutions. It said that there should be an auditor general and an ombudsperson for first nations communities. Those are solutions that everyone in the House should embrace. For six years, those recommendations have been festering in some backroom where the Conservatives hid them away. Instead, they bring forward this bill on which there has been no consultation at all.

Consultation is a fundamental part of democracy. It is something that an NDP government will do in 2015. It will be ensuring that it is consulting with the public, because that is normal. However, the Conservative government, whether it is Nexen, or first nations, or the labour movement or anything it decides it does not like or disagrees with, there is no consultation and it tries to impose its views and ideology on Canadians. I think that is why Canadians are losing confidence in the government.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I was reading the House notes last night, the first thing that came to my mind, and I am glad the member mentioned it, was to compare Bill C-27 to Bill C-377. I am also glad he used the word “strangle”. That is the proper word to use with this bill and Bill C-377. The Conservatives are trying to strangle or choke organizations that do not agree with Conservative policies. If they cannot choke or strangle them with paperwork, they take away their funding, like they did with KAIROS. It did not agree with the Conservatives’

ideology, so it took away its funding. That is the only example I am going to give.

I am going to ask my colleague this. Am I right to compare Bill C-27 to Bill C-377 and say that they are almost the same?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Nickel Belt is a fantastic member in the House of Commons and is one of the most effective local representatives across the country. He does a great job on behalf of his community.

The difficulty is that the intent is the same. The government’s proven complete lack of accountability to the Canadian public, ongoing secrecy and lack of transparency is unbelievable. It would have former Reform Party members rolling over. What it has done absolutely contradicts everything that originally brought the Reform Party to some prominence in the country. There is secrecy and lack of transparency that is incredible, mind-boggling and disrespectful to the Canadian public. At the same time, big industry lobbyists get money and there is no accountability there.

However, if people run a first nation, or run as a democratically-elected officer of a labour movement or are part of an NGO that endeavours to bring things forward, if they do not follow the line of the Conservatives, they will be under attack. That is what the government is doing. It is strangling these organizations with financial red tape and that is despicable.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague for Burnaby—New Westminster before me, who made such an eloquent and passionate speech, this is one of the motions that I would rather not have to get up to speak on. One would think that we would not have this legislation in front of us when there are so many serious issues to be addressed for our first nation communities across the country.

I have worked as a teacher for a great number of years on beautiful Vancouver Island. I have had the privilege of working very closely with the first nation communities both in Nanaimo and Nanoose. One of the things I have realized over the last couple of decades is that as a society we have a lot of work to do.

For the catastrophe of residential schools, we have had an official apology from this place. However, we need to start addressing some of the very serious issues in our first nation communities around clean water, housing, price of food and health care.

These are areas for which we have been criticized by the rapporteur of the United Nations. This was a criticism that my colleagues across the way did not take too well. Even though the rapporteur is from a well-established international organization that we are a member of, the Conservatives wanted this gentleman’s resignation. It is absolutely flabbergasting.

Instead of addressing any of the real day-to-day issues and challenges faced by our aboriginal communities, what do we have? We have another bill that would create more accountability.

Government Orders

Who would not want more accountability? On this side of the House, we want more accountability. We want legislation to be debated and voted on in the House. We do not want time allocations to be called. We also do not want to be faced with bills that are the size of a phone book purporting to be budget bills but buried in them are devastating impacts on our environment, immigration policies and much more.

However, the Conservative government really does not believe in accountability for itself. It has a tendency to use some extreme cases in order to stranglehold those who may not agree with it. I wish I knew what the motive of the Conservatives is. I know they are very good at yelling “accountability” at others, but they have practised none of it themselves. They do not even listen to their own parliamentary officer and they definitely do not give him the information he required so he can give an informed assessment.

I was not here during the last sitting of Parliament, but I believe this legislation is based on a private member's bill from the previous sitting, Bill C-575. This new bill was introduced on November 25, 2011, with a press release that said:

This bill builds on [the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar's] bill that was introduced in the last session of Parliament, addressing the issue of financial transparency for First Nation leaders by expanding the scope of the information to be publicly disclosed beyond the salaries and expenses of chiefs and councillors to include a First Nation's audited consolidated financial statements.

● (1605)

The issue is not really accountability. Once again it is playing to their base. Once again, based on misinformation and limited information, the Conservative government has introduced a piece of legislation. What the government is doing is absolutely outrageous. Using the example of purported salaries in one province alone with one first nations group, it is putting in a kind of surveillance that goes way beyond the requirements for many of our elected officials around this country. Let us take a look at this.

While the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and other Conservative-friendly groups like to talk about the outrageous salaries made by our first nation administrators and leaders, once we actually look at the facts, the reality is that the average salary for chiefs is \$60,000 and the average salary for councillors is \$31,000. As well, 50% of the chiefs around this country earn less than \$60,000 and only 5% earning more than \$100,000. This obviously has very little to do with addressing a real issue, so what is it all about?

One of the things that has really struck me since I came to the House is how pieces of legislation such as this get sent to committee, where we really hope there is some parliamentary oversight, discussion, debate and amendments. The NDP proposed 18 amendments and not one was adopted by the majority on the other side. While we were there, we were trying to do something that makes sense: to delink remuneration and expenses. The two things just do not go together. People have different expenses as they carry out their jobs, but to link that to their actual salaries and then conflate that figure is just outrageously unjust.

The other thing we tried to do with an amendment was to remove the power of the minister to withhold funds. We know the kinds of terrible conditions that exist for first nations right across this country. To think that any minister would be able to withhold funds, let us

remember that funding is to provide for education, health care and to subsidize the cost of food in many cases. This could also freeze the administration in that area in a very damaging way and could actually put lives at risk.

This seems to be a new trend by the government. I have certainly seen it in the area of immigration. We are seeing it in more and more of the legislation that keeps coming through the House. More and more power is being vested in the hands of the ministers. I would say that is the antithesis of parliamentary democracy.

When so much power is vested in the hands of one minister, or two or three or four ministers, no matter which political party they belong to, I would say that is a real threat to parliamentary oversight and to parliamentary democracy. We get elected and sent to this hallowed hall to discuss, debate and then vote on issues. Under the current government, ministers have grown their powers to a degree that I would say has become very dangerous. That is one of the key areas in this piece of legislation that needs to be addressed.

● (1610)

We are opposing the bill because of the items I have mentioned, but also because the government failed in a fundamental rule. It failed to consult with our first nation communities and make them part of the solution. Without consultation it would be unfair to impose an unjust piece of legislation on our first nations people.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's comments and I appreciated her opening remarks when she talked about speaking to the bill. I reflect on the Kelowna accord where we had first nation leaders and different stakeholders come to the table. They came up with an agreement on an accord, and then the Paul Martin government was in a position to introduce it in the House of Commons.

When a member of Parliament introduces legislation or ideas to the floor of the House of Commons and he or she has done the background work and the consulting, would the hon. member not agree that it makes it a whole lot easier to support legislation when we know the background work was done in advance of a motion or a bill being presented? In other words, we know that others, particularly the stakeholders, were involved in what is being debated. Does that not provide more comfort for members who are speaking to it and want to support it?

● (1615)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, it will come as no surprise to anyone in the House that I believe in consultation. I believe that in order to find a solution, we need to engage the very people who are involved.

I would say that the first nations people have been disrespected in a great way. They were made to believe they would be consulted and they would be part of issues, especially on any legislation that would impact them. Here we have a piece of legislation that did not involve them in a productive way. We are always better off to consult than to go into a room and make up legislation, then use extreme cases to justify it and do the media spin. It just does not cut it.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's presentation and would now like to ask her a question to which, unfortunately, I cannot foresee a positive answer. As a member of the committee, perhaps she will be able to enlighten me.

I would go back to what my colleague for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin said a short while ago about the fact that we are poised to impose on first nations a set of standards that are vastly more restrictive than those to which all other elected officials are held.

Are our first nations being singled out, or can it be argued that first nations are just the first of many groups on which the government will attempt to impose similar standards?

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very thoughtful question. That is the one item I think is really distasteful in this.

The legislation would apply to the first nations people and would hold them to a completely different standard than many elected officials. It does not hold corporations to these kinds of standards, yet businesses owned by first nations people will be held to them. Think about the kind of impact that has on the economy within the first nations, their competitiveness and their ability to compete with others, when all of their information will be out there for the world to access by making a request. It is very unfortunate.

It also sends the message that they are one group that we have to build a very tight fence around, and if they do not behave, we will take their pennies away from them. It is just outrageous that we are debating such a measure in Parliament.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to oppose Bill C-27 because the bill is incredibly problematic. As with most bills introduced by the government pertaining to aboriginal peoples, it demonstrates a dangerous misunderstanding of the concerns and issues first nations face and a misunderstanding of how the federal government could best address them.

I oppose Bill C-27 both on principle and pragmatically because insofar as its implementation goes, the bill would not accomplish what it is intended to do. It does nothing to increase accountability of first nation governments to their people and gives the ability of the minister to withhold funding to the community, while holding first nation chiefs to an impossible standard, especially compared to that of other elected officials in other jurisdictions. The bill is actually redundant if what we are looking for is accountability from first nations.

First nations, excluding those who have their own self-governing regimes, are already beholden to funding arrangements with the Government of Canada in the form of fixed contribution agreements under which first nations must satisfy certain conditions to ensure continued payment of federal funds. Audits are already provided to Aboriginal Affairs and first nation band councils are already required to release their documents and statements to their people.

According to the Library of Parliament's legislative summary on the bill:

First Nations bands are [already] subject to certain financial disclosure requirements under the Indian Act and related statutes and regulations. In particular...a band's financial statements [are] audited annually, and that the auditor's report [is] posted "in conspicuous places on the Band Reserve for examination by members of the Band."

Therefore, practically speaking, the bill is doing nothing but forcing a burdensome and costly hoop for every first nation to jump through annually. It is designed to make a statement that these sovereign nations, which is what they are or should be, must be transparent to us, the average Canadian, and not to their own people or to their federal funding partners.

At best, the bill is working to make it appear that native leaders are so egregiously corrupt that they require extra paternalistic oversight, far more than any of our own levels of government are subject to. At worst, the bill is a deflection from the real source of first nations financial unaccountability, which, as was repeatedly proven by the Auditor General, is the federal government.

I would like to quote Cindy Blackstock, who is the executive director at the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. When she appeared last May at the status of women committee, she said:

That is not to say that when this happens people shouldn't be held to account, but it should be no reason to deny children basic access to services. Where there are allegations of mismanagement of funding, there are provisions within the agreements to stop that and address it—and of course, there are the criminal courts, and they should be used to the fullest extent.

Introducing a bill that takes extreme, near emergency, measures to ensure that every financial statement, audit and report is made available to every Canadian and is subject to the unilateral power of the minister is simply trying to perpetuate a myth that band council chiefs are all mismanaging large sums of funding on reserves. That is simply untrue.

