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Monday, October 21, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 21, 2013

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[English]

ELECTION OF COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC) moved:

That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to: (a) consider the election of committee chairs by means of a preferential ballot system by all the Members of the House of Commons, at the beginning of each session and prior to the establishment of the membership of the standing committees; (b) study the practices of other Westminster-style Parliaments in relation to the election of Committee Chairs; (c) propose any necessary modifications to the Standing Orders and practices of the House; and (d) report its findings to the House no later than six months following the adoption of this order.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to this motion today. Before I start I should thank the interpreters. I am probably one of the worst MPs when it comes to handing in my speeches ahead of time for their interpretation. They are going to have to work from my notes and show their rather extraordinary talents of translation today. My apologies.

The history and the background of this motion come from two basic sources. The first, and probably the most relevant to this place, is the debate that was held in 2002 on an opposition supply day. It was a very interesting day. Even though there was a majority Liberal government, the motion actually passed.

There were members of the Liberal government in caucus, and the Canadian Alliance, the Progressive Conservatives and the NDP, who worked together to get a motion through. The motion at that time was about the election of committee chairs directly by their committees. It was a fascinating day. It was interesting to read some of the motions and debates of that era, and to follow some of the remarks.

I used this quote the first time I spoke to this issue. It was from the former member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough and former minister of defence, who is now Minister of Justice. He said:

An independently elected chair...would demystify and give greater credibility to the process. What we are talking about is not the election of opposition members to fill those important positions of chair, but government members.

Again, and I used this quote the last time I spoke on this matter, the former NDP member for Palliser, Mr. Dick Proctor, said:

Frankly we make it far too easy for the media to cover politics in a very partisan fashion. There is a high angle shot which highlights, maybe even exaggerates, the neutral zone between the government side and the opposition side.

That was the general tone of the debate that day. These were members getting together and talking about ways to enhance the credibility of committee chairmanships, their powers and election. The many members who were not here prior to 2002 may not understand that the appointment of committee chairs was done purely through the Prime Minister's Office.

The second inspiration for this motion is what is known as the Wright report, a report by the British House of Commons. Several years ago, Great Britain was going through a bit of a crisis of democracy; that's one of those terms that political scientists use from time to time.

Great Britain had had some substantive issues with expense accounts. I know members are thinking about things that have been in the news here. However, it was much more widespread and encompassed members of all parties. More importantly, the members of the House of Commons were very deeply involved.

Great Britain began to look at a considerable number of reforms to make its House of Commons work. One of them, among other things, was to look at the election of committee chairs. In the last year it has looked at and revised the changes that were implemented by the Wright report, and by and large it has come to a very positive conclusion. It seems to be working, and it seems to be very substantive.

I will read a quote from the U.K. House of Commons political and constitutional reform committee from July 18, 2013.

The Wright Committee recommended a number of changes to the way the membership of select committees was decided, including most notably "an initial system of election by the whole House of Chairs of departmental and similarly select committees..."

That was the recommendation. Following up, it concluded that was one of the best recommendations that was made. There were several different positive results from this change. Some of those are the reasons I am proposing this change to the House of Commons.

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●(1110)

The first reason, and the British found this to be the case in its experience, is the perception of independence. We are in a unique business in politics. Reality is not always reality in politics; perception is reality. That may seem strange, but I am getting some smiles from members in the House who understand what I am saying. What we do substantively does not often have the greatest impact, but what we are seen to do has an even greater impact. If we take steps to democratize and bring forward more independence, and more perception of independence, we enhance the reality of democracy.

That is not to imply any sort of criticism to current chairs. By and large, in my nine-plus years in the House of Commons I have dealt with excellent committee chairs. However sometimes in various situations, where they act based on their best judgment and in their own independent way, they are not always seen to have that. That is one of the reasons that this is an important and useful reform. It enhances the credibility of their position, the independence and understanding that they are acting—as they do, by and large—based on their own good judgment and not under anyone else's influence.

The second reason I am making this proposal is that members are more likely to be engaged. One of the areas where we do get engaged as members of Parliament, in a very deep and substantive way, is at our committees. We often do not have the time to become an expert on all aspects of debate here in the House. There are some members who are very widely read and who can cover a multitude of policy areas with extreme fluency. Unfortunately, that is not the reality for most of us, so we tend to engage and specialize in areas where we either have expertise or where we are appointed to committees. As members take responsibility at committees, through election, engagement and increasing independence, members will be more engaged and able to act.

The other thing I would like to point out is impartiality. In my experience, the committee chairs have been impartial, and vice-chairs as well. However, again, the perception is important, and it also helps with the reality. If my party were in opposition and I voted for someone for committee chair from whatever party in government, I have some stake in that. I have some responsibility in getting that person to that position. I am less likely to make the charge of partiality when I have had some responsibility for putting that person in the office. I think it would bring together a more collaborative and positive result.

In the first hour of debate on this motion, there were some questions put to me, and I have had questions when I have interacted with members throughout this process. I am going to deal with a few of them directly, to help members understand what we are talking about.

First of all, the motion would not change who would be eligible to run for the chair of a committee. In a situation with a minority Parliament, opposition members would not choose from their ranks to fill the committee chairs that are normally filled by the government. We have some committees that are chaired by opposition members, and government members would not be able to take over positions, such as public accounts, and a few other

committee chairs. The eligibility for who would be able to stand for these positions would be same.

The second question I have had is why did I not put forward the same motion for vice-chairs, particularly first vice-chairs, as frequently second vice-chairs are from a party which has a very small representation. On principle that would be a very good step, to treat the first vice-chairs in the same way that we do the chairs of committees. However, I understand there are a couple of things. First of all, as one complicates a motion, the odds of its being successfully accepted go down. Second, I do not want to send the message that I, as a government member, from whose party most chairs are currently chosen, want to be seen as imposing something on the opposition.

●(1115)

I would suggest that opposition members who tend to agree with that on principle advocate and speak to their respective critics and members on the committee that will be handling this to include that concept, because it is consistent. However, I for one do not want to be seen to be imposing, as a Conservative, on opposition prerogatives.

Having said that, I should note this change is unlikely to affect this Parliament and would happen in the next Parliament. Therefore, members who are thinking about how it would affect their particular individual situation should maybe think of the broader principles involved because many of us may not be in the next Parliament. Frankly, what we are interested in most of all in this place is not what is best for me but what is best for this place and what is best for this country.

Then there is a fairly direct question. How would this change function?

In my motion, I have left the ultimate decision to the committee. It would have to come back through another motion for this to be implemented. However, this is the way that, in a general sense, the British Parliament has found and the way that I would envision it, on a very cursory preliminary glance. Again I would be open to the members of the committee to make suggestions.

I would envision after the election of a speaker we would go on in a way that most of us are very familiar with due to party nominations; that is, a large preferential ballot. If there is more than one candidate who has put his or her name forward to stand, we would very simply number off: one, two, three, four. Now, we could have one ballot with all the committees listed, which is, perhaps, unwieldy, or we could have a separate ballot. We would have our 20 ballot boxes, members would vote and then the various clerks of the House of Commons would tally the results and post them the next day. It is very simple to do, not very difficult and very easy to implement. Again, that is not a decision I am trying to make or impose. It is just something that I am suggesting and that is for the committee to decide.

Here is another very good question that was put to me. How would we actually ensure diversity among the people who are committee chairs?

One of the first things I would say is that this is a very political process. Everything we do here is political. I would think all members of the House would have some interest in seeing a diverse range of people taking the chairmanships of the committees. Therefore, there would be a pressure to vote for a variety of candidates to encourage people who we know may not fit the traditional image of a committee chair to step forward.

By and large, the way caucuses work, with the way representation is, I think if there was an election where committee chairs all came from one very narrow demographic, purely from one province, for example, very quickly in the next election that situation would be solved. Because as we all know, we very are much influenced and open to political pressures both in our caucus and in dealing with the general public.

It would probably be more difficult for rookies to get appointed or elected as committee chairs than it would be for veterans. That is normative now, as we see most committee chairs are people with experience. It does help to have some idea how this place runs before we get involved in a leadership post. Having said that, if someone is an energetic brand new member with a talent and an ability to communicate, they will be known by members in their caucus and the members of their caucus will vouch for that and will help them to get their candidacy put forward.

What I am asking from other members of the House? What am I looking for?

I am looking, in the committee and from other members, for concrete ideas as to how we can take this and make this very modest reform. The mechanics should be simple. However, they need to be thought out. They need to be looked into. Problems need to be delved into to see what can be done to improve this, to make this work.

The second thing I am looking for from members is to use this as a springboard to start to think about other ways and other places we need to have reforms done, both in committee and in caucus. This would be an opportunity for members to come together, to be collaborative, to be productive. I suggest this as a very modest, positive step to help make this place a more functioning, better democracy.

• (1120)

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from across the aisle for again delivering an engaging speech. As a member of the procedure and House affairs committee, I do hope that the motion passes and that we will have a chance to study it.

My question is simple. Can the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt let us know whether he has drawn any particular lessons of his own from how a system such as he is proposing may have operated in any other Westminster system to this point? That is one of the points we would look at in the procedure and House affairs committee, but are signs good that this kind of system can work?

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, as I noted in my speech, the British parliament has done a review of the reforms in the original Wright report. There were a couple of things that the report said, particularly

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with committees and the election of committee chairmanship, that the U.K. members thought had an interesting impact.

Number one, in their opinion, the committees actually, by and large, became more active and more engaged. That is a good thing. There was more of a sense of ownership and committees were more vocal. One of the ways, which no one anticipated originally, was that four particular committees became more engaged with the public and much more media active.

As we now know, unless there is some major disruption in our committees, our committees tend to be very quiet and off the radar. Perhaps there is a very exciting witness who may bring media attention, et cetera. However, the report noted that with the enhanced credibility of this there was more public engagement through the media. The correlation was drawn that it was largely to do with the enhanced credibility that came with elected committee chairs. It is an interesting insight and not something I would have thought of when I first looked at this proposal, but it is something we should perhaps think of as we study this.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his proposal here today. In fact, I have served on committee with the hon. member. What he proposes in studying this has the capacity to render committees more independent, potentially more constructive and less partisan in their workings.

I would appreciate his thoughts on another proposal that was most recently put forward by Deborah Grey and Senator Lowell Murray some time ago. That was that parliamentary secretaries to a minister ought not to be part of committees, that in fact having parliamentary secretaries as part of committees has the capacity, under not simply the current government but any government, of making committees function more like branch plants of ministers' offices as opposed to independent, less partisan groups of parliamentarians. I would appreciate his thoughts on the idea of parliamentary secretaries not having automatic seats on committees.

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, it is always dangerous for a politician to talk before he has thought through something very thoroughly. This is the first I have heard of that suggestion. I can see some merit to the argument. Having said that, honestly this is the first time that the proposal has been put to me.

However, I appreciate what the hon. member is trying to do, and this is what I noted in my speech. He is trying to look at it and say that we should not confine the reforms to one area but that we should take a broad approach and see what we can do collaboratively. I can think of some parliamentary secretaries who would be very much supportive of something like that and some who would be opposed. While I am standing here, I could probably see quite a robust debate. I think the member's idea has merit, but since I am so new to the idea, I cannot endorse it at this time.

• (1125)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my friend from Saskatoon—Humboldt for bringing a tangible measure that we can all support to deal with what is a democracy deficit in Canadian government and certainly in this Parliament.

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I just finished, parenthetically, a cross-country tour of town halls in communities across the country on the subject of democracy. As well, I have contrasted my own experience of having worked from 1986 to 1988 with the Minister of the Environment, where the committee process was far less partisan than it is now. It was a place where people really, as individual members of Parliament, worked to improve legislation. The election of a chair could be one way that we could bring back that sense of greater cross-party co-operation.

I would like the member's comments on whether that is one of his goals.

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, yes, it is one of my goals to bring that together. I have seen it, as the member for Kings—Hants noted. We were on committee together. The international trade committee during that period engaged in some very difficult debates, but it was a good committee to operate in because people wanted to work together even when they were at loggerheads. Therefore, what the hon. member is suggesting is one of my goals for this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order from the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for unanimous consent for the following motion: that at the conclusion of today's debate on private member's business Motion No. 431, this motion be deemed adopted.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Toronto—Danforth, and the parliamentary and democratic reform critic for the NDP, I am pleased to stand and speak again on Motion No. 431, moved by my colleague from Saskatoon—Humboldt. It is a simple and worthwhile motion. It is also an especially welcome motion coming from a Conservative MP, and I would hazard a guess, without the full support of the government, at least at the moment.

I would emphasize in my remarks, to take up the offer of the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, general parliamentary reform, which his motion could help nurture.

With respect to this particular motion, it is important to note that it would be something that would temper the dominating influence of the Prime Minister's Office, and other parties' central apparatus, on aspects of parliamentary life and MPs themselves. I see that as a knock-on effect to the motion that needs to be taken into account.

I would also note that, partly along the lines of comments we heard earlier from the members for Saanich—Gulf Islands and Kings—Hants, the last two years have given rise to certain concerns on the part of the opposition about how some committees have been working. It does appear that some chairs have been unable to manage committee business in such a way as to give members a fair opportunity to prepare for meetings involving witnesses or to present amendments with sufficient notice. Those are just minor examples.

I was earlier looking across the way at the chair for PROC, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, and most assuredly I am not speaking of that hon. member, who is chairing PROC with prowess, good faith, and in the spirit of what we want to see with elected chairs.

The NDP is in favour of improving a number of parliamentary practices to achieve a better balance between legislative and executive power and to relax the strict control that has evolved over the years, not simply under the current government, of the Prime Minister's Office over parliamentary life. Even though some parliamentary reforms and some of the ones I am about to mention are more of a priority than the one currently before us, there is nothing stopping us from taking a serious look at the issue of House election of committee chairs.

The NDP has always advocated for a more open and more transparent democracy. I believe that Canadians know that. This study would have the benefit of helping stimulate debate on the wider issue of healthy democratic practice, both on this particular issue and on wider questions on the openness and transparency of Parliament in general. For that reason, as a member of PROC, I look forward to participating in the process, if indeed this motion is adopted, and, as I have made clear, I hope it is.

As noted, it is PROC that would be examining this motion, if passed. The study would be added to an already fairly long list of proposed amendments this committee has before it to examine with respect to the functioning of the House of Commons. Given that the initiative here before us is from the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, perhaps we will see more interest in these general parliamentary reform questions from the Conservative MPs who are his colleagues, and perhaps even from the party as a whole, which is presently in government. We will see, obviously.

Let me now talk about some of these parliamentary reforms the current motion would help us focus on as well at some point. The first would be to limit the systematic use, and I have to say, unfortunately, abuse of in camera proceedings in committees, which decreases transparency and the impartiality with which committees can do their work.

The NDP has taken the lead on this most recently. Last Thursday we announced that each one of the committees of the House would be presented with the following motion related to in camera proceedings by NDP members.

Each committee will be asked to adopt a motion that states:

That the Committee may meet in camera only for the purpose of discussing:

- (a) wages, salaries and other employee benefits;
- (b) contracts and contract negotiations;
- (c) labour relations and personnel matters;
- (d) draft reports;
- (e) briefings concerning national security;

• (1130)

Added to the motion was the following:

That all votes taken in camera be recorded in the Minutes of Proceedings, including how each member voted when recorded votes are requested.

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This is one effort on our part to do something that parallels the effort of the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, who has expressed his concern that perceptions of how Parliament works are as important as how Parliament actually works. The perception of what the generalized practice of so frequently going in camera has done to this House really has to be taken seriously.

A second reform would limit the government's use, and I would say again, abuse, of time allocation motions to stop the party in power, especially a majority power, obviously, from systematically limiting debate in the House of Commons. In this regard, it is important to note the November 2011 motion moved by the NDP member for Windsor—Tecumseh, which would give the Speaker of the House of Commons the authority to determine whether the grounds for the time allocation were, in fact, reasonable.

A third reform would create some discipline over the use of prorogation. I do not think I have to actually add “and abuse of prorogation” in the chamber. Most people would know that this follows with recent practice. We know how often it has been abused by the present Prime Minister and in the past by other prime ministers, such as when Jean Chrétien prorogued to take the heat off him during one phase of the Liberal corruption scandal around sponsorship money. No doubt we can find ways to structure the Governor General's discretion by legislation, but one initial reform would at least prevent the government from using prorogation as a cloak for shutting down Parliament without having to at least get Parliament's support.

It is for that reason that in March 2010, the former leader of the NDP and of the official opposition for a period in 2011, Jack Layton, tabled a motion, which was adopted by the House, that required that the Prime Minister “shall not advise the Governor General to prorogue any session of any Parliament for longer than seven calendar days without a specific resolution of the House of Commons to support such prorogation”. Last week I attempted to seek unanimous consent to move this motion again and reaffirm it, but unfortunately, there was no such support in the House. I believe that we should be looking seriously at this quite minor reform, in the broader scheme of things, at least to get us looking at the whole institution of prorogation.

A fourth reform would modernize the process for tabling petitions to allow for online petitions and perhaps to allow the House to get somewhat creative with what we do with petitions. What kinds of proceedings in the House might be triggered by such petitions, or e-petitions? As most in the chamber will know, a motion moved in February by my colleague, the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas, seeks to have the procedure and House affairs committee design such a system. I would encourage all members of the chamber, including my colleagues opposite, to support that motion or to at least give it very serious consideration.

A fifth reform would involve the reform of the procedure for making amendments in committee. This may not be just a procedural reform but may actually involve a cultural change. On the current Prime Minister's watch, in particular, almost none of the opposition's amendments in various committees seem to be able to make their way through to acceptance. This would be tied, of course, to overall greater independence of committees from the government, which is not at all distant from the rationale of the motion before us.

To conclude, these are only a few of many dozens of reforms that, collectively, those of us in the House could come up with that could make the functioning of the House and the perception of the House by the public much better than is currently the case. We need to change the prevailing parliamentary culture and resuscitate and deepen certain parliamentary traditions of collegiality, cross-party co-operation in the public interest, and civility. I believe that the motion by the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt would contribute to that process, and for that reason, I will be particularly happy to support it.

•(1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we start the second session of Canada's 41st Parliament, I would like to thank my family, especially my spouse Tara and our daughters Ella and Vera-Claire, who sacrificed to support me so I could serve the people of Kingston and the Islands as a member of Parliament.

Today I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 431, moved by my hon. colleague from Saskatoon—Humboldt, which is intended to “consider the election of committee chairs by means of a preferential ballot system by all the Members of the House of Commons” similar to that recently implemented at Westminster, and to allow for proposals to adopt similar changes in this House.