I am proud to be the member of Parliament for the Kanesatake Mohawk, whose band council grand chief, Serge Simon, is fighting every day to provide the best possible care for his nation. That is in spite of its massive debt and underfunding. Kanesatake is, and has been, working to build itself a sustainable economic future against the tremendous odds that the federal government has stacked against it and perpetuated until this day. Chief Simon has gone so far as to prove his commitment to the greater welfare of his community by donating his own salary back to the communal coffers in order to help pay back Kanesatake's debts.

Why should Kanesatake and all 638 band councils be targeted as being corrupt? I am certain that if we were to compare band council politicians and Canadian politicians at all levels of government, we would find more cases of corruption and mismanagement in our politics than in theirs. Yet, if we were to give a minister the power to unilaterally withdraw all federal transfers from provinces, territories or municipalities, as the bill would allow the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to do to first nations, the proposal would be met with outrage.

Government Orders

• (1620)

Would we start closing down schools and sewage systems because political corruption or mismanagement exists at the city level? Of course not, because we would not punish innocent citizens and their children no matter the crime of their elected representatives.

Again, to quote Cindy Blackstock, who contacted me specifically with her comments on this legislation:

The Auditor General has repeatedly pointed to shortcomings in the accountability of the Federal Government in its relationships and funding policies respecting First Nations peoples and governments. Instead of addressing the government's internal accountability shortcomings they are wasting more tax dollars doing something that the Auditor General specifically recommended against—implementing more reporting requirements for First Nations. I would like to see the funds being spent on this initiative re-profiled to do something that will make a difference and save tax payers millions in the long run—building safe schools for First Nations children, providing equitable child welfare funding and improving health care services.

While the government is proposing impossible standards for our underfunded first nations, it withholds information from our own Parliamentary Budget Officer on spending cuts. It seems to me that is the very definition of hypocrisy.

First nations' band councils should not be treated pre-emptively like criminals, especially not by the current government. In this case the Conservative government has no moral high ground, and my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster demonstrated that quite well a few minutes ago. When it comes to financial accountability and transparency, the Conservative government has no credibility.

The larger problem with this bill, and pretty well with every bill on first nations the government puts before Parliament, is that it is imposed on first nations without consultation. This runs counter to the Conservatives' pronouncements at the Crown-first nations gathering that they would strive to work together with first nations. However, they continue to impose legislation without the consent of the first nations their legislation would affect. New Democrats would never pass any law regarding aboriginal people without consultation, which requires consent.

This is not simply a matter of principle but one of our obligations as a signatory of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 32 of the declaration requires free, prior and informed consent on any matter relating to indigenous peoples' lands or welfare. The fact that the vast majority of first nations were not consulted on Bill C-27, let alone gave consent, means that Canada is once again breaking faith with this important declaration of rights. Why would the Prime Minister ratify the UN declaration when he does not even intend to make a cursory attempt to uphold its standards?

To quote the Assembly of First Nations on this issue:

First Nation governments are arguably among the most transparent and accountable governments in all of Canada. The AFN has long advanced its Accountability for Results initiative and continues to work with First Nation organizations and leaders—and with the Auditor General of Canada, the Treasury Board Secretariat, and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada—on better approaches to both governance and accountability.

We all know what the problems are—they are not exorbitant salaries—they are decades of paternalism that have placed many First Nation leaders in a position where they are responsible for implementing decisions, but where the ultimate power to make decisions rests with the federal government....

Alongside my New Democrat colleagues, I believe that we must move away from the paternalism of the Indian Act and toward a paradigm where we have a healthy relationship with first nations as partners, where they are able to maintain their own sovereignty and jurisdiction over their lands and business. This legislation is a perfect example of exactly the opposite and demonstrates that Conservatives have no genuine desire to work with first nations to find collaborative and functional solutions to problems.

• (1625)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note that my colleague was not here during the last Parliament so she did witness the private member's bill being brought forward by the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, when considerable consultation took place with first nations about these very issues.

I find it quite ironic that the member would stand in the House and ask for transparency from one level of government but not from what is effectively another level of government.

What kind of transparency would the member look for if she were setting something up, because we do ask for transparency when government money or taxpayers' dollars are put forward to another level of government and when every province and every municipality now puts all their statements online? I can go to my municipalities and ask them to present to me their audited statements and they are responsible for providing them to me as a taxpayer. My question for the member is, what does transparency look like?

• (1630)

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I would point out to my colleague from Newmarket that just because I was not elected prior to this parliament does not mean that I do not understand or know what happened in prior parliaments. It is a little bit silly to suggest that I did not realize that my colleague from Saskatoon had a private member's bill on this.

If I go into Kanesatake and ask whether there have been consultations and the response is no, then I believe that not enough consultation has taken place, because that is a community that should be consulted. If first nations people are saying they have not been consulted enough, then who are the Conservatives to decide that they have been?

As for transparency, we cannot take any lessons from the Conservatives. The member said that she could go online and check for her municipality's statements there. First nations can ask that of their band councils, and it is already happening. Someone living in a community can already access that information, as it is already required.

Government Orders

What more do we need to do? That is quite transparent already. We only need to be transparent to those to whom we are accountable, namely the people living within our jurisdictions.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first chance to speak to Bill C-27 in the House, I will say that I find the demands being placed on first nations disturbing, particularly in terms of time and the costs of producing these additional papers. The words just used by our parliamentary colleague of patronizing and paternalistic apply here.

I wonder if we could turn the mirror on ourselves and ask why it is that at the Board of Internal Economy all of the other parliamentary parties in this place object to the expenses of members of Parliament being placed on the public record. I wonder if we could do that before we ask the same of first nations.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, the real problem is that my colleagues on the other side are thinking that we need to make first nations accountable to all taxpayers. That is because the system we have set up right now is one that is paternalistic and racist. Essentially, it is our colonial structure toward first nations. Basically, what we have done is to make these first nations communities, which are nations with their own people, accountable to us through the structure of the Indian Act.

What we need to do is to sit down at the table and move forward as partners. That is something that the Conservatives will never do as long as they continue to see these communities as accountable to them and not as partners.

[*Translation*]

Mr. José Nunez-Melo (Laval, NDP): Monsieur Speaker, I would like to start by saying that it is a privilege for me to address the Chair and all the members of the House.

Truth be told, my one true regret, or should I say criticism of this bill, is that it is pointless and senseless. Bill C-27, An Act to enhance the financial accountability and transparency of First Nations is an aberration across the board.

Let me begin by pointing out that my honourable colleagues have invested a considerable amount of time, either here in this House or in committee, debating this bill. Instead we could have been diligent and spent more time debating other more important bills, especially those for which my honourable Conservative colleagues have arbitrarily invoked time allocation.

Our caucus opposes the bill at report stage. Bill C-27 requires the annual disclosure of consolidated financial statements, a separate schedule, an auditor's written report respecting the consolidated financial statements and an auditor's report respecting the schedule of remuneration.

This is a great deal to ask for and it is extremely constraining, particularly for small governments such as first nation governments.

We the members of the New Democratic Party caucus are opposed to this bill because first nations would be bound by all of its provisions, irrespective of the fact that they were not consulted. I listened to what my colleague opposite had to say a short while ago. She stated that previous Parliaments held consultations. I believe that

is not entirely accurate and that these consultations were conducted in a rather cavalier manner.

As far as we are concerned, the emphasis should instead be on respect between first nations and the government in power.

We do not support this bill because we feel it does nothing to improve the accountability process either. It requires the drafting of a number of reports which are probably irrelevant. Furthermore, confidential information will be widely disseminated electronically. Information will find its way online and onto websites and that is not the intent here.

The NDP does not support this bill. As I just said, we feel it does nothing to improve the situation. It also imposes standards that are stricter than those to which elected officials in many jurisdictions are held. It gives the minister the power to withhold payment of any moneys due to a first nation or to rescind any agreement providing for the payment of a grant or contribution to a first nation should it breach its duty.

This is no laughing matter, although I do find all of these constraints that have no business existing in the first place quite laughable.

• (1635)

The federal government has failed miserably over the last decade to address the worsening living conditions of first nation members.

This bill shows that the government wants first nations to do what it should in principle have demanded of foreign governments in its famous free trade agreements. The government does not impose on any foreign nation restrictions as convoluted and serious as the ones it wants to impose on small first nation communities in Canada which are deserving of its respect. This is a very serious situation indeed.

In our view, the kinds of changes that are being required of first nations, such as having to prepare audited financial reports, should not be consigned to legislation. They could be part of the requirements already set out in funding agreements that the department has had each first nation sign. There is already a bill stipulating that first nations with self-government agreements should not be subject to additional texts and legislation. It reminds me of comments made by my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster to the effect that the Conservatives are attacking groups that oppose their policies or their actions, targeting all small first nation governments.

Our honourable colleague from Newton—North Delta also explained very quickly what happens when groups disagree with the funding arrangements this government is attempting to impose on first nations.

As I also recall, our honourable colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles talked about a double standard at play. That matter was also addressed in a question raised by our honourable colleague from Trois-Rivières. There is clear evidence here of a direct attack on any group that opposes the policies put forward by the Conservatives.

Government Orders

I started off by saying that it was a privilege for me to speak to this House on this bill. However, on reading the notes carefully and listening to the comments of my colleagues, I should have begun by saying that I regretted having to make any reference to this bill.

In closing, I would simply reiterate that the NDP caucus is opposed to this bill because it is arbitrary and pointless. Perhaps more time should be devoted to debating more important bills that would benefit the general public and first nations in particular.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a couple of comments. First, it is very disappointing to hear the member speak about this legislation or characterize himself as being disappointed to have to speak to a piece of legislation for which many first nation community members are actually calling. It is because of complaints by first nation community members that this legislation was introduced. While the member may be disappointed, I feel very privileged to be able to bring legislation like this forward to address an issue that first nations have brought forward to our government.

We have also heard members talk about the reporting burdens of first nations, and I have already spoken to this in my remarks, but I want to reassure members that there is nothing in this legislation that would require additional paperwork for first nation governments. They already produce consolidated financial statements each year, which are audited by independent, accredited, professional auditors. It is a requirement of their funding agreements with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. Members need to stop perpetuating the notion that we are requiring more reporting, when it is actually already being done by first nations.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Mr. José Nunez-Melo: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague made some comments, but did not ask a question.

I am sorry that she is disappointed. On the other hand, I want to stress that the reporting requirements for first nations, and particularly for groups that are outside the scope of the bill, might be an excessive burden.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the first nations live in Canada as if they were in a third world country, when it comes to access to drinking water, decent housing and something as simple as an elementary school.

In our wealthy and prosperous country, according to Conservative criteria, we accept that a community lives in third world conditions.

I would like the member for Laval to explain how the management rules to be imposed on first nations will change their economic and social status.

Will they at last have the schools they are entitled to or will they have to fill out administrative forms?

Mr. José Nunez-Melo: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin for his question.

I am not in a position at all to say how this bill could be beneficial to first nations. As he just explained very clearly, they already live in conditions worthy of third world countries, which today are called developing countries.

They have very limited resources and, in addition, they are expected to behave like a nation with its own efficient public service. In fact, they have such limited resources that management is not very complex. And they are generally very well managed.

Imposing a burden of useless and arbitrary red tape just makes management more difficult. They will have to spend their resources on that instead of addressing the crying need of their people for schools and infrastructure.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this House is discussing a bill of surprising relevance. In theory, a government should work in collaboration with the first nations in order to improve governance—not just administration, but the results obtained. It should not use administrative obligations as a weapon to silence anyone. Unions, environmental groups, charitable organizations, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Rights and Democracy, and Development and Peace are all facing administrative roadblocks, some of them so huge that the organizations may disappear.

The Conservatives have eliminated funding for institutions that support governance, for instance the First Nations Statistical Institute and the National Centre for First Nations Governance and, to top it off, they are preventing many young aboriginals from getting a post-secondary education. This is a case of giving someone orders but taking away the resources needed to carry them out. It is Machiavellian. It is demoralizing to give a person an order but make it impossible to carry it out.

The minister's power to withhold payment of any money due to a first nation or to cancel any agreement concerning grants or contributions to a first nation if all requirements have not been fulfilled is a truly excessive penalty. It turns a person's ability to fill in an administrative form into a matter of life or death, although the form changes absolutely nothing about the service provided.

There is no mention of social housing. There is nothing about health care. Public education is missing. There is nothing about running water. In short, the means needed to overcome poverty are not there. However, there are administrative rules. This is a huge defect. It will do nothing to relieve the problems of infrastructure, but administrative rules will be imposed—the kind of rules the Conservatives themselves do not obey. They have eliminated the obligation on polluters to respond to environmental assessments. In terms of navigable waters, they have slashed so much that 95% of our bodies of water are no longer protected by the law.

On one hand, some people who no longer have to fill out forms in order to carry out a project get preferential treatment, while people the government does not like get no such favours. More red tape is added, lots more. For a government that claims it wants to eliminate red tape, it is creating a lot. It is generous with red tape for its adversaries, but not for its friends. It is a double standard.

Government Orders

If we apply administrative rules rigorously, then we set up a rule and apply it to everyone. That is what is called GRAP—generally recognized accounting practices. First nations, unions and businesses are applying them already, but the Conservatives have decided to use their imagination when dealing with their ideological adversaries.

We in the NDP believe that the changes in first nations financial statements do not require a law. It could be covered in the requirements under the financing agreements the minister signs with each first nation.

In short, the solution to the problem they claim to see is already there. If they have some problems now and then, the solution already exists.

● (1650)

They show up with their horror stories and generalize from a few back-page news items, when this government already has the solution but is not applying it. Why is it not applying it? That is an interesting question.

In one of her last reports, the Auditor General said the government was inundating the first nations with administrative problems and forms to fill out and it did not even have the staff to check them. That is the height of futility. People are being asked to fill out administrative forms and threatened with financial cuts if they do not fill them out, when there is no administrative infrastructure in place to check the reports. And the government claims to be a good manager. It is actually amazing that the country has not gone bankrupt yet.

It is quite something. The Auditor General and her senior officials gave the government instructions, but it is not listening and it is looking around for something else. It hears some back-page story, it generalizes from it, and it comes in with a club, a coercive law, and a means of eliminating a problem that does not exist. The law already gives the department the means to remedy any impropriety in first nations funding. The means exist. Why is the government not using it?

If a member of the first nations embezzles funds, the Criminal Code is available. All it takes is a phone call to the RCMP to report a theft, a fraud, or problems with management or administration. The department already has flying squads to help people deal with these administrative difficulties.

The department is getting craftier; it does not have flying squads of public servants anymore: it has consultants. It has big accounting firms that come in and tell it they are going to teach it, for a fee, how it should manage itself and deal with the administrative forms it demands. I presume that some day it is maybe going to think of hiring these accounting firms to audit the administrative reports it has demanded. That will be interesting to see.

Obviously, the problems it is facing have nothing to do with the sponsorship scandal. Let us talk about that scandal. The government has been very quick to bring in a bill to deal with these back-page cases. But the Gomery report, which called for a solution in relation to the sponsorship scandal, has still not been implemented to prevent a repeat of the sponsorship scandal.

What it comes down to is that we are faced with threats for which the government does not want to apply solutions. And for problems that do not exist, it invents solutions that are worse than the problem itself. The little bit of money that it might save has nothing to do with the orgy of spending on accountants and consultants that it is going to take to administer this legislation.

Instead of dealing with the real problems facing first nations communities, this bill contributes nothing. And that is disgraceful.

For all these reasons, the NDP will be opposing a bill that produces nothing, a bill that is typical of the government and serves only one purpose: to impose constraints on an adversary.

● (1655)

[*English*]

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): Mr. Speaker, I will say at the outset that I reject the member's remarks with respect to Conservatives favouring or disfavoured any particular group. I have spent a lifetime working with these communities, and I think he should do the right thing and take those words back.

Whether we are talking about the Parliament of Canada Act, the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act or Manitoba's Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Act, these are examples of the kinds of legislation that make it necessary for government to declare its salaries and expenses to the people to whom it answers. That is what this bill is about. It is about re-establishing the relationship, based on complaints from grassroots first nations community members to their government, and posting what the governments already produce.

That might be too complicated for the member to understand, but I want him to go on record and say if he is telling this place that he does not stand for the countless first nations community members who came forward and had been under duress at certain points in their community forums to simply ask for the disclosure of their audited consolidated financial statements and notes, which reflect the salaries and expenses. Is he saying he does not stand for any level of government? As he said, there should be one rule for everyone. That sounds as if this rule levels the playing field. What is he talking about?

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, for someone who has worked with first nations for a long time, I find the member especially insensitive to their present material welfare.

With this bill, I would have expected that someone who says he wants to work with first nations had actually worked with them. As for good governance, first nations have solutions and they have submitted them to the government. So has the auditor general.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, I can hear my colleague, but I have the floor. He can ask me a supplementary question later if he wants.

Government Orders

The leaders essentially agree to be accountable for their financial obligations to their constituents. They even proposed that a special auditor general be assigned to first nations, and also the establishment of an ombudsman. There are solutions.

As for the abuses you are talking about, I would suggest you call the RCMP. These days, the Conservatives are afraid they will be arrested if they call the RCMP. That is your problem, not ours. Solutions do exist, such as generally accepted accounting principles. You guys across the aisle do not understand that.

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind members to direct their comments through the Chair rather than directly to other members.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who is one of the hardest working members of Parliament. His speech was so good, witty and full of facts that it went over the member for Kenora's head. It was too intelligent for him.

Could my colleague please comment on the fact that the current Conservative government is possibly the least accountable and transparent in Canadian history? I would like my colleague to comment on the government's irresponsibility.

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, the government is refusing to give the Parliamentary Budget Officer the information he is entitled to. By denying an officer of Parliament that right, the government is denying all Canadians the right to receive information about government spending.

We do not know how much some people working in the Prime Minister's Office actually earn. We do not know what cuts will be made and what services will be eliminated as a result. The Conservatives do not want more clarity: they only want to silence their opponents.

[English]

BILL C-27—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first nations of course have asked for greater accountability and transparency from their governments, and we believe that first nations, like all Canadians, deserve transparency and accountability from their elected officials.

Thus I must advise that an agreement has not been reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) concerning the proceedings at report stage and third reading of Bill C-27, An Act to enhance the financial accountability and transparency of First Nations.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose, at the next sitting, a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at those stages.

• (1705)

REPORT STAGE

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank everyone here who is supporting my speech. I speak to a very difficult bill that the government has brought forward, Bill C-27, ostensibly called a "transparency act", but really it is another colonial act. That is what the bill is about. We have a bill that speaks to a very

small segment of society that considers first nations to have extreme problems with accountability. It demands a system of accountability that is really unacceptable, that would not meet the needs of first nations and that would impose a burden that would, in some cases, put first nations at a disadvantage with other Canadians.

The bill would force first nations who are still under the Indian Act to publicly post their financial statements of any moneys provided to chiefs and band councillors regardless of where it is earned, including reimbursements for out-of-pocket expenses, its auditors' reports on financial statements and its auditors' reports on moneys paid to chiefs and council, and to make these available on a website for a period of 10 years. All this information is already accessible to band members through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs by request. This information is available to those who want it and they make use of that service, from what we were told, upwards of 150 to 200 times a year. I do not know if that is every year or in particular years, but out of the 600 or so bands, that is the volume of requests put forward.

Once we took the bill to committee, even those who supported it said that there needed to be amendments. There were a few major supporters within the first nations who took the position of the government and said they wanted it. They made that choice. However, by and large, the majority of first nations people understood and recognized that this was not the way to do business and that this was not government to government. When the minister was in front of us I asked him whether he considers the relationship between the federal government and the band councils in Canada to be government to government. He agreed with me. He said that it is. Hence, the hypocrisy of the bill, which would treat first nations people as wards of the state.

In the Northwest Territories, another government that is set up by a bill of this Parliament, the NWT Act, the NWT government gets to choose how it discloses information. That applies to Nunavut as well as to the Yukon. We have a situation here where the government agrees it is a government to government relationship, yet it will not treat the first nations in the same fashion that it treats others. We have equality in this country. We have equality as a guiding principle of this country and the Conservatives seem to take that and ignore it.

There is a hypocrisy issue here as well because quite clearly the current government has been one of the most secretive governments in the history of Canada. International agencies that monitor access to information have taken us from fourth place in the world to 52nd place in our ability to access information from the government. In terms of the information that is given, when the Conservative government came to power, the average redaction of information was 15%. Fifteen per cent of the items that the government released to the public was redacted. It is now 47%. Why? Has the nature of government changed so much? Has secrecy become so important?

Government Orders

If it is so important for the Conservatives, why would they insist that first nation governments would have to show everything to everyone in this country on a website for every nitpicker in the country to look at. Everyone with a grudge against first nations could go there and go through their dirty laundry to look for something. That is what the government wants to do to first nations. That is what it is doing with the bill. What a shame.

• (1710)

The government could have, through incentives to first nations, enabled them to develop their own information systems. Many have. Many of the first nations that came in front of us said, "Look, here is the work that we have done. Here is how we disclose our information. We are proud of it. We did this ourselves".

What does the government do? It slaps it on everyone. How is that government to government? Shame on the government. Shame on it for not treating first nations in a respectful fashion. That is the problem we had in Canada for 100 years. I thought we were trying to get over this problem of treating first nations with little respect. After signing treaties with them, after taking over their land, when are we going to treat them with respect?