[*English*]

I would like to begin by saying that I feel a bit uneasy when I am introduced at riding events as the Liberal member of Parliament for Kingston and the Islands. I have chosen the Liberal Party, because I believe that a Liberal government is what is best for the country. However, my duty is to represent my constituents in Kingston and the Islands here in the House as well as to say and do what is best for the country. I am their member of Parliament. I am not simply the Liberal Party's presence in Kingston and the Islands.

I tell people that we in the House, from all parties, are here to keep tabs on the government of the day. Every well-functioning democracy has a division of powers and checks on the power of any one person or branch. As a legislature, we are supposed to check the power of the executive branch, even as ministers of the Crown are drawn from our ranks. Committees of the House of Commons are critical tools of this legislature. If we presume to hold the executive to account, we must have a functioning independent committee system that merits the public's trust and confidence.

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The Standing Orders tell us that committee chairs are elected by secret ballot from among the members of the committee, but the Standing Orders do not fully reveal reality. The current reality is that committee activities are often directed by the executive branch of government, and a parliamentary secretary for a minister of the Crown often sits on the committee and guides its work. That work includes going to great lengths to protect the government of the day when, for example, committee meetings are taken in camera to protect the government from embarrassment. This is over a decade after the member for Calgary Southwest said, "Standing committees of the House should not simply be extensions of the Prime Minister's Office".

Committees are not as independent as they could be, but then, committee membership and committee chairs are determined by the executive branch or by the leadership of opposition parties, who, to be fair, may be thought of as executive branches in waiting. Much of what happens in the House is determined by the leadership of political parties. They may have what they believe to be the best interests of the country at heart, but we have been elected not only to say and do what is best for the country, and that is why we support our political parties and work as a team here in Ottawa, but to represent our constituents. Therefore, Parliament and its committees must be more than fields of battle between political parties.

Fortunately, there are those who see that the balance of power has moved too much in favour of the party leadership for the good of Canadian democracy. I believe that the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt is one. I am one. Another one is the leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Papineau, who has talked about loosening the grip of the Prime Minister's Office on Parliament. He said "...we will...strengthen the committee system...we will strengthen the role of committee chairs and create a more robust system of oversight and review for members from all parties...".

The election of committee chairs by a preferential ballot, by a ballot that would be a secret ballot, according to the statements by the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, would have the potential to make the chairs and their committees more independent of the government of the day and more effective.

● (1140)

I acknowledge the caveats that have been raised by colleagues speaking to this motion in the last session of Parliament and today, and that is the requirement that certain chairs be filled by members of the official opposition, the need for the preferential ballots to be secret, the risk of gender and regional imbalances and the need for the study by the committee to address these concerns.

I do not claim to know the full implications of the idea that we are talking about today nor to what extent it would nudge the balance of power in the House back toward elected members of Parliament, but it is a good step to consider.

I do not claim to know the best manner by which a modification of the Standing Orders could implement this idea, but I trust hon. members who serve on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will make their best efforts to find it. That is and should be how our committees support our work in the House.

I therefore support Motion No. 431 and thank my hon. colleague from Saskatoon—Humboldt for his initiative. I hope it will lead to a continual effort to improve how Parliament works to serve Canada.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to participate in today's discussion of Motion No. 431 on the process for selecting chairs of committees in the House. I know my colleague, the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, has brought forward this motion with the objective of strengthening the role of Parliament and its members.

A strong role for Parliament is an objective that is central to the government's policy agenda. Just as our government's commitment to jobs and economic prosperity has led to positive results for Canadians, such as through the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, our commitment to accountability, transparency and democratic reform has achieved results.

The government's first act on forming government in 2006 was to pass the Federal Accountability Act, a comprehensive set of reforms that changed the way Ottawa did business. It did so by strengthening government accountability, including accountability to Parliament. Since then, the government has continued to improve integrity and accountability in government through measures to promote democratic reform and open and transparent government.

Let me return to Motion No. 431.

The motion first sets out a requirement for the procedure and House affairs committee to consider the election of chairs by a means of a preferential ballot system by all members of the House. The motion then states that the committee would be required to study the practices of committee chair selections in other Westminster style parliaments. It concludes with the committee having to table its findings within six months of the motion being adopted, including any necessary modifications to the Standing Orders.

Let us discuss the context for the current chair selection system.

As members of the House know, our rules and, in particular, Standing Order 106, provide that at the start of every session and, when necessary, during a session, each standing or special committee shall elect a chair and two vice-chairs. If more than one candidate is nominated, an election is conducted by secret ballot. This approach is consistent with the long held view that committees are masters of their own affairs.

Before this motion came forward in the previous session, I was not aware that there were any major concerns with our current system. The existing rules for committee chairs have now been in place for over 10 years. I believe it is fair to say that the current system functions efficiently.

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It may be helpful in considering this motion to remind members of the circumstances under which the current rules were adopted by the House. It was the Canadian Alliance Party that brought forward a change of the rules through an opposition day motion in October, 2002. The motion proposed to change the Standing Orders to require a secret ballot when selecting committee chairs. The premise for the motion was the belief that committee members should have the freedom to vote by secret ballot for the member of their choice to be chair. The House agreed with that rationale and adopted the motion by a vote of 174 to 87. That was 11 years ago. Members of all recognized parties at the time supported the motion. Over 30 of those members are still members of the House today.

I should note that although the previous government did not support the motion, many of its members did. After it passed, there was no subsequent attempt to undo the changes to the rules that it brought into effect. The result we see today is that committee chairs are elected by the members of the committees they serve.

With respect to electing committee chairs in other jurisdictions, many of the other Westminster style legislatures have the same system in place that we have. Most provincial legislatures, as well as the parliaments of Australia and New Zealand, have systems of electing committee chairs that are essentially the same as the one we use here.

An exception to this general approach is the United Kingdom, which only recently changed its system and rules in 2010. Under the new rules, at the start of a new parliament, the allocation of chairs of each party is set, based on the results of the previous election. Members are then able to submit nominations for committee chair positions, as long as the member they nominate is from the party which has been allocated the chair for that committee. To be nominated, a member must obtain signatures from either 15 members of his or her party or 10% of the party's members, whichever is lower. All members of that House vote to elect committee chairs based on a system of preferential ballots, ranking as many candidates as they wish. A candidate is elected once he or she has received more than half of the votes, with the lowest candidate dropped from the ballot and those votes distributed according to the rankings after any round that does not generate a majority outcome.

This new system was implemented in 2010, so it has only been used once. In that case, 16 of 24 committee chair positions were contested and decided by preferential ballot, and 8 were elected unopposed. At this time, it is too soon to determine what the long-term impact of those changes will be or whether there are any unintended consequences of the changes. There are several factors in the consideration of changes to House rules.

Let us return now to Motion No. 431 and the rules that govern the House of Commons in Canada.

● (1145)

Members will know that the rules of the House are carefully balanced, based on parliamentary principles and traditions and reflect the interests of all members. We should keep an open mind about changing these rules, but such change should never be a trivial matter. Rather, prudence, due diligence and a wide support among

members are needed before considering any significant changes to the Standing Orders.

To avoid an arbitrary or trivial approach to changing the rules of the House, Standing Order 108(3)(a) provides for a review of the operation of our rules by the procedure and House affairs committee in each Parliament. This is a study which the committee will resume this fall.

Today's discussion is an important part of the consideration of this motion. Some of the questions and concerns members will be no doubt commenting on include these. Is there a need for changing the current system? Is there something about the system that is not working? Do members want a system where opposition members could influence the selection of government chairs and government members could influence the selection of opposition chairs? What are the mechanisms for removing chairs from their positions once elected? Would just committee members vote on this or all members of the House? How might this proposal affect considerations such as adequate gender or regional representation of committee chairs? Are these important issues for members? Are we willing to considering moving to a system based on one established very recently in 2010, for which there is little understanding of its long-term impacts and possible unintended consequences?

A study by the procedure and House affairs committee could review these and many other considerations. The committee is already undertaking a review of House rules and could review the process for electing committee chairs in the context of its broader review of the rules.

The government will support this motion. That said, it is important all members consider what is at stake when we implement any changes to the Standing Orders. Any such decision should be made with a clear understanding of potential impacts down the road.

We need to fully examine all options and potential consequences before considering whether there is a need to implement a new and permanent way of electing committee chairs.

There are often unanticipated consequences in making significant changes to the Standing Orders and, should the motion be adopted, these things should be carefully considered by the procedure and House affairs committee. We need to take careful consideration of any such changes. When we go down any road, we want to ensure that when we get to the destination we intended to get to, we do not leave a string of potholes behind us.

● (1150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to this motion. It could be very interesting to talk about democracy and independence on the first day of my thirties.

Private Members' Business

The motion calls for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to undertake a study assessing the possibility of having all members of the House elect committee chairs by preferential ballot. Following the possible adoption of this motion—which I will support—the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will try to find out how to proceed; however, there is no guarantee that the motion can be implemented or that other examples will be found in other parliaments.

I want to be clear: since this will be studied in committee, the end result may be different. However, we will seriously consider the issue. The important thing is to find a way to improve the democratic process and the independence of our committees. We will consider this in an ordered, thoughtful way and if possible make the appropriate changes. Democracy must continually evolve and improve. That is why I will support my colleague's motion.

Now, although the motion is rather straightforward, the process of electing committee chairs can be somewhat complex. That is why further discussion is needed at meetings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to determine whether this can really be done.