Let us talk about the Conservative government for a while, because the bill is going to pass and we are going to end up in a situation where the first nations are going to have wait three years to get this fixed. Right now, the government has done very bad things with respect to accountability and transparency.

One of the first acts by the government was to create the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, saying this would make the government more accountable. Since that day, the government has denied information, delayed the release of information and demeaned the PBO. Most recently, the PBO has had to threaten court action to get the information he needs to provide parliamentarians with the facts we need to properly review Conservative budgets and other financial statements. This is a public government, open to every citizen of the country, unlike first nations, which are governments for specific groups of people in this country. We have a responsibility as a public government to release information to all and sundry.

When it comes to the environment, the Conservative government has shut down investigation into climate change, taken out the Experimental Lakes Area, closed Arctic research centres and has muzzled scientists from speaking in public. What is going on? What is it about science that Conservatives feel the rest of the Canadians should not know? What is it about science that the government wants to hide from us?

That is a question that perhaps we will get in the next election. That is when the Canadian public will actually decide what information they want. There is the F-35 auditor's report and the handling of the Auditor General's report. In his first report as Auditor General, Michael Ferguson said the Department of National Defence gambled on the F-35 fighter jet without running a fair competition, while lacking cost certainty or any guarantee the plane could replace the current fleet of CF-18s by the end of the decade. He went on to talk about business conducted in an uncoordinated fashion by federal departments.

What did the government do? First it said his information was all wrong, after refusing to release the information he requested. Then it tried to shut committee meetings in this boondoggle. The final attempt by the Conservative government to hide the truth has been to delay the release of the public accounts committee report looking into the debacle. These are hardly the actions of a government that supports accountability and transparency.

I could go on for quite a long time about the inadequacy of the government when it comes to accountability and transparency. The Canadian public would probably enjoy hearing about all the issues we have with that. I could talk about robocalls, the impact of the health care transfer cuts to the provinces, the cost of the ideological prison agenda or election financing schemes, but I would be here all day and I only have 30 seconds.

For the Conservatives to say that the single biggest issue for first nations people, many of whom live in third world poverty, is the need for accountability beyond what they do already is real hypocrisy.

• (1715)

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Western Arctic knows this topic very well. He has always been a good advocate for first nations. I am really proud of him.

I have seen the numbers. The different aboriginal administrations right now table more than 60,000 reports with the ministry of aboriginal affairs. That is 165 reports every day that these administrations have to give to the minister. Right now the government has no shame. It has the nerve to tell us that there is no accountability and there is not enough transparency when it is already drowning in bureaucracy and paperwork.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that subject.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, the issue surrounding the paperwork that first nations are required to produce is really extraordinary. These governments are being hobbled in their work by the federal government and by the aboriginal affairs bureaucracy. There is no doubt about that. That goes on with respect to every single issue that these people work on. It requires massive change. It is not a question of stupidly increasing the accountability provisions as is happening with this legislation. It is about coming to an understanding of how governments can be accountable in good fashion.

There is so much to do for first nations. They have so much promise and potential and they are being held back tremendously by the rules that run their lives.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to emphasize the fact that many first nation leaders are advocating for more financial accountability and transparency. That is nothing new. It is not as if the Government of Canada is saying that there has to be transparency and first nation leadership is saying no to transparency. That is not happening. It was recognized in small part in the Kelowna accord where first nations led the arguments as to whether there should be a first nations auditor general who would provide accountability and so forth. I would not want people to get the impression that first nation leadership is outright rejecting the whole issue of financial accountability and transparency because that is not the case.

The case today is why the government failed to consult and work with first nation leadership to come up with how best to deal with the issue of accountability and transparency. Would the member not agree?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I agree to a certain extent. Consultation is important but it is also important to recognize the fundamental principle that this is a government to government relationship. The Government of Canada does not consult with the government of the Northwest Territories and tell it what its transparency arrangements are going to be.

What are we speaking about when we speak about government to government relationships? First nations that accomplish the work for themselves, that develop their own systems of transparency, are going to be the most successful ones. That is simply the case. We need to throw off the shackles that exist between the federal government and first nations in a proper and respectful fashion.

Bill C-27 goes in the wrong direction. It goes in another direction, which is simply going to increase the aspects of what we do not want. That is the problem we have with the bill. It is a problem that the government has to recognize because it has a number of other bills coming forward that are going to do the same thing, that are going to create the same problem with the relationship between the federal government and first nations.

• (1720)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak to the bill again.

At the outset, Bill C-27 remains largely unnecessary. It in no way addresses the multitude of better known, long-lasting and long-standing problems that persist on many first nations. The bill would create an unnecessary reporting mechanism that would rely on a form of communication that really would not reflect the way most people in these communities go about talking to each other or learn about their relationship.

Bill C-27 is overly punitive and amounts to a waste of valuable and much needed funds by duplicating efforts and increasing the bureaucratic burden on those first nations that do not already have self-governing regimes. It would set the course for costly legal battles and would ignore the advice of the Auditor General to reduce the reporting burden placed on first nations. It would add to that reporting burden at the same time the government handcuffs the participants by reducing the abilities and effectiveness of those bodies that assist with first nation governance.

Everyone in this place is aware of the failings of the Conservative government that claimed it would be more transparent and accountable than its predecessors. The Conservatives have learned that it is not as easy as it sounds, yet they are demanding what they cannot do themselves of our first nations.

In fact, the bill would impose standards greater than those applied to politicians in many other elected jurisdictions in a way that would create more bureaucracy without really increasing accountability of first nation governments to their communities.

The question that begs to be asked is this. Why is this being done now?

We might hear about a handful of overpaid band politicians. However, this is not the norm and any assumptions that are drawn from those stories are often based more on opinion than fact.

Also, if hearing about something is excuse enough to set the wheels of change in motion, I invite the government to recall how often we have heard about the challenges related to poverty, inadequate housing, substandard education opportunities, mental and physical health and so many more significant well-documented problems that persist in far too many first nation communities across Canada. I invite the government to find some resources to address some of those arguably more urgent issues.

I also invite the government to recall that only work done under the broader concept of full consultation is bound to succeed. If the government works in isolation, ignores its duty to consult, or only listens to the opinion of those who support its opinion, it will be spinning its wheels.

From the outset, we know that there is a problem because the intention of the bill is to duplicate something that already exists. Anyone watching Parliament today might be tempted to think that first nations report nothing about the funding they receive or on the salaries and compensation provided to their leadership when in fact the opposite is true.

First nations produce year-end reports that include annual audited consolidated financial statements for the public funds provided to them. These reports include salaries, honoraria and travel expenses for all elected, appointed and senior unelected band officials.

First nations are also required to release statements to their membership about compensation earned or accrued by elected, appointed and unelected senior officials and the amounts of remuneration paid, earned or accrued by elected and appointed officials, which must be from all sources within the recipient's financial reporting entity, including amounts from economic development and other types of business corporations.

Let us remember the June 2011 findings of the Auditor General which stated that despite repeated audits recommending numerous reforms over the last decade, the federal government had failed abysmally to address the worsening conditions for first nations.

Government Orders

That report tells us that the money just is not flowing to the problems and that it is not for lack of audits or reporting processes. The Auditor General pointed out that the reporting burden on first nations had actually worsened in recent years despite the fact of the office's repeated calls to reduce the reporting burden.

● (1725)

Worst of all, the findings showed how many of the reports were not even used by federal government departments and were not serving anything but bureaucratic processes. They are white elephants and the government is eagerly seeking to increase them.

In this respect, we have a government that is all about creating more burdensome red tape to go along with the handcuffs it is putting on first nations communities, communities that rely on the services of tribal councils, the First Nations Statistical Institute and the National Centre for First Nations Governance to assist with many items related to governance.

Consider the way the government has attacked tribal councils on one hand and created a great deal of work that those councils are uniquely positioned to assist with at the same time. The cuts to funding in this area show that the government is not working from a coherent plan. There is no playing to strengths or even acknowledgement of interplay between variables. In fact, cuts to the tribal council funding program mute the significant assistance that tribal councils could provide bands that will be forced to comply with the technological bureaucracy the bill sets in play. That program funds tribal councils so they can provide advisory services to their member first nations and to administer other Indian and northern programs.

Let us remember that tribal councils are institutions established voluntarily by the bands. In 2006-07 the program funded 78 tribal councils that served 471 first nations for a hair less than \$45 million. That is not an excessive amount of money for the work these councils do. It is nowhere near the amount the government flushes down the drain for self-congratulatory advertising.

Consider the work tribal councils do. Five advisory services have been devolved to tribal councils: economic development, financial management, community planning, technical services and band governance. It is only reasonable to expect these cuts will affect the output of many first nations. Certainly, the work tribal councils on advisory services dovetails with the demands that Bill C-27 places on first nations. Be it technical services, financial management or band governance, tribal councils had an important role to play in this process. However, the government saw fit to claw back those budgets ahead of this bill.

We understand there is not an infinite amount of resources. That is why the New Democrats would never make the kinds of cuts and demands that the government has and pretend that one does not affect the other.

It is no secret that many first nation communities are not as well off as most non-aboriginal places. We know that almost a third of first nation households struggle to get by on less than \$20,000 a year. We know that number is growing, which is to say, it is not going in the right direction. This is a significant problem and the government's answer seems to be to pile on in terms of the amount of

money a community now has to spend reporting on how it spend its money. It sounds absurd. That is because it kind of is.

Consider that first nations are already subject to various policy-based and legal requirements regarding the management and expenditure of federal public funds. If these new requirements did away with those, or streamlined them, it might make more sense. Instead, this is just the creation of more red tape for first nations.

The New Democrats remain convinced that changes to how audited statements are made public does not require heavy-handed legislation. Any changes deemed necessary could be a requirement of funding arrangements that the department would have each first nation government sign.

We are concerned that Bill C-27 not only ignores the simple solution, but is overly punitive as well. Bands that do not comply with the demands of the bill can have their funding withheld or have a funding agreement terminated by the minister. How will that improve education, housing or the infrastructure challenges that many of these communities face?

The New Democrats do not see the need to divert more money to a new level of bureaucracy to reproduce much of what has already been done in a new or novel format. We understand there can be problems associated with reporting on the website that are not apparent to anyone. As someone who represents a northern rural constituency, Internet connectivity is not always possible. In fact, it is enough of a challenge to get service to relatively accessible areas like Manitoulin Island, so we can see that website reporting could become a hurdle some bands might not easily jump over, especially those in more remote areas.

● (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: There will be five minutes of questions and comments when the debate resumes.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HELPING FAMILIES IN NEED ACT

The House resumed from November 19 consideration of the motion that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations, be read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the third reading stage of Bill C-44.

Call in the members.