I have a few thoughts I would like to share on this. Electing 20 or so committee chairs by preferential ballot at the beginning of each session could be hard for new members, because they do not know the candidates. Within the first few days of my arrival here in the House, we voted to elect the Speaker of the House. We received some letters, and I tried to learn about and understand the candidates. That is how I made my choice. However, if we have to do that for all of the committees, that is a lot to ask of new members who are trying to understand how the House of Commons actually works. Most people have some idea before being elected, but until you actually get here, you do not really know. That is a problem.

Furthermore, if committee chairs were to be elected, it would only make sense to give all the members time to get to know the candidates. However, if we delay the election of committee chairs, would this not also delay the beginning of committee work at the start of each parliamentary session? These questions need to be examined in committee.

Gender inclusiveness is also very important to me. I fully support the principles of democracy and independence. At present, I imagine that both the government and official opposition whips—at least I am sure this is true of the official opposition whip—try to have adequate representation of women as chairs and vice-chairs. How can we be sure that this principle is honoured and give women, who are often under-represented, access to these positions? This principle needs to be protected when new committee chairs are elected.

I have many other questions that could be discussed by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I spoke about representation of women, but there is also the issue of representation of minorities. I am also wondering if, during this process, the four committee chair positions that are currently reserved for the official opposition will remain that way. That is something else that must be looked at.

In fact, there are many technical details that will need to be looked at. For example, could someone be considered for two chair

positions at the same time? Currently, the majority of chairs are government party members, except the four positions reserved for the official opposition. Would someone who is normally not allowed to hold the position—because he is a member of the third party or sits as an independent—be able to throw his hat in the ring?

● (1155)

That is another issue that will have to be studied in committee.

Of course, the voting system will have to be discussed in order to determine if it would be by secret ballot or recorded vote. The voting system that is chosen will have to be effective and result in chairs actually being elected.

If it takes several hours of voting for each committee and there are 24 committees, then this risks being a complicated way to begin a session and it could make it difficult to implement the motion. However, solutions may already exist to ensure that it happens very quickly and that we can promptly get to work on electing committee chairs.

That said, I am questioning whether the preferential ballot is necessarily the best voting system and whether, with 308 ballots, the numbers might make the calculations too complicated.

There are plenty of questions. For example, what would happen in the case of a tie? Would we have to start the voting all over again?

Although the motion is a simple one, it is clear that it could be quite difficult to actually implement because of all the technical, practical details that need to be looked at in order to make it an effective process.

However, in order to protect the principles of independence and democracy, I think it is really worth examining this motion, taking the time to study it and checking to see if there are one or more ways that it could be implemented. There could be a number of ways to elect committee chairs.

I have another question that the member may be able to answer in the second hour of debate. Once the committee chairs are elected, will the vice-chairs still be appointed by the whips? If we are going to use a certain voting method to elect chairs, will we do the same for the vice-chairs? This is another question to consider in committee. If we go with a new system to elect committee chairs, then it would be good to know what we are going to do about the vice-chairs, namely, whether we will stick with the old system or adopt the new system for them too.

All of these questions are fairly technical. They are procedural issues. People at home in their living rooms may not understand all of these details, but this really is part of our routine procedure here in the House of Commons.

I think that we recognize that this is a fairly complex issue that deserves our consideration. Holding elections for committee chairs may give us the opportunity to hear from some MPs who do not often get a chance to speak. We might realize just how much experience some people have if they put their name forward and campaign for the position. For example, we may see that positions are filled based on experience rather than preference, which would mean that the person who is elected could make a significant contribution to the committee.

As I said, it would be difficult at first. However, after two years, as is the case now, if we held elections for committee chairs, I would know both the government and official opposition members well enough to have a fairly informed opinion of who would be a good fit for the position of committee chair. I did not necessarily have that knowledge on the first day we sat. I believe that it could be a worthwhile exercise now. After some time, I might be able to make that decision. In my opinion, this could lead to greater independence and democracy.

Let us send the motion to committee and see what changes are proposed and whether they can actually be implemented.

• (1200)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 1

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to present the following motion:

That ways and means Motion No. 1 be deemed adopted on division.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

ELECTION OF COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The House resumed consideration of Motion No. 431.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to see you back here from Windsor, and I look

Private Members' Business

forward to starting the fall session of Parliament with my colleagues here on the Hill.

Continuing from where I left since last spring, I would like to provide the House with an overview of the current system of selecting committee members and committee chairs.

In our system here in Ottawa, the membership of committees and selection of committee chairs are decisions of the respective party whips, and of the 24 committees, 20 are committees for which the Standing Orders specify that the committee chairs are to be elected by members of the committee, that those 20 out of the 24 committee chairs must be government members, and that the remaining four committees are committees for which the chairs are to be members of the opposition party.

While chairs are publicly elected at the first committee meeting in a new session of Parliament, it is important for the public to know that the votes of the members of the committee are under the whips, and that in fact the committee chairs are selected by their respective parties and the selection is enforced through the power of the whips.

This is the system we have had here for a number of years. There was a change whereby instead of directly appointing members to sit as chairs, we introduced a change to have the public election of chairs. However, since committee members from all three recognized parties are all under the whip, in effect the system is as it always has been, which is that committee chairs are selected by the parties.

It is important to note that in the United Kingdom, members adopted a slightly different system about three years ago. They went to the election of committee chairs without having those votes under the whip; in the U.K., committee chairs are elected by secret ballot. This is the system they put in place about three years ago. Recently a report from one of the committees of the Westminster Parliament that looked at this rule change of three years ago endorsed it. It looks as though the parliament on which our Parliament is modelled will be adopting that as a permanent rule change.

It is something that was tried over there over the last three years with great success. I think it would be worthwhile for the committee of this House to look at it, because we would strengthen the committee system, strengthen the legislature, ensure that the division of powers between the executive and legislative branches in our system of government would be strengthened, and ensure greater accountability.

In conclusion, it is important that we consider this change. There is no doubt when we look at academic studies of the Canadian Parliament that legislative power has eroded to the benefit of the executive branch of government over the last four decades. This measure, if studied and potentially implemented, would strengthen the legislature and once again rebalance the power that exists between those two branches of government.

I urge member on both sides of the aisle to support this motion. It is worthwhile at the very least to study.

• (1205)

The Deputy Speaker: The member will have approximately four and a half minutes when the debate resumes on this motion.

Government Orders

We have a point of order from the member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, given the support for the motion, I rise on a point of order to ask if there would be the unanimous support of the House to allow Motion No. 431 to be deemed adopted effective immediately, so that we can get it to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the member have the unanimous consent of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SAFEGUARDING CANADA'S SEAS AND SKIES ACT

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC) moved that Bill C-3, An Act to enact the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, to amend the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak to the importance of safeguarding Canada's seas and skies act. This proposed legislation focuses on five key initiatives. The first, amendments to the Canada Shipping Act, 2001; the second, amendments to the Marine Liability Act; the third, amendments to the Canada Marine Act; the fourth, amendments to the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act; and fifth, amendments to the Aeronautics Act.

The question, of course, is why are all these initiatives important. They are important because they support a number of things. They support our Conservative government's commitment to provide long-term economic growth, jobs and prosperity. They support our red tape reduction action plan, which will save businesses time and money, and will make government regulations clearer and more predictable. It also supports our government's plan for responsible resource development to ensure timely and efficient reviews of proposed resource projects, while strengthening world-class environmental standards.

Finally, it supports the economic action plan 2012, which focused on the drivers of growth and job creation: innovation, investment, education, skills and communities.

The economic action plan is giving Canada the ability to meet the challenges of the current global economy, to emerge from this period stronger, and to enable our economy and public finances to remain sustainable for many years to come. Our government is committed to achieving these goals without compromising the health, safety or security of Canadians or our environment. These initiatives help to

support our transportation system. They also contribute to Canada's competitiveness and prosperity.

Let me start by discussing the proposed amendments to the Canada Shipping Act, 2001. This is the act that is the principal legislation that governs safety and protection of the environment in marine transportation and in recreational boating. It applies to Canadian vessels in all waters, and it applies to all vessels in Canadian waters.

The objectives of this act include protecting the marine environment, reducing the impact of marine pollution incidents in Canadian waters, and ensuring the safety of the general public. The amendments our government is proposing today would increase marine environmental protection by strengthening provisions pertaining to pollution prevention and response. To accomplish these objectives the amendments aim to strengthen requirements for spill prevention and preparedness at oil handling facilities by requiring that certain facilities submit both prevention and emergency plans to the Minister of Transport.

The current act requires all oil handling facilities to prepare oil pollution prevention and emergency plans to meet the requirements of the regulations, and to have these plans on site. Through on-site inspections, Transport Canada monitors the compliance of these facilities. However, the current legislation needs to be strengthened with regard to facilities notifying the minister of their operations and submitting their pollution prevention and emergency plans, as well as notices of proposed major expansions or conversions of their facilities. These amendments would require these facilities to submit plans to the Minister of Transport and to empower departmental inspectors to direct facility operators to demonstrate their compliance.

Second, the amendments allow use of a fair and effective regulatory tool, which we already have, to deal with contraventions of pollution prevention and spill response by expanding the administrative monetary penalty provisions of the Canada Shipping Act, 2001.

The current regime allows marine safety inspectors to impose monetary penalties on vessels or persons who do not comply with the act. The penalties can range between \$250 and \$25,000. This use of monetary penalties, however, does not apply to part 8 of the act, and that means it forces the department to prosecute regulatory infractions either through the court or through taking administrative actions, such as suspending the certification of non-compliant response organizations.

Both of these options are complex and potentially expensive. Extending the use of administrative monetary penalties to part 8 of the act allows marine safety inspectors, the people who are on the front lines, to issue penalties in cases where the act is violated. This change would provide us with a flexible enforcement tool that is more effective than the current practice.

Government Orders

•(1210)

Finally, the amendments would ensure Canada has the assistance needed to respond to oil spill incidents by extending civil and criminal immunity protection to the agents of certified Canadian response organizations.

The Canada Shipping Act, 2001 provides civil and criminal liability to certified response organizations responding to a ship-source oil spill or environmental emergency. However, the act does provide such immunity to these organizations if they are responding to spills that take place when a vessel is either loading or unloading at an oil handling facility. Consequently, these responders are reluctant to respond to such an incident.

The proposed amendments to the act would strengthen the oil spill response by extending this to certified response organizations so that if they were to respond to spills from a vessel or an oil handling facility during loading or unloading of oil, they would have immunity. These amendments to liability would also apply to the agents of the response organizations that have been requested by a certified Canadian response organization to assist in the cleanup of a spill.

Spill responders, including our international partners, tell us that they are reluctant to help in such emergencies without this sort of immunity. Given that the immediate response is crucial to minimize the impact of these such incidents, if we provide better assurance of immunity for these agents, the amendments would enhance Canada's access to international resources for spill response.

Canada and the United States have a long history of helping each other in times of distress, including responding together to oil spills and other environmental incidents involving our waterways. Although Canada does not rely solely upon the assistance of our American neighbours in such matters, we have been fortunate to have it. We expect that these amendments would ensure it for the future. It is worth noting that these proposed amendments would not change the partnership but it would build upon it. By introducing these proposed amendments to the Canada Shipping Act, 2001, our government is reiterating its commitment to ensure marine safety, to protect our marine environment, and to support the crucial role of shipping to Canada's trade and economy.

Last March, our government announced important measures, including the creation of tanker safety expert panel, to review Canada's current tanker safety system. The proposed amendments would complement the work of this expert panel. In addition, our government announced increased scientific research on non-conventional petroleum products and ensured a system of aids to navigation. The system of navigation is composed of buoys, lights and other devices to warn of obstructions as well as to mark the location of preferred shipping routes. Last, our government has also increased the number of inspections of all foreign tankers and increased funding for the national aerial surveillance program to keep a watchful eye on tankers moving through Canadian waters.

As part of our plan for responsible resource development, these measures would ensure that Canada has a world-class marine safety system that would prevent incidents, protect our environment and ensure the safety of Canadians. In this way, in the event of an

environmental emergency, we would be ready to respond quickly and efficiently, and ensure that polluters would be responsible for paying cleanup costs.

The tanker safety review panel was mandated to consult with key stakeholders to enhance the government's knowledge of the current oil transportation system, point out gaps that we have to address, and manage impacts on the marine environment. As well, the tanker safety review panel launches an ongoing effort to ensure we lead the world in marine environment safety.

Let me now turn my attention to the very important amendments to the Marine Liability Act.

Protecting our waterways from pollution is a priority of our government and we take it very seriously. The potential for a chemical spill in Canadian waters requires appropriate mechanisms to responsibly address the potential consequences of such an event. Therefore, we will continue to take action to ensure Canada has the most stringent tanker safety regime in the world.

•(1215)

Given the importance of trade to Canada's continuing prosperity, we must recognize that this involves the transportation of hazardous and noxious substances. Indeed, almost 400 million metric tonnes of cargo carried by ships in Canada annually, which is really only 3.5%, would be considered hazardous or noxious substances.

These substances consist of a very broad range of marine cargo, such as chemicals, liquefied natural gas, propane or other materials. Now while it is only a small percentage, 3.5%, this wide variety of substances can cause an array of environmental damage should there be an accident or incident. Therefore, the Marine Liability Act, being the principal legislation we have to address this matter, deals with the liability of ship owners and operators in relation to passengers, cargo, pollution and property damage.

In building on our current robust system, the amendments that our government is proposing to the act will introduce a comprehensive liability and compensation regime that really is in step with our other international conventions that we have already ratified. This recognizes both the importance of uniform standards in the global transport of hazardous substances and the importance of such standards to Canada's trade and to its economic prosperity.

The amendments would accomplish two main objectives.

First, they would enhance our pollution liability and compensation regime, which would enable Canada to ratify an international convention that would significantly increase the amount of compensation available for pollution and other damages caused by hazardous and noxious substances from ships.

Government Orders

Second, the amendments would implement the provisions of the 2010 Hazardous and Noxious Substances Convention in Canadian law.

The amendments would accomplish these objectives in four ways: first, implement this convention in order to establish the liability of ship owners in the event of spills and their requirement to have insurance to cover this liability; second, set a legal framework for those affected by these incidents to access the international compensation fund; third, create a regulatory-making power to adopt regulations that would require reporting receipts of bulk hazardous and noxious substances in Canadian ports; fourth, reporting required by the convention to ensure levies would be paid to the international compensation fund, update an enforcement regime so ship owners must maintain proof of insurance through certificates issued by Transport Canada and the receivers of hazardous and noxious substances report receipt of such shipments.

To put these amendments to the Marine Liability Act in context, it is worth noting a few points.

First, the amendments provide comprehensive coverage for more than 6,500 hazardous substances being transported in Canada by ship and would ensure that the list of substances covered by the amendments would be continuously kept up to date.

Second, the amendments would establish a liability in the compensation regime for claimants that would be in step with other international conventions that Canada has ratified.

Finally, the amendments are in line with Canada's long-standing policy to seek multilateral solutions to issues of marine liability and compensation.

It is also worth noting that Transport Canada has worked in partnership with various stakeholders and industry associations on this matter. In our consultations with this broad range of stakeholders and associations, we have found strong support for Canada's ratification of the 2010 hazardous and noxious protocol and its implementation through these amendments to the Marine Liability Act.

To give an example, ship owners accept the liability these international conventions provide and cargo owners accept that they must do their part in contributing to international funds. Both parties want to ensure that victims are compensated in the event of an accident or incident.

I will turn from our seas to our skies now and discuss the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act.

As in the case of many sectors, the Canadian air industry requires insurance coverage to operate. In addition to general risks, this coverage must address risks for acts of war, terrorism, or civil unrest. Indeed, the attacks of September 11, 2011, caused instability in the insurance market, specifically for war risks to third parties; in other words, people and property on the ground which could be affected by aviation incidents.

In response, the Government of Canada developed a program to indemnify aviation businesses against liability they may face from third parties, such as property owners on the ground who experienced loss caused by extreme events such as war. This

coverage is known as the "aviation war risk liability program", and it has addressed the matter. However, without permanent authority to enable federal support related to war-risk insurance, it must be renewed repeatedly.

● (1220)

Therefore, our government is now proposing new legislation, the aviation industry indemnity act, that would repeal aviation-related provisions of the Marine and Aviation War Risks Act and give the Minister of Transport permanent authority to provide indemnities in emergency situations and allow air-industry operators to get coverage in the case of continuing market instability. In short, it would allow the same kind of coverage, but would eliminate the need to regularly renew it. As well, to ensure transparency, the minister would report to Parliament within 90 days of an indemnity being authorized and every two years if there was no change.

In discussions with Transport Canada, air industry participants have expressed strong support for continuing this kind of coverage.

Finally, the safeguarding Canada's seas and skies act also includes proposed amendments to the Aeronautics Act concerning civilian involvement in military aviation accident investigations. As members know, every day the Canadian Forces successfully carry out numerous aviation activities from routine airlifts to search and rescue missions. However, sometimes these activities do not always go as planned, which is why the Canadian Forces have a Canadian Forces flight safety program. Therefore, if something goes wrong, military flight safety investigators look for the causes, interview witnesses and make recommendations to improve safety.

Over the past two decades, the nature of military aviation really has evolved. Today, the number of civilian contractors providing support to Canadian Forces aviation activities has increased significantly. Many tasks related to military aviation, including tasks with safety implications like flight training, strategic airlift, target towing and equipment maintenance, are carried out to one degree or another by civilian contractors. The civilian contractors actually possess a wealth of information and their evidence may very well be essential to a military flight safety investigation, yet while civilian contractors co-operate with such investigations in the vast majority of cases, there really is no effective legal tool to require them to do so. That is why the bill we are discussing is so important.

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It would give our military flight safety investigators the tools they need to fully investigate flight safety occurrences involving civilians by giving them the power to search premises, seize documents and take statements. These tools are parallel to those available to the investigators working for the Transportation Safety Board which investigates aviation occurrences not related to military aviation safety. The changes would also permit access to on-board flight recordings by a board of inquiry convened under the National Defence Act. This access would only arise in the appropriate circumstances and for military administrative purposes only. Most important, these tools would ensure that civilians would contribute their expertise to military aviation safety. As a result, we would continue to develop effective aviation safety measures for all the Canadian Forces and all Canadians.