● (1810)

[*English*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 496)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Welland)
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Andrews	Angus
Armstrong	Ashton
Aspin	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bateman	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benoit	Benskin
Bernier	Bevington
Bezan	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Block
Boivin	Borg
Boughen	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brison
Brosseau	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Caron	Carrie
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Chisu	Chong
Choquette	Chow
Clarke	Cleary
Clement	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Daniel	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dreeshen
Dubé	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Foote
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Gallant
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Gill	Glover
Godin	Goguen
Goodale	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Gravelle	Grewal
Groguhé	Harper
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hassainia
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	James
Jean	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kellway	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Lauzon
Laverdière	Lebel
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leef	Leitch

Government Orders

Lemieux	Leslie
Leung	Liu
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKenzie
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
Mayes	McCallum
McColeman	McGuindy
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Michaud
Miller	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholson	Norlock
Nunez-Melo	O'Connor
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	Pacetti
Papillon	Paradis
Patry	Payne
Péclet	Penashue
Perreault	Plamondon
Poilievre	Preston
Quach	Rafferty
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Ravnat
Raynault	Regan
Reid	Rempel
Rickford	Ritz
Sandhu	Saxton
Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger
Scott	Seeback
Sellah	Sgro
Shea	Shipley
Shory (sor)	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaesan
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Storseth
Strahl	Sullivan
Sweet	Thibeault
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Tremblay
Trost	Trotter
Truppe	Turmel
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Valeriotte
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to)
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer — 279	

NAYS

PAIRED

Nil

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Government Orders

(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

[Translation]

SAFE FOOD FOR CANADIANS ACT

The House resumed from November 19 consideration of the motion that Bill S-11, An Act respecting food commodities, including their inspection, their safety, their labelling and advertising, their import, export and interprovincial trade, the establishment of standards for them, the registration or licensing of persons who perform certain activities related to them, the establishment of standards governing establishments where those activities are performed and the registration of establishments where those activities are performed, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the third reading stage of Bill S-11.

The hon. Chief Government Whip is rising on a point of order.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I believe you would find agreement to apply the results from the previous vote to the current vote, with the Conservatives voting yes.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, the NDP agrees to apply the vote, and it will vote yes.

[English]

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals agree to apply the vote, including the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, the members of the Bloc support the motion.

[English]

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, Thunder Bay—Superior North will be voting yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the Green Party will be voting yes.

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 497)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Andrews
Armstrong

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Welland)
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Angus
Ashton

Aspin
Aubin
Bateman
Bellavance
Benoit
Bernier
Bezan
Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin
Boughen
Boutin-Sweet
Breitkreuz
Brosseau
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Caron
Cash
Chicoine
Chisu
Choquette
Clarke
Clement
Comartin
Cotler
Cullen
Daniel
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Del Mastro
Dewar
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dusseau
Easter
Fantino
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Fortin
Fry
Gameau
Genest
Giguère
Glover
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Grewal
Harper
Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Hyer
James
Julian
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Larose
Lauzon
Lebel
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leitch
Leslie
Liu
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
Marston
Masse
May
McCallum
McGuinity
McLeod
Menzies
Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)

Atamanenko
Ayala
Bélangier
Bennett
Benskin
Bevington
Blanchette
Block
Borg
Boulerice
Braid
Brison
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Carrie
Charlton
Chisholm
Chong
Chow
Cleary
Coderre
Côté
Crowder
Cuzner
Davidson
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dechert
Devolin
Dion
Donnelly
Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dykstra
Eyking
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Foote
Freeman
Gallant
Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Gill
Godin
Goodale
Gosal
Gravelle
Grogouh
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Hughes
Jacob
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kellway
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lapointe
Latendresse
Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leaf
Lemieux
Leung
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacAulay
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
Mayer
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis
Merrifield
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)

Moore (Fundy Royal)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholson
Norlock	Nunez-Melo
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
Pacetti	Papillon
Paradis	Patry
Payne	Péclet
Penashue	Perreault
Plamondon	Poilievre
Preston	Quach
Rafferty	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Rickford
Ritz	Sandhu
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Scott
Seebach	Sellah
Sgro	Shea
Shiple	Shory
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sullivan	Sweet
Thibeault	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Tremblay	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Turmel	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Valeriotte	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 280

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

The Speaker: It being 6:15 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1815)

[Translation]

BULLYING

The House resumed from October 15 consideration of Motion No. 385.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I explained the last time I commented on this bill, I am saddened by the extent to which people, especially young people, are affected by bullying.

Private Members' Business

For example, we all remember Marjorie Raymond, a young, 15-year-old girl from Gaspésie who committed suicide last year, after years of bullying at school. We also remember Jamie Hubley, another 15-year-old from Ottawa, who took his own life last year after being humiliated and insulted by classmates because of his homosexuality.

We all want to put an end to bullying. However, the approach by the Conservative Party and the NDP will do nothing to address the issue. Even if the challenge is enormous, we already see many potential solutions, both in the provinces and abroad, and the fact that we only put off everything until later without committing to any action could leave us without a solution to fight against this serious problem affecting our society.

[English]

The federal government has a role to play in combatting bullying, and here it should be noted that the previous Liberal government was active in this regard. When I was first elected to the House in 2002, the then Minister of Justice, Martin Cauchon, initiated an anti-bullying ad campaign and boasted that through the national crime prevention strategy, the government of the day was involved in over a hundred projects across the country designed to deal with the question of bullying.

One example was the then minister for multiculturalism, Jean Augustine, who spoke in the House of the program called reaching across differences, which provided information and training to elementary school children in British Columbia to increase their awareness of the impact of discrimination and bullying.

Here we must remember that bullying needs to be addressed from multiple angles, as a question of justice, of safety and health, of multiculturalism, of education, of the status of women and so on. One cannot adopt a myopic approach that treats the matter as solely something for the criminal law to be addressed after the fact. Prevention is the key.

Regrettably, how to prevent bullying is not an easy question. Many groups have studied the question and report back that it involves families, teachers, schools, communities and fostering a culture that goes beyond zero tolerance, to use a phrase from the Fondation Jasmin Roy, to 100% intervention. Many of the efforts in this regard involve items of provincial jurisdiction, such as education or realms the law does not touch easily, such as what our children see on television or even what they observe in their own homes.

That said, there exists a plethora of groups and initiatives in communities across the country that the government should continue to support. Moreover, Ottawa must collaborate with the provinces to ensure that each level of government is supported by the other to ensure maximum efficiency and that redundant efforts are not made. In short, we need a comprehensive and collaborative national bullying strategy. This is something on which we can all agree.

Private Members' Business

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, today, we are not debating a strategy or a bill. Instead, we are debating a motion to create a special committee that will study the issue for 12 months and then write a report.

This is the main issue: if we adopt this motion, we will study the problem for 12 months, and we will create a report that will require nothing from anyone and might not lead to any bill and any additional funding to community organizations. We will only have a nice report with black ink on white pages that the government will be able to ignore as soon as it comes off the press. How will this contribute to improving life for our young people? That's what we call putting off things.

[*English*]

While I emphasize the need for a national bullying strategy, I am concerned about a process that gives the Conservatives a blank cheque to say what they feel is appropriate and will only result in a report to be issued in a year from now, which could easily be ignored.

Moreover, the motion itself does not define the scope of bullying to be studied by the committee, such that committee meetings on this could look at union busting, political intimidation and other types of intimidation that may not involve young people at all.

As I mentioned, various governments have looked at this question previously in response to a spate of teen suicides resulting from bullying. Numerous American states have changed their laws to address the epidemic of bullying, in particular, cyberbullying.

In that regard, my colleague, the member for Vancouver Centre, proposed legislation that passed in the House at second reading to ensure that cyberbullying would be caught by Canada's Criminal Code. I look forward to Bill C-273 coming back from the justice committee and being adopted by the House.

Such concrete actions are what the House should be studying and adopting rather than engaging in the exercise of study yet again. We have plenty of examples to turn to from around the world. In the U.K., for example, the education and inspections act gives headteachers the power to regulate the conduct of pupils when they are not on school premises and are not under the lawful control or charge of a member of school staff. This can relate to any bullying incidents occurring anywhere off school premises, such as on school or public transport, outside local shops or in a town centre, for example.

The U.S. state of Maryland has one of the most aggressive anti-bullying laws in the country, with students encouraged to fill out anonymous forms when incidents occur, protections for students who blow the whistle and reports of incidents published by schools are accessible to parents so they can monitor the school climate.

Simply put, there is no shortage of ideas out there for how to combat bullying and we all agree that this is a grave problem that must be addressed urgently. In that regard, I do not fault the sponsor of this motion for wanting to help. We all want to help and do what we can. My biggest concern is that he proposes the committee trust the Conservative majority to come up with a solution.

As I noted at the outset, bullying is an epidemic in our country that all too often has tragic consequences. I applaud the parents, teachers and community groups seeking to make a stand and improve the lives of youth affected by bullying. I hope Parliament will also play its part for we must all work together to make the bullying of young people a thing of the past.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise here today to speak in support of the initiative brought forward by my NDP colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. His initiative involves developing a national bullying prevention strategy.

My colleague's motion, moved on October 15, 2012, remains current and extremely relevant, especially considering the growing number of suicides that have been linked to bullying. A very recent case comes to mind involving a teenager named Amanda Todd, from British Columbia, who was a victim of bullying. In her case and others, isolation at school can cause kids to drop out or, sadly, even worse, to commit suicide.

Considering the seriousness of the situation, we have a duty to take action, which is why it is so important, as my colleague's initiative proposes, to call on the government to examine the prevalence and impact of various kinds of bullying. A national bullying prevention strategy would also look at the best ways to go about tackling the problem. Creating a special committee is a wonderful idea for examining the problem of bullying in Canada.

In Drummondville, in my riding of Drummond, people are very active in the fight against bullying. Furthermore, we have an anti-violence committee that includes several organizations. The committee decided to create a subcommittee strictly dedicated to the fight against bullying. I have the honour of sitting on that committee and attending meetings with the goal of creating an effective bullying prevention strategy in Drummondville and the greater Drummond area.

On October 1, the anti-bullying committee, my team and myself organized an evening to fight bullying. The theme was "Bullying, let's talk about it". Over 18 committees, organizations and educators were present. I want to name them because it is really important to show the scope of the event and the importance of having people from the greater Drummond area involved in the fight against bullying, which is a very complex issue. Everyone must take action against this problem. The Rose des vents de Drummond, PANDA Mauricie/Centre du Québec, the Maison Marie Rivier, the Centre d'écoute et prévention suicide Drummond, Marie-Reine Cercle 407, the AQDR Centre-du-Québec, Commun accord, the Sûreté du Québec, Judo Drummondville, the Centre d'aide aux victimes d'actes criminels or CAVAC, the Collège Saint-Bernard, the Calacs La Passerelle, the GRIS-Mauricie/Centre-du-Québec, the Maison des jeunes de Saint-Charles and the Commission scolaire des Chênes, among others, were present.