To conclude, as I noted at the start of my remarks, our Conservative government is committed to supporting the prosperity of Canadians by streamlining our regulatory agenda, but in ways that also ensure the safety of Canadians and our partners around the globe. While the legislative initiatives I have outlined today may appear to be mostly administrative in nature, they would go a long way to helping accomplish even broader goals. They address infrastructure matters that would affect Canada's trading relationship. They would fine-tune domestic regulations to reduce regulatory burden on various stakeholders. They would also create a more efficient inspection regime for marine vessels and improve safety and investigation procedures for our airline industry.

Our government remains focused on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. These amendments highlight our commitment to maintaining Canada as a safe, strong and competitive player in the world economy and the global community.

• (1225)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the minister to the file. It is fair to say that the minister has a good reputation, but she has a long hill to climb when we look at the actions of the government over the last few years, which have been so profoundly irresponsible, particularly with the issue of marine transportation.

We have seen the closure of the Kitsilano Coast Guard station, the cuts to Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centres and the closure of B.C.'s regional office for emergency oil spills. There has been a whole range of closures in British Columbia that have certainly undermined the credibility of the government 100%.

Given the fact that the government has proceeded, in my mind, in such an irresponsible way, despite the small baby steps that we see in the bill today, could the minister give some assurance to British Columbians that in her new role as Minister of Transport she will actually address what they are concerned about in terms of marine liability and tanker safety? At the same time, will she fix what has been broken by the government over the last few years?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his kind words. I am very honoured to be taking on this responsibility in transport and I hope I can lend, as best I can, positiveness to the file as we move forward.

With respect to our relationship with British Columbia, it is an incredibly important one. Indeed, I have had conversations with my

counterpart already and have spoken to a number of municipal officials. I understand the importance of marine safety as they have made it very clear to me. That is why our government introduced this act and amendments last year and set up this marine advisory panel to take a look at where the gaps were in the system and focus on having a true world-class system where all three aspects would be looked at: the prevention of spills and accidents; the response to spills and accidents; and the liability on the other end of spills and accidents.

We will continue to work on this as the weeks go by and I will continue to reach out to both people in British Columbia and along the coast where there are shipments of hazardous and dangerous goods or oil.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to raise four issues with the minister. One has to do with the first part of her speech, namely, the part with respect to seas and the issue of liability for spills.

The first issue has to do with the flagging tankers, the flagging of ships generally, particularly ships carrying hazardous substances. The second has to do with bankruptcy, which is one of the ways of getting out of liability, to simply bankrupt oneself. The third has to do with proof of insurance upon arriving in Canadian coastal waters, whether picking something up or leaving with something. The fourth is the limitations on insurance policies. Insurance lawyers spend all of their waking hours trying to figure out how to get out of the responsibility of having insurance policies.

How is this legislation going to deal with the flags of convenience, the bankruptcy of shippers, proof of insurance, both coming and going, and the resistance, shall we say, to taking on full responsibility of liability that comes with almost any insurance policy?

• (1230)

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, the member has a full list of questions. I cannot get into specific details, but would be happy to talk to him later about it outside of the House.

What I can answer is this. The purpose of the amendments in the Marine Liability Act is to help fill a critical gap we now have from an international convention point of view that deals specifically with hazardous and noxious emissions from ships. All the issues the member brought up are important ones and we view this as a first step in dealing with and approaching what kind of liability gaps there may be in the Marine Liability Act, but it is always fundamentally on the same premise, which is the polluter will pay.

We are talking to stakeholders and municipal partners to determine what a good, strong, comprehensive liability scheme will look like and we will be introducing regulations and amendments that make sense to the overall scheme of what we are trying to accomplish, which is to ensure we have a world-class tanker safety regime in place.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too want to congratulate the minister for taking over this portfolio.

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I have a question on the scope of the Marine Liability Act and how it will apply to navigable waters in Canada, the rivers and lakes that provide access to oceans. This is a simple question that could be answered very easily by the minister one way or the other.

To understand that better is something that people in my constituency who regularly transport large quantities of petroleum and hazardous products up the Mackenzie River into the Arctic Ocean would be very interested in. There have been problems in this regard already. This summer there was a spill on the Mackenzie River. There are certain concerns that lie with the equipment and the ability to deal with moving these goods up rivers into oceans.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I will admit to the member that while I do not know the definition of the waterways that are covered in the Marine Liabilities Act right off the top of my head, I would be happy to look into it.

However, for navigable waters and waters that need to be protected, the spirit of the Marine Liabilities Act and the spirit of what we are doing in terms of liability and compensation is to ensure and enshrine the principle that the polluter pays. We want to ensure that we protect the waters as well as the people who utilize the waters and come up with the appropriate liability and compensation scheme.

As I have indicated, this is the first step, and through consultation we will be having more discussions as we move along, just as we did with the member opposite.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to the minister on assuming her new post.

We focus in this House and in Canada on issues of marine, aviation, and rail safety and so on as it applies to Canada. That is clearly what we should be doing.

Can the minister give us some comparison of how we compare in our day-to-day record with respect to other international regimes that are facing the same kinds of challenges we are?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, Canada has a good reputation internationally with respect to how we respond and how we deal with the prevention of spills and environmental damage from ships. We are a strong participant in the IMO too. Our officials at Transport Canada work with its counterparts around the world to adhere to and develop international standards that can be applied here in Canada as well.

It is important to note too that in this country we have not had a serious oil spill off the coast of British Columbia in 30 years. That is why this is a good opportunity to take a serious look at what the gaps may be in our current system. That is exactly what this world-class tanker safety review panel is doing. We look forward to seeing the results coming forward, as I know our international partners are as well.

• (1235)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to join my colleagues in welcoming my friend to her new portfolio.

I can inform her of the quite excellent world-class tanker safety system that has been in place in British Columbia since 1972 and has

been responsible for preventing any major oil tanker spills. It has been the federal-provincial moratorium that has prevented any supertankers carrying oil to traverse the areas that are now anticipated and promoted by members of the current administration without waiting for the NEB panel review to be completed.

As the minister mentioned, the government has actually been spending money on lining out the routes for oil tanker traffic through a route that has been prevented since 1972 and is still not approved.

On looking at this overblown title of “safeguarding Canada’s seas and skies act”, we see that it is largely housekeeping measures.

I completely support that it does bring in the measures we need to implement the carriage of hazardous and noxious substances by sea convention, which we signed more than three years ago. There are good measures in here. However, my question to the hon. minister is this: how can we possibly talk about a world-class system when we have shut down all the regional offices for emergency preparedness for oil spills with Environment Canada? On both the west and east coasts, are we supposed to dial a 1-800 number that rings in Ottawa?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, our government has acted decisively. We have put more money into a national aerial surveillance program to keep that eye on ships as they move along both of our coasts. We have also increased the number of inspections of foreign vessels.

To the point that the hon. member made, of course we always make sure that we are marking the lanes of shipping appropriately, and we have invested more money through the Coast Guard into that as well.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely important debate. This is not an academic debate. This is a debate that really strikes at the heart of issues that Canadians are living from coast to coast to coast, and the issue is transportation safety. We have seen over the last few months an unprecedented number of accidents and deaths, and I would attest that there is a growing level of public concern right across this country about the actions of the Conservative government that have led to a deterioration in transportation safety.

We welcome the new minister here. Hopefully this will be a big change, a turning of the page, from what has been a series of profoundly irresponsible actions. The reality is that the Conservative government has to take transportation safety seriously; it has not, and in fact has done the opposite: it has cut back on the fundamental safety systems that Canadians have relied on in the past to protect them.

There are some small baby steps in Bill C-3 that we will of course support. There are some housekeeping items that are long overdue. However, the reality is that the legislation would do nothing to change the fundamental framework that has been put in place by the government and that has put so many Canadians at risk.

Government Orders

I will be speaking later to some of the other modes of transportation safety that have been sadly eroded. We are all aware of the tragic and profoundly sad circumstances that we have seen over the past few months in rail transport safety. We are aware of the increasing number of pipeline spills across the country because of the irresponsibility of the Conservative government. However, I would like to address just for a moment the whole question of marine safety.

For 30 years British Columbians have protected the coast of British Columbia by putting in place a tanker moratorium on the north coast. That is why there has been a good safety record. It is not because of the actions of the current government or the actions of any other government; it is because provincially and federally British Columbians said very strongly that we did not want to see tankers thrown willy-nilly around the coast of British Columbia. That is why British Columbia's coast has been protected.

Now the government is pushing to eliminate that respected moratorium and is pushing a number of projects that undoubtedly will lead to increased tanker traffic on British Columbia's coast if they go through.

The question then is this: what is the government's credibility on issues of marine safety? I would submit to the House that if we look at the record of the government and what it has done over the past couple of years, we see that it has done more harm to the coast of British Columbia, more potential harm to British Columbia's pristine coast and the tens of thousands of jobs that rely on B.C.'s coast being pristine, than any other government in our history.

Let us look at the record.

Just in the last few months we have seen the closure of the Kitsilano Coast Guard station. The member for New Westminster—Coquitlam has been a strong advocate on this issue. He has risen in the House of Commons to speak repeatedly on this issue, but he is not the only one. New Democratic MPs from British Columbia have risen repeatedly to speak on this issue. I myself have spoken on it. The member for Vancouver East has spoken on it. The member for Burnaby—Douglas, the member for Newton—North Delta, the member for Surrey North, the member for Vancouver Kingsway, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, and the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca have all spoken on this issue. We have seen NDP MPs from British Columbia repeatedly raise this issue, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam being the most forthright.

Despite the fact that parliamentarians have raised this issue, despite the fact that the provincial government raised it, despite the fact that municipalities such as the City of Vancouver have raised it repeatedly, the Conservative government said it was going to close off the Coast Guard station and did not care if people were put at risk.

This is profoundly irresponsible. If it were just perhaps that one Coast Guard station, rather than a pattern, then perhaps we could say there was some justification, but there are a lot of expenses by the Conservative government that I profoundly disagree with. They include flying limousines around the world, the tens of billions of dollars that it wants to throw into an untended fighter jet contract, a billion dollars for a weekend meeting, \$16 glasses of orange juice.

Speaking as a former financial administrator, I can say that Conservative financial management is an oxymoron. The government has been absolutely appalling when it comes to financial management. It is beyond comprehension.

● (1240)

Even if the Conservatives could justify the closure of the Coast Guard station, let us look at what else they have closed, which has been a repeated slap in the face to British Columbians and all those concerned with the safety of our coasts and the tens of thousands of jobs in fisheries and tourism that come from having a pristine coast. They also closed the Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centre, which helped to facilitate and ensure safe transportation on the coast. They said we do not need that; let us throw it out.

Then the Conservatives decided to close the B.C. office for emergency oil spill responders. Conservatives will say there is a 1-800 number for an oil spill off the coast of British Columbia. It goes to some desk in Ottawa, but British Columbians need an immediate response. We need to feel safe about our coast, not with a 1-800 number going back to Ottawa that no one ever answers. That is the Conservatives' attempt to provide some damage control.

What else did they do? They actually closed a whole system of environmental emergency programs as well. This has been a systematic pattern of shutting down the safety mechanisms that were present on the coast of British Columbia. What they have done is simply to put British Columbia's whole coast at risk.

The then minister of natural resources decided that he would do a press conference in Vancouver to address the concerns raised by British Columbians throughout the province. It would show British Columbians just how good the Conservative government is at marine safety. He did his press conference. He even brought a rescue ship across the Salish Sea from Victoria. What happened? The rescue ship ran aground.

It just proves the point that we cannot trust Conservatives with the safety of the B.C. coast. However, we can trust New Democrats, and that is what British Columbians will do in 2015. That is for sure.

The Conservatives have shut down all of this. They had a debacle of a press conference that proved our point that transportation safety was being undermined. To date, although we have a new minister who we hope will address all the concerns being raised by British Columbians, we have not seen the fundamental problem being addressed.

When we look at the small steps in Bill C-3 that address in a housekeeping way some of the small things that obviously the Conservatives wanted to bring forward as a package to say they are saving the coast, we remain skeptical, although we certainly support the baby-step measures that are contained in it.

Government Orders

However, let us be clear about what the bottom line is for us. We believe that the Coast Guard closures need to be addressed, and that process can start by reopening the Kitsilano Coast Guard station. It would respond to the concerns raised for British Columbia. We would like the Conservatives to reopen the marine traffic communication centre in Vancouver. That would start to address issues of safety concerns along the coast of British Columbia. We would like them to reopen the B.C. office for emergency oil spills. They can keep their 1-800 line, but let us have people who can respond to oil spills in British Columbia. If they do that, it would start to restore some of the confidence that we have completely lost in the Conservative government.

We proposed all of that. Just a few months ago the official opposition, the NDP, sent a letter to the transport minister and said that we support the tiny steps contained in their legislation. We disagreed with the title of the “safe coasts”. They must be kidding. After all the Conservatives have done, they simply are not guaranteeing safe coasts in any way, shape, or form. We said they should start including these elements in the legislation, and then we would actually have legislation that would help to address public confidence.

That is what we have put forward. The Conservatives have steadfastly refused thus far, but we are going to take this issue into committee and will be offering these kinds of positive amendments on behalf of British Columbians.

● (1245)

We certainly hope that B.C. Conservative MPs will step up to the plate and help support British Columbians, that they will step forward and say, “For goodness sake, there is a fundamental problem here. British Columbians have completely lost confidence in the government on marine safety, so we will address that by voting for the NDP amendment”. That is what we are hoping to see. We can support this on second reading to bring it forward, but let us see some action from the government. Let us see some positive action that actually addresses the concerns that British Columbians are raising.

With Bill C-3, there is no doubt that we see the Conservatives spinning around the northern gateway pipeline. The northern gateway pipeline has been shown, in poll after poll, that 80% of British Columbians reject it. They reject it because they are concerned about destroying the moratorium for tankers on the north coast. They are concerned about the lack of tanker safety. They are concerned about what the impact will be with the potential loss of thousands of jobs in the tourism and fisheries sectors. There are thousands of British Columbians who depend on a pristine coast. They are concerned about all that, and they have raised it repeatedly.

A few weeks ago, my wife and I went to see a movie in Coquitlam, which is next to Burnaby—New Westminster. I am looking at the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam because I want to acknowledge that we are spending some money in his riding. Before the film came on, there was a paid advertisement from Enbridge for the northern gateway pipeline. This was a non-partisan movie crowd. We were all there to see the movie. We were not there as New Democrats, Conservatives, Liberals or people from any other political background. We were British Columbians who were out to

see a movie, and Enbridge put on the ad. What was the reaction of the crowd? There were round boos. People were throwing popcorn at the screen. That shows the extent to which British Columbians reject the northern gateway pipeline. There will be 104 full-time, on-site positions created, but thousands of jobs are threatened by the northern gateway pipeline. That is why communities along the right of way, and British Columbians generally, have said no.

For the Conservative government to put forward Bill C-3 today, hoping that somehow that will change British Columbians minds about a project that does not provide any economic or environmental advantage, is simply wrong-headed. In fact, it will do the opposite. It threatens our environment and our economy. For the government to think that Bill C-3 will address those concerns is simply wrong.

British Columbians feel profoundly strong about our coast. Many of us gain our living from the coast. We will not accept a Conservative government that tries to ram through a project when it has so many negative environmental and economic repercussions.

For the Conservatives to think they can ram this project through is simply wrong-headed. I have said this publicly outside the House, and I will say it in the House as well. If the Conservative government tries to ram through the northern gateway pipeline over the objections of first nations, the communities and British Columbians, there will not be a single safe seat for the Conservative Party in British Columbia in the 2015 election. I can guarantee that. British Columbians will say no to the Conservative agenda, and they will say yes to having strong New Democrats representing British Columbia in the House of Commons.

With only a few minutes left, I want to touch on the other concerns that have been raised by Canadians across this country in regard to transportation safety. I am the energy and natural resources critic. My work as a former refinery worker is part of what I bring to that job. I have been in situations where, with an oxygen tank, I was cleaning out the oil drums at the Shelburn refinery in Burnaby, British Columbia. The reality is, I have a very healthy respect for the impact of petroleum products. They are very dangerous and they have to be handled carefully. I do not see the same due regard for safety being applied by Conservatives.

● (1250)

We see that in terms of pipeline safety. We have seen a clear deterioration in pipeline safety over the last few years on the Conservatives' watch. We have seen this in the number of pipeline spills, which have increased exponentially, by almost 200% over the last few years. That should bring cause to concern for any government that is concerned about safety measures. We are talking about marine safety, and the government is bringing forward very small baby steps. The concerns about pipeline safety are now front and centre, yet the government is doing nothing to address them.

Government Orders

This is a substance that we have to be very careful with. It kills. It destroys. There has to be a very strong and reinforced investigation and inspection process. We have to make sure, at all times, that we have the best safety equipment possible. That has not been the case with pipelines. It has not been the case with any sort of oil spill response. In fact, an audit that came at the beginning of the summer found that in 83% of the cases, oil spill response equipment is out of date. We see a situation where there is “a number of significant deficiencies in the program's preparedness capability”.

Whether we are talking about marine safety or pipeline safety, very serious concerns have been raised by Canadians. We are all aware of what has transpired over the last few months. There was the profoundly saddening tragedy in Lac-Mégantic. We have just seen the tragedy in Alberta. There have been various communities in the last few months that have been impacted in terms of rail transportation safety. I am not just talking about Gainford and Lac-Mégantic; I am talking about Sexsmith, Brampton, Calgary, Landis, Ottawa, Lloydminster, Gogama, Wanup, Okotoks and Jansen. We are talking about communities that have been impacted just in the last few months by the lack of serious regard for safety in the transportation sector.

These are unprecedented accidents that we have seen, and they are multiplying. We are seeing a government that simply does not have the due regard for safety that is required of any responsible government.

I have asked before, and I will ask the new Minister of Transport, that the Conservatives reverse all of the cuts, the irresponsible actions and the gutting of safety in the transportation sector. Whether we were talking about marine safety, pipeline safety or rail safety, they are all linked.

The official opposition has brought forward very constructive ideas. The NDP has said that there are things we could do now. Our transport critic, the member for Trinity—Spadina, brought forward a whole series of recommendations after the appalling tragedy in Lac-Mégantic. The government has not implemented them. We have brought forward a whole series of recommendations on marine safety. The government has refused to implement them. We have raised concerns about the lack of pipeline safety. The government has refused to act.

We are doing this on behalf of the populations of Canada. We are doing it on behalf of all of the communities that are suffering from the lack of due diligence and responsibility by the Conservative government. We have never seen a government that has been so reckless and irresponsible with our nation's public safety. We have seen an increase in the number of fatalities and incidents in a whole series of sectors.

Canadians want to see a change from the government. They want it to be responsible with the public's safety. If the government chooses to continue its reckless path, not only is it saddening and a tragedy, it also means that in 2015 New Democrats will be stepping forward with a safety agenda that we believe Canadians will support.