All these people put their shoulders to the wheel to make this event a success. This allowed us to talk about bullying and to try to demystify its harmful effects. I am really proud that my community is tackling this issue.

Scientific literature shows that prevention yields better results than criminalization. It is important to realize that some of the most effective laws against bullying are provincial laws, for example in the field of education. However, the federal government must still act and show leadership on this issue. For example, cyberbullying is related to telecommunications, which is a federal jurisdiction. This national strategy to fight bullying should be developed in co-operation with the provinces, the territories, municipalities, schools, parents and young people.

The government should also follow the example of other countries that have made great strides in this regard. For example, the Finnish program KiVa is considered to be one of the world's best national programs against bullying. In Finland, the emphasis is on education. The program's objective is to influence and encourage people who witness bullying behaviour to intervene and put a stop to it. In cases of bullying, as an alternative to expelling the culprits, a dialogue takes place between the bully, his victim and other student witnesses. That is a good example of a government program in which education plays a key role in the fight against bullying.

• (1825)

Since 1994, the federal government in Sweden has been demonstrating leadership by requiring all schools to develop a plan to combat bullying. The United States government has set up a website that serves as a public information centre on bullying. In 2001, the American government also organized a conference and summit on bullying prevention. This event brought together many key stakeholders at all levels of government, experts, parents and young people.

It is important to see all the good things that are being done around the world to deal with bullying, which is a very serious problem. These things also help us to understand bullies better. Often bullies act the way they do because they are not comfortable in their own skin and they have low self-esteem. Witnesses often do not speak out against these offensive acts. Of course, there are also the victims, who are the first to suffer. This suffering does not always lead to suicide, since it is not always the most extraordinary and blatant suffering that is the most serious. Suicide is only the tip of the iceberg. The part of the iceberg hidden under the water is the true inner suffering of many people.

Over the years, the NDP has always been against bullying in all its forms. Unfortunately, history has shown us that the Conservatives do not really want to tackle the issue of bullying. Yet the provinces, community organizations and educational institutions need help. The federal government has to play a lead role in the fight against bullying. We hope that the government will show leadership and will finally work with the provinces, the territories, the educational community and even parents and youth. It is very important to involve youth in the fight against this very serious problem.

In fact, we are deliberately placing our youth in a vulnerable position. Stakeholders and experts are adamant about the need to promote education and prevention in order to combat bullying and cyberbullying. We need to address the root causes of the problem to better understand its complexity. To that end, the government must support initiatives to better train stakeholders from various communities.

Private Members' Business

However, the government must first reflect on the bullying phenomenon and attempt to fully comprehend it. For this reason, I am both proud and happy to support the motion moved by my colleague for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. We need a game plan. The government must stop wasting time and dragging its feet on this issue. Faced with the escalating number of unfortunate events triggered by bullying in this country, it is urgent that we act now.

It is for all these reasons that my colleague's proposed national bullying prevention strategy is such a wonderful initiative. It reflects the values that Canadians and the whole of the NDP caucus hold dear. I think back to the late Jack Layton, who did an outstanding job throughout his career fighting bullying and the exclusion of people because they are different. Let us try to remember that we are all different, in one way or another. We are all unique, we all have our role to play and our own identity.

It is important to make sure that everyone has the chance to express themselves and to grow. I am very glad to belong to a party that has had a leader like Mr. Layton, and now Mr. Mulcair; indeed, through his vision of a country where no one is left behind, where exclusion is unheard of, Mr. Layton has cultivated our desire to fight against bullying. That is why I am very proud to support this motion. I once again congratulate my colleague for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord on his motion.

• (1830)

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, bullying in schools has become a cause for concern to all Canadians. Many examples of violence against children have made newspaper headlines in recent years. We are experiencing a profound change in social codes associated with new technologies and modern means of communication. We can no longer put our heads in the sand and claim ignorance of these violent incidents affecting most of our communities.

We no longer live in isolation, but rather in an open world receptive to ideas, fashions and trends from around the world. This globalization of our relationships has sometimes happy, sometimes disastrous consequences for citizens, particularly children. We offer our children a world full of promise, but we have so little control over the flow of information conveyed through all the social media that have now become our standard means of expression.

Having been a teacher for three decades, I can attest to the tremendous transformation that has occurred in social relations among students at educational institutions since the early 1960s. Our world has changed at a dizzying pace, and we have not had time to reflect on the kinds of relations we maintain among ourselves. Young people are often placed in unavoidable situations at school since school is a fertile ground for experimentation of all kinds.

Private Members' Business

In recent years, we have made room for all these social communication networks, which have gradually broken down social structures and forms of communication, even at our educational institutions. Our duty today is to consider the various forms that bullying can take and the dangers stalking youth who are in constant contact with new information technologies. Even as adults we are not immune to abuse. One need only read the social media every day to agree that defamation, verbal abuse and insults abound in these 21st century forums.

I was particularly shocked to see that violence against young girls, in the form of bullying, is on the rise and that its consequences are disastrous to say the least. Verbal abuse, physical abuse, threats, extortion, defamatory remarks and racial and sexual insults are part of the everyday lives of thousands of young Canadians. How can we stem the flow of these reprehensible acts in educational institutions without creating repressive, sectarian "reform" schools?

This debate has reached all levels of society and has left no one indifferent. Children have too often been forgotten in our society, and since we must look for solutions to address this insidious violence spreading through our schools, we must have the courage to consider the sources of that violence.

I am one of those people who believes in education, having worked in that field for decades. When I taught, I always tried to put my students above all other concerns so they could be the centre of my educational activity. They were my purpose. In facing the threat that bullying represents, we must join forces and set our political stripes aside. We must raise the debate above our usual partisan politics so that we can understand the sources and causes of all this violence. We must make children the Canadian government's priority. Together we must look for solutions to the violence undermining our societies.

• (1835)

Violence is committed against children on aboriginal reserves, in French-Canadian villages, in Ontario, in British Columbia and across Canada.

Bullying is one form of violence against children, but make no mistake: violence has a thousand other faces and expressions.

The fact that we lack the courage to help children who suffer from hunger or a lack of education or who do not have access to decent housing is reflected, among other things, in this deterioration in relations among young people.

Our actions will be an utter waste of time if we are incapable of examining the origin of all this violence. We have abandoned our children. We had a world full of promise. We rethought our education system. We rebuilt our infrastructure. We redesigned Canada but forgot the most disadvantaged among us, those who have no voice.

Our duty is to address the issue of bullying so that today's children can know a world where there is no violence in their schoolyard, their classroom or their now-global village.

In this deterioration in relations among young people, I beg my colleagues to see the truth about the place we give the children of our country. We have ratified the International Convention on the Rights

of the Child, believing in humanist principles that abhor violence and asserting fundamental rights such as the right to education and to protection.

We have belonged to all the forums that have asserted children's right to dignity and respect. We have been at the forefront in standing up for the rights of the most disadvantaged around the world, but have we failed in that task in our own communities?

Development inevitably depends on respect for fundamental rights. These principles, which are entrenched in Canada's charter, must guide us in developing policies on children's rights.

We have unfortunately gone back to square one for thousands of children in Canada who experience violence every day in the form of bullying, but also in the form of hunger and too often in a lack of decent housing or educational resources. The right to life, health and education can only be expressed through our common will to include our children in our social and economic development actions.

We are at the dawn of other major social changes, and Canada must remain an example of respect for human rights. Every form of violence finds its source in imbalance, whatever it may be. Our desire to succeed must not make us forget our primary responsibility toward our children.

While violence today is made manifest through modern technology, it still finds its source in the individual injuries of these children who are forgotten, mistreated, dispossessed and destitute. It is up to us to make room for children.

Today my colleague is moving a motion to strike a special House committee responsible for developing a national bullying prevention strategy.

The Liberal Party supports that motion.

• (1840)

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Motion No. 385 moved by my colleague against bullying certainly strikes a nerve. I used to be a high school teacher and I am a mother whose children attend school. Therefore, I am a first-hand witness of acts of bullying and their consequences on our youth and our society at large.

On January 18, 2011, the Public Health Agency of Canada published the following on its website:

The thought of our own child being bullied at school, on the playground or in cyberspace is a huge concern to parents everywhere.

It would be important to define bullying. For that, I will use my document on the bullying prevention strategies used in Alberta.

Bullying is defined as a conscious, wilful, deliberate and repeated hostile activity marked by an imbalance of power, intent to harm or a threat of aggression. Severe bullying can lead to a feeling of terror on the part of the person being bullied.

Bullying affects everyone, even the bullies. From their own actions and the lack of action by their peers, they learn that antisocial behaviours and exerting control over others (verbally, physically, socially or by e-mail) are acceptable and effective.

Private Members' Business

In fact, at one point or another in our lives, we have all been a victim or a perpetrator of acts of bullying or we have witnessed acts of bullying. Bullying is harmful and is not a normal part of growing up.

Bullying can take various forms such as:

Verbal bullying: name calling, insults and criticism, threats and intimidation.

Social bullying: excluding others from a group, intimidation and teasing by a group.

The bully will say it is just a joke, but the joke cuts like a knife through the other person's heart.

Physical bullying: to hit or injure someone.

Cyberbullying: to use a computer or other technology to harass or threaten someone.

[According to the experts] bullying is the assertion of power through aggression. Its forms change with age...

Bullying starts at elementary school. It is not only a problem among teenagers. It may also occur among the elderly.

Homophobic language is often the most common verbal form of bullying, yet it is the least responded to by students and trusted adults.

In other words, many people stand idly by when others are bullied on the basis of sexual orientation. I would also like to turn my attention to cyberbullying, including being threatened, harassed or humiliated over the Internet. This phenomenon has become a scourge.

Bullying has consequences. Studies show that bullies and their victims are at greater risk of developing emotional problems later in life. When a child in your family has been bullied, you often realize from his behaviour that something is wrong: he does not want to go to school, he is often sad or even aggressive at home. You may wonder what is going on.

When you ask the teacher what is going on in the classroom, she may say that it is nothing serious and that all it amounts to is the games children play. Then, one or two months later, you realize that your child has been excluded or mistreated by his classmates, for months and perhaps for years. Soon, the child is no longer interested in having friends and becomes a loner, because he feels that the other children are mean. And that is that.

Bullying may result in poor self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence. It may have a negative effect on a child's social skills and on his happiness, even as an adult. There is also the matter of guilt. I know of a bully who, as an adult, still remembered how much he hurt a little girl by stealing her candy on Halloween.

Moreover, the bully also has to come to terms with his inability to solve his own problems. He uses aggression as a crutch to solve problems of a different nature.

●(1845)

By tolerating bullying, we are not teaching children to solve their own problems or to behave in an acceptable manner with others.

Other consequences of bullying include depression and missing out on opportunities to grow up. Childhood is a time to learn, to grow and to discover activities that will be useful in adulthood. Bullying can, to a large extent, adversely affect a child's ability to participate in activities, to learn and to have fun both in school and in society in general.

Finally, the most dramatic consequence is suicide. In extreme cases, a child may decide that death is preferable to interminable bullying.

On the subject of bullying, I would like to speak about three groups. Youth are often the focus, but today I would like to talk about immigrants, children and seniors. Often, immigrants are threatened with deportation by their sponsors. I know of a woman who was sponsored by her husband and had a child by him. The man threw her down a staircase and told her that if she reported him he would send her home and keep the child. That is an example of bullying. The woman was afraid.

Let us also consider the case of a Portuguese permanent resident of Canada who was bullied recently. He was threatened with expulsion from the country although he had been living here a long time. Bullying can also be institutional. Think of the temporary immigrant workers with an individual employer, who live in isolated situations and often do not speak either English or French. If they complain about anything at all regarding their working conditions, they will be sent back. What do they do? They keep quiet; they do not even dare to complain.

Some young immigrants to Canada say that they face racism and xenophobia, but admire the freedom of Canada's youth culture. Because they are subject to discrimination at school, they form groups—that may be called gangs—to find the strength they do not have alone. Sometimes this leads to bad behaviour.

A report on immigrants indicated that in 1999-2000, the latest year for which statistics are available, the vast majority of immigrants in the groups being studied thought it was difficult to feel accepted as Canadians, and most faced ostracism and bullying at school. Many of them indicated that not only the other students but also the teachers and school staff were part of the problem. The report also examined the community support available to immigrants.

Last week I attended a party in my riding with a number of young teens who had just come from Haiti with their families, who were sponsored. They hardly spoke any French and their parents spoke even less. The organizations that welcome these people and give them hope have had to reduce their staff, for lack of funding.

I will go back to the report, which says:

While immigrant youth generally adapt well to Canadian life, problems remain, and many community service providers do not have adequate resources to help young people address these problems.

Private Members' Business

I now want to talk about older persons, our grandparents and parents. They also are subject to all kinds of violence and bullying. Mistreatment may happen to old people who live at home or in a care facility. It may take various forms: physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial exploitation or neglect. Physical and psychological abuse are forms of bullying. What often happens is that old people are told that if they do not give what is being asked for, no one will visit them and they will not see their grandchildren.

Lastly, I am very concerned about violence and abuse toward children. It has been talked about a great deal. The communication media can play an active role. If there could be television programs where children learn to speak up against bullying and are invited to talk about it, we would all win. To that end, an infrastructure is needed. For that, my colleague's bill is truly necessary.

● (1850)

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to debate an extremely important issue that concerns all Canadian youth: the scourge of bullying.

Bullying has serious consequences for our youth. That is why I am rising today to emphasize to my colleagues opposite that it is important to take action to address this serious problem affecting our communities.

I believe the members here present are aware of the impact this scourge has on our youth. We need only think of all the cases that have made the news in recent months. Young victims of bullying have committed the tragic act of taking their own lives.

In response to this problem, more and more Canadians are calling on the government to take action to combat bullying properly. Current efforts are inadequate, and the governing party has unfortunately come up with no solution to the problem.

The leadership of the Conservative Party refuses to adopt a tough approach to bullying and prefers to leave that task to the provinces.

We hope the federal government will show some leadership and work with the provinces and groups that combat bullying, as well as all other stakeholders, to solve this problem once and for all, instead of simply washing its hands of the matter and handing it over to the provinces and schools concerned by the problem.

As proof of the Conservatives' inaction, when my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, whom I congratulate for this important motion, asked a question about the suicide of Marjorie Raymond, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety suggested that bullying was the responsibility of everyone except the federal government. This lack of leadership on the government's part is utterly unacceptable.

That is why my colleague introduced this important motion because, unlike the Conservative Party, we want to take action to ensure that our children and teenagers are no longer victims of bullying.

This motion urges the government to study the prevalence and impact of various types of bullying and to evaluate the best ways to combat the problem by establishing a special committee to study bullying in Canada. It asks the government to study, by means of a special committee, the four types of bullying, which are physical

bullying, verbal attacks, indirect attacks such as the spreading of rumours, and , and to determine their effects on our communities. It also asks the government to do a more effective job of disseminating best practices for combatting all forms of bullying and to support organizations that have the necessary expertise to combat the problem effectively.

There are a number of approaches to combatting the problem. Some have proven successful and others have failed. It is therefore important that all stakeholders from the various communities have access to this information and know the best approaches so that they are able to adopt the approach that can produce the best results depending on the situation.

I would therefore like to emphasize that anti-bullying strategies that focus on prevention rather than criminalization will indeed have a better chance of succeeding. That is why this motion emphasizes prevention programs instead of proposing a bill to amend the Criminal Code.

Studies in psychology define bullying as acts, repeated over time, that intentionally cause harm to others where there is a power imbalance. Bullying includes physical behaviour, such as punching, kicking and biting, and verbal behaviour, such as threatening, name-calling, insulting, denigrating or making racist or sexist remarks. Bullying can also include social exclusion, such as spreading rumours or gossip, or ignoring, rejecting or socially isolating a person.

● (1855)

Studies also show that boys are more likely to engage in bullying and to be bullied than girls. With boys, bullying takes many forms, especially physical aggression and the use of force, whereas girls seem to prefer indirect forms of bullying, including social isolation, spreading rumours and maligning others.

There is a whole range of signs indicating that a child is being bullied: sometimes children may invent illnesses so that they do not have to attend school; their money or belongings may be missing; they may have trouble sleeping; they may be irritable; they may have trouble concentrating; they may change their routine unexpectedly; or they may have problems from an academic standpoint. It is important for schools and parents to be aware of the symptoms of bullying so that they can identify them.

According to a study done in Toronto, teachers are aware of approximately 4% of all cases of bullying. However, 70% of teachers believe that they are aware of most cases of bullying and that they intervene in most incidents, whereas students estimate that teachers intervene in only 25% of cases. Only 60% of victims tell their parents when they are bullied.

Private Members' Business

As I mentioned, bullying has extremely serious consequences for victims. For example, boys who are bullied are five times more likely, and girls three times more likely, to experience depression than their classmates. Victims of bullying are more likely than their classmates to have suicidal tendencies, as is evident in several cases reported by the media.

Moreover, studies show that the consequences of bullying do not diminish over time. Bullying has long-term consequences. According to *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 23-year-olds who were bullied during their childhood have high levels of depression and lack self-esteem, even though they were neither harassed nor socially excluded in adulthood.

Moreover, there is a very close correlation between bullying others during childhood and anti-social behaviour during adolescence and adulthood. Children who were bullies may become teenagers who sexually harass others, engage in criminal behaviour, get involved in gangs, and are violent toward their life partner. In adulthood, they harass their work colleagues or abuse their spouse, their children and sometimes even seniors. Preventing bullying, therefore, helps to reduce the likelihood of criminal behaviour later in life. It is a matter of public safety in both the short and the medium term.

Many countries have developed anti-bullying programs. Every country has a different approach, but they have all decided to take an active role in combatting this problem. For example, a program in Colorado tries to identify and change factors in the school environment that contribute to bullying, since to be effective, we must be able to target all of the risk factors. This program encourages elementary school children and high school students to take responsibility for safety at their school and to participate in developing and maintaining a school environment where everyone is safe. The program is more likely to be effective when children are more directly involved in all steps of the preventative approach.

Another program in Colorado managed to reduce the number of bullying and victimization incidents by 50% and considerably decrease incidents of anti-social behaviour, such as vandalism, fights, theft or students skipping school. They also noted a significant improvement in the social climate, order and discipline in class, and in social relations, as well as a much more positive attitude towards school and school work.

That was a brief overview of the situation. I think it is time to take action. We cannot stand by while our children are being bullied at school. The time for making speeches is over. We can no longer settle for talking about compassion. We must take concrete action to combat bullying and support this important motion. I think it is an excellent measure to adopt.

I urge all of my colleagues to do so.

• (1900)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I give the floor to the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, I will tell her that she has six or seven minutes left for her speech, because we must leave time for a response.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to the motion against bullying, made by my hon. colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

We must fight bullying wherever it exists because we know it is a serious problem.

The federal government must take steps to greatly reduce this serious problem, which is growing among Canada's youth. It is now found in elementary schools, as I have seen in my own riding.

In an elementary school in Rouyn-Noranda, last February, worried parents had had enough: some 15 of the 50 children in the school did not go to school for several days as a protest by their parents, who were worried about the violence and bullying and fed up with broken promises. Fifteen children out of 50 is nearly one-third of the school's population.

The provinces, including Quebec and Ontario, and some schools and school boards are already taking steps, but more effort is needed. It is a national epidemic. As we have seen, with great regret, the consequences can be extremely serious. I am thinking about the young people of 11, 15 or 17 who committed suicide because they believed their torture would never end.

Bullying has also changed. It no longer is confined to schools. Now there is cyberbullying through social networks. Young people can be continuously exposed to bullying 24 hours a day. Moreover, it is even easier to do such things when hiding behind a computer. Thus, it is even more important for the government to act. Cyberbullying is a problem that lies within federal jurisdiction. In other fields, it is a provincial matter, and that is why the federal and provincial governments must co-operate to reach a solution.

We need an action plan based on studies and facts, with input from families, stakeholders and victims from across the country, in order to eliminate this problem in the long term. In addition, studying this problem in a committee, as my colleague has proposed in his motion, could help us find long-term solutions.

Parents and grandparents are worried that their children are being bullied. Parents, too, often feel powerless in this situation, and powerless to help their young people overcome their problems.

I would like to talk about André Lavigne, a resident of Rouyn-Noranda and a Second World War veteran. He is very much involved in finding practical solutions to the problem of bullying in Abitibi-Témiscamingue. One of his granddaughters was a victim of bullying. He told me how important it is to create real solutions and to get the entire community involved. According to him, the current approach is like putting buckets under a leaky roof.

That is exactly what this motion is intended to do: act quickly, but find a real solution.

He understands that a concerted effort by all stakeholders is necessary, that the problem must be taken seriously and all resources committed to permanent change in situations where youth across the nation are subject to bullying and violence.

Private Members' Business

When young victims take their own lives, it causes a lot of talk, and the political classes agree that it is not acceptable. But that is only the tip of the iceberg. Most people who are bullied are not being talked about and not doing media interviews, but they are suffering serious problems like depression, anxiety and sleep loss. Without help, some of these child victims will suffer the consequences the rest of their lives.

Bullying can affect everyone. Tommy Thibodeau, from La Sarre, was bullied as a young boy. Today, as the author of *Entre l'ombre et la lumière*, he gives talks at institutions in the region on how to deal with bullying. He has dared to speak out. When he gives talks, many people identify with what he says. He survived, but others may not have that chance. His experience could help other youth and institutions take effective measures against bullying, and that is what this motion proposes to do.

We also have to think, from a social and medical point of view, about taking care of those who are bullied and the people who bully them.

● (1905)

The federal government also has a role to play in this area and can lend impetus at the national level.

As I said, people who have been bullied may suffer from mental health problems, such as chronic depression, even into adult life years later. Bullies are often young people with other problems, such as family problems, for example.

To combat bullying, we must not only put tools in place to help people who are bullied; we must also consider the bullies. In some cases, bullies are former bullying victims for whom bullying was the only way out.

We need a national anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying strategy. We must bring stakeholders together and discuss best practices across Canada to provide specific, effective tools for organizations, parents and institutions. Lastly, we must provide support for stakeholders in the field.

For all these reasons, I will tirelessly support the motion of my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord because I believe it is high time we found a long-term solution and took the trouble to think about this issue and help our children build their future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord has a five minute right of reply.

● (1910)

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the debate that we have had in the House. I would first like to thank all the members who spoke during the two hours of debate, whether they were New Democrats, Liberals or Conservatives.

Before I continue my speech, I would like to say that I am proud that the Kid's Help Phone called me today to formally offer me its support. I would also like to thank this organization for supporting this motion, which is very dear to my heart and to the hearts of so many people here. Regardless of the role we want to play to combat bullying, I think that everyone's heart is in the right place.

I would also like to thank those who did not have the opportunity to speak during the two hours of debate because I know that these people, these adults, have been leaders over the past few years and that they have told young people and Canadian society that we must combat bullying, whether it was in the course of their duties in the House of Commons or elsewhere in the media.

I am going to take the four minutes that I have left to quickly thank them. There are so many that I cannot thank everyone, and I apologize for that.

First, I would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice who said the following on April 24:

[English]

She was referring to the cyberbullying bill introduced by the member for Vancouver Centre and stated:

I would just like to raise for our consideration a few points regarding the approach this bill is proposing. I would ask members to think about the scope of the bill and the fact that it only addresses the issue of cyberbullying and not the broader issue of bullying. In my opinion, these two types of bullying are so closely intertwined that it may well make more sense to deal with both together.

[Translation]

I totally agree with her. In fact, I believe we must take a comprehensive view of the issue. That is why my proposed national bullying prevention strategy takes aim at bullying as well as cyberbullying.

I would very much like to thank the member for Vegreville—Wainwright who, in the fall of 2010, stood in the House to present three distinct petitions on behalf of Canadians. These petitions asked the Government of Canada to introduce a bill to address the issue of bullying. He even added his own thoughts, and for that I am very appreciative.

On November 4, 2010, he said:

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents, mostly from Edgerton and Chauvin in my constituency, who note that bullying is becoming a very significant problem in Canada. Particularly with the new communication methods, including the Internet, email, cell phones, et cetera, bullying is becoming easier for people to carry out.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to consider introducing legislation that would target putting an end to bullying.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

I would also like to thank the member for Tobique—Mactaquac who said, on January 27, 2009:

[English]

Mr. Speaker, bullying is a problem that Canadians have faced for generations. Today one in four kids is bullied, one in five is a bully and 282,000 high school kids are attacked each month nationally.

Bullying has changed over the years. While there are still bullies in the schoolyards, advances such as the Internet and text messaging allow bullying to happen anytime, anywhere, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Sadly, once there is a habit of childhood bullying, this behaviour can continue into the workplace.

*Adjournment Proceedings***ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

[Translation]

My sincere thanks go out to him as well. I would also like to thank the deputy government whip and member for Kitchener—Conestoga, who said the following in response to Jer's Vision:

[English]

Bullying in any form and for whatever reason must never be condoned. It is a serious social issue that will require all of us – families, parents, students, educators and government to each do our part to stop it.

As well, when speaking in the House about the suicide prevention strategy, he said:

There is already lots of good work being done in suicide prevention across the country, but with some federal coordination and federal leadership, we can do better for vulnerable Canadians.

[Translation]

I would like the hon. member to know that I totally agree with him and believe the government has a role to play in terms of coordination. I do not believe the government has a miracle solution, nor do I believe my proposed strategy to be a miracle solution. We must all work together.

●(1915)

There are so many members I would like to thank, including the members for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, Portage—Lisgar and Ajax—Pickering. I am short on time, but I would also like to thank everyone who stood in this place in the last few years to address the bullying issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 7:16 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 21, 2012, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

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

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to follow up on the government's decision to close the Experimental Lakes Area. The government has now thrown up a wall of secrecy around the ELA extending beyond just muzzling scientists. Now visitors are increasingly denied access to the ELA facilities themselves.

One example is that last month the Department of Fisheries and Oceans blocked the Council of Canadians from visiting the ELA. The council noted subsequently that:

All media requests with scientists have been denied by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Requests from Members of Parliament have been denied multiple times. Requests from citizens for ELA scientists to speak about their work have also been rejected.

I am one of those members of Parliament who was denied access to visit that government facility, when in previous years MPs would have no problem paying a visit. How are we elected members supposed to do our job if the government is now denying us access to the very facilities and program personnel we are supposed to make decisions on?

The wall of secrecy does not end there.

I would like to quote from a letter sent to *The Hill Times* by Peter Kirby of Kenora, Ontario. Mr. Kirby notes the lack of transparency and the lack of attention by key Conservatives to constituents on the ELA. He asks:

Why does the [Member of Parliament for Kenora] refuse to debate the closure? He declined to appear on a television program or attend a public forum in Kenora.

[The member] advertises himself as a "strong voice". [But]...what good is a strong voice, if it does not listen to the people it should be speaking for?

The [Member for Kenora], the [Minister of the Environment], the [Minister of Fisheries and Oceans] are determined not to debate or discuss the ELA or give the public information.

The [Member for Kenora] says that a "deal" is being worked out to "transfer" the ELA, but gives us no details.

Mr. Kirby continued by asking what organization would take over the project. What would its capacity, technically and financially, be now and into the future to handle ELA research? Would the ELA scientists be transferred? Who would determine what research got done? Would the research be of the same world-class quality? He concluded that it was time to break the silence and end the secrecy surrounding the deal.

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Mr. Kirby is not alone among residents of Kenora and across Canada in raising these important questions. I would like the member opposite to explain how Conservative Party insiders in Manitoba are pushing for oil companies to take over the Experimental Lakes Area. Are we going to see the Imperial Oil Experimental Lakes Area? Handing the ELA to big oil interests will end up tainting the very science that makes the ELA so valuable. Independent and impartial scientists will be independent and impartial no longer.

Taxpayers have invested millions in the ELA and now the government will hand it over to private interests for a song and a prayer. Taxpayers have spent \$5 million upgrading the facilities over the last few years, including a new fisheries laboratory and two new residences. The member for Kenora once crowed about an \$800,000 investment in the ELA, though I notice that this press release has now been removed from his website.

This would not just be a sell-off but a bald-faced assault on public science. It would amount to Canadians losing a unique and vital research platform that is crucial to the government fulfilling its obligation to protect Canada's lakes and fisheries.

Are the Conservatives looking into handing over the facility to oil sector interests? If not oil interests, just whom are they negotiating with to take over this facility?

• (1920)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for raising this issue again and for providing me the opportunity to speak to the Experimental Lakes Area and the commitment of Fisheries and Oceans Canada to freshwater science.

As I have said before, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has conducted a review of all of its activities to reduce the cost of operations and program delivery. As a result, the department will increasingly direct its valuable resources to areas that support conservation and fisheries management priorities. As a consequence, the department will cease its operations of the Experimental Lakes Area.

The department believes that universities and other non-government research facilities are better suited to conduct experimental research that requires whole lake or whole ecosystem manipulation. Indeed, many other organizations are keenly interested in the type of research that has been done at the Experimental Lakes Area. This is why departmental officials are working to transfer the facility to another operator. We look forward to transferring it so that the work can continue by another party better suited to this type of research.

While Fisheries and Oceans Canada is phasing out its program at the Experimental Lakes Area, the department continues to maintain an active freshwater science program in support of its conservation and fisheries management priorities. The department will continue to conduct freshwater research at other locations across the country.

At the department's Freshwater Institute in Winnipeg, science staff conduct research on freshwater fisheries and habitat science. Scientists are also undertaking aquaculture research in Lake Diefenbaker, Saskatchewan, under the program for aquaculture regulatory research.

In Burlington, Ontario, Fisheries and Oceans Canada also operates the Great Lakes Laboratory for Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences. Staff at that laboratory conduct freshwater research related to fish habitat and Asian carp and provide scientific advice to support the department's mandate.

In Sault Ste. Marie, scientists conduct work in support of sea lamprey control. As members know, invasive species, such as the sea lamprey, are one of the leading threats to aquatic biodiversity and ecosystem health.

This past summer, departmental scientists and biologists at these science institutes, as well as other institutes across Canada, were out in the field and in laboratories undertaking science research and generating valuable scientific knowledge. This knowledge will help guide regulatory decision-making and various policies.

The department will continue to invest in priority freshwater research. For example, the department is investing in research on the risks of aquatic invasive species, assessments of freshwater species at risk and the impacts of human activities on freshwater fish habitat.

The department has created the strategic program for ecosystem-based research and advice. This research fund began funding research projects across the country this past summer, including priority freshwater research.

In addition, the department has developed the aquatic climate change adaptation services program. This research program supports departmental science that examines the impacts of climate change on Canada's oceans and inland waters.

Departmental scientists will also continue to collaborate with universities, other government departments, industry partners and other science organizations to complement the department's science program. Results from these activities become part of the scientific information that supports departmental decision-making.

As members can see, the department remains a science-based department and is absolutely committed to freshwater science in support of its mandate.

The department will continue to engage in research activities that support long-term sustainability. We will continue to dedicate resources to priority science areas that directly support conservation and fisheries management.

• (1925)

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his response but the government is being anything but transparent here. This, as we all know, is not about saving money.

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The majority of Canadians know that the best option is, of course, to keep the ELA in government hands doing the work it does best by real scientists. There is no reason that Environment Canada could not run the facility, for example, because the work that the ELA does is central to the Environment Canada mandate. The second best option would be for a consortium of universities to take over.

Regardless, any transfer will take time. The March 31 closure is coming up fast and we need some certainty. Will the government at least commit to bridge financing to keep the ELA open for three to five years until a good partner can take over?

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, we do acknowledge the unique opportunity that the Experimental Lakes facility presented for researchers and the quality of research that can be undertaken there. That is why we look forward to transferring it to another operator who can continue to conduct ecosystem experiments.

While our science priorities may evolve, Fisheries and Oceans Canada remains a science based department and the Government of Canada will continue to invest in science where it counts most to

achieve the best results for Canadians, according to the department's mandate.

Scientists and biologists at Fisheries and Oceans Canada continue to undertake science activities in lakes and rivers across the country in support of the department's mandate. The department will use this scientific knowledge to inform decisions and policies that will meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Since the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice had been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:29 p.m.)

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