We ask the Conservatives to do the right thing. If they do not, we will. That rendezvous is in 2015.

●(1255)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, for his presentation. I agree with him that the title of the act is quite overblown. I have noted in the past that this administration has a penchant for overblowing titles of acts that are mostly housekeeping measures. In this case it is called the “safeguarding Canada's seas and skies act” as if it would do something about air pollution. It deals with some administrative changes under the Aeronautics Act.

However, in terms of oil tanker safety, I completely agree with my hon. friend. I would like to ask if he has examined the report that came out in December 2011. Almost two years ago, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development within the Office of the Auditor General did a thorough review of the transportation of hazardous and dangerous goods by rail, pipeline, tanker, and truck. It provided advice that, in my view, had the current administration looked at those recommendations and implemented them, might have avoided the Lac-Mégantic disaster.

I would like to ask if the member has had a look at those environment commissioner recommendations from nearly two years ago.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right to point out that other entities within the federal government raised this issue years prior to this outbreak and the increase in accidents and fatalities that we are seeing across our country. It was telescoped. The member is quite right to point that out. For years now, people have been warning the government that things were going to go awry, and the government members said, “Oh, no. Everything is fine. We've got stuff under control.”

However, we can see from the disasters, the deaths, and the destruction over the last few months that the government has nothing under control. The government needs to start listening to Canadians, reading the reports that have come out—in some cases, one or two years ago—and start putting those recommendations in place. Canadians are asking for the government to stop acting irresponsibly and recklessly and to start taking into consideration public safety, and Canadians are right to be asking for that from their government.

●(1300)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech. He clearly explained the Conservatives' very disturbing approach to protecting coastal areas, among other things.

The Conservatives also decided to close the Quebec City maritime search and rescue centre, the only bilingual centre in Canada. Unfortunately, that truly terrible decision could endanger lives, but it is in keeping with the Conservatives' approach since coming to power.

I would like to ask my colleague if he could tell us a little more about the changes that the NDP would like to make to Bill C-3 in order to take a different approach than that of the Conservatives to protecting our coastal areas.

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier for her question. She worked very hard to save the Quebec City maritime rescue centre. I would like to thank her for her excellent work on that issue. She does a very good job of representing her constituents and the people who live in the Quebec City area.

It is important to note that we are not talking just about the British Columbia coast, but about both coasts. I focused on British Columbia because this is an issue we are facing right now. However, she is quite right because the situation is just as worrisome on the east coast. There is a lack of transparency and accountability on the part of this government. Canadians everywhere are entitled to better protection, and they are quite right to be more worried because of the Conservatives.

It would be really beneficial to have a government that takes its responsibilities seriously and governs properly and not a government that spouts talking points. It could start by reopening the Quebec City and Vancouver maritime rescue centres and acting in a responsible manner. That would be a good thing.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for his excellent speech, which illustrated just how incompetent and reckless the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean was during his term as the former minister of transport.

The changes he made to rail safety across Canada have unfortunately left marks and scars. I hope that the new Minister of Transport will be more competent than the current member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean.

Here is my question for my NDP colleague. Why does he think the former minister of transport was so reckless with Canadians' rail and marine safety across the country?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord for his question and want to point out that he has raised these issues more often than any other member in this House. He does an excellent job in the House of Commons and he represents a community I know very well, in the riding of Chicoutimi.

His question is too difficult to answer. Why would a minister of transport and a government systematically adopt an attitude that involves pulling apart and breaking down existing safety systems? The existing systems were not even good enough in the first place.

The government is being irresponsible and simply wants to destroy all the safety systems. This is happening with rail safety, pipeline safety and marine safety. We could add food safety to that list.

Under this government we have seen more crises in the food industry than ever before in our country's history. Once again, this is a result of the government making cuts and destroying inspection regulations.

The government does not want to govern. It thinks it is entitled to everything. Take a look at the Senate, where Conservative senators are taking tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Prime Minister wants to take his limousine all over the world, but no one in

his government is looking after Canadians' safety. This is their responsibility. It should be their primary responsibility.

In response to my colleague's question, I do not understand why this government is being so irresponsible.

● (1305)

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the cuts to the safety of our waters, northern Ontario is not untouched by that. The communications centre at Thunder Bay was also part of the ax of the Conservative government.

It shows over and over again that we have a government that is not interested in the well-being of people and is really not interested in our waters. The Conservatives are big talkers and little doers when it comes to safety.

My colleague mentioned the largest tainted beef recall in Canada's history. During the throne speech, the government talked about the fact that paying down the debt was again its main focus, but at what cost, at what cost to the safety of Canadians?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking has raised issues of food safety in this House and has done an excellent job doing that.

The reality is that the government, and I say this as a former financial administrator, is the worst administrator of public finances we have ever seen in our history. There was \$40 billion for the F-35s, untendered. It started out at \$8 billion; it went to \$40 billion. There was \$1 billion for a weekend summit; \$1 million to fly the Prime Minister's limousine around the world.

The government is absolutely horrible at financial management. I have heard people who voted Conservative last time saying that they are never going to vote Conservative again, because they are so appallingly bad at the one thing they were supposed to be good at.

The reality is that the costs the member is speaking of are costs to Canadian families, families that are sick or dead, families that end up seeing terrible tragedies, whole communities that are threatened. As well, there is the profound impact on and degradation of our environment. The costs of keeping the government in office are immense. In 2015, Canadians—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Ottawa South.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill C-3 which is the follow-up bill to Bill C-57 from the last session of this House, which has not passed by now, in part, because the House was prorogued for an unusually long period of time. It is unfortunate, because I think we would have dispatched this legislation much more efficiently had we been sitting here.

Government Orders

In many respects, what we are seeing in the bill is a piecemeal or what I might even describe as an incoherent approach to transportation safety policy in Canada. Small things are trickling out in dribs and drabs without a comprehensive approach to transportation safety in the country to deal with the important issues that have been raised, by many speakers, on marine transportation, rail transportation, passenger safety, and beyond, of course.

The bill is mostly about technical amendments, and the Liberal Party of Canada will be supporting sending the bill to committee.

It has different parts. Part 1, enacting the aviation industry indemnity act, would allow aviation participants, in the event of loss or damage, to deal with what are called “war risks”. This flows from the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, when insurance companies stopped offering air carriers liability insurance for what are typically called war risks. That is part 1 of the bill. I am looking to hearing more about it at committee.

Part 2 amends the Aeronautics Act to establish a new procedure for investigating accidents or incidents involving civilians and military aircraft. Again, for clauses 10 to 26, I am looking forward to seeing more evidence to substantiate the new process in the Aeronautics Act that will allow for investigation of accidents that involve civilians and military aircraft or installations. That will be important to go through.

Part 3 amends the Canada Marine Act in relation to the effective date of the appointment of a director of a port authority. That is more or less standard fare. It is very much housekeeping.

Part 4 amends the Marine Liability Act to implement the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea. This effectively provides for the liability of ship owners and operators for damage caused by pollutants. In particular, it finally implements in Canada the liability scheme established pretty much elsewhere internationally by the several international conventions that are already in place.

We are making progress in terms of these small amendments.

Finally, part 5 amends the Canada Shipping Act to introduce new requirements for operators of oil handling facilities, ostensibly, the governments says, to help produce a world-class tanker safety system. I cannot help but be struck by “world-class tanker safety system”, when the government rushed through licences in the Beaufort Sea, with full knowledge that there is no technology to deal with potential spills should there be one in that most fragile Canadian sea.

Let us turn to the overall context within which I think this bill has been presented and what is happening out there among Canadians.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

First, the Lac-Mégantic tragedy shook the country. Obviously, it affected Quebecers, the people of Lac-Mégantic and their families. This tragedy, which still weighs heavy on the minds of Canadians, stunned us and affected us deeply.

[*English*]

We had also a bus-train collision here in the city of Ottawa. We had a derailment in Calgary, which Mayor Nenshi spoke of some time ago, and of course, we had the derailment over the weekend in Gainford, Alberta. There are so many more instances of rail safety questions.

The bill is being deposited at a time when we are debating pipelines. We are debating pipelines heading west, the gateway pipeline. We are debating pipelines heading south, the Keystone pipeline, and of course there is the question of Line 9, reversing the flow of a pipeline between Sarnia and Montreal to provide more feedstock for eastern Canadian refineries.

I would pause for a moment and say that I think the government has seriously compromised Canada's reputation with respect to its dealings on the Keystone pipeline. It has, in fact, weakened us. For that matter, to a certain extent, it has even weakened the democratic presidency of President Obama by actually not working with American congressional leaders and the President's office to show that Canada is serious about climate change. Because we have been delaying, denying, dragging our feet, making up stories, and hitching our wagon to President Obama, and at other points to somebody else or to some other factor, Canada is now very much behind the eight ball. When it comes to Washington, and, I can certainly confirm from international experience, elsewhere, Canada is now considered to be a pariah on the climate change file. In a sense, this is how the Prime Minister has seriously compromised our reputation in Washington and has put the Keystone pipeline very much at risk.

As I said, Canadians are very concerned about a few things. They see these instances on television and read about them in the newspapers. They are very concerned about passenger safety, community safety, and marine safety, of course. They are concerned about the transport of dangerous substances and what is happening in their local municipalities with trains running in and out. They are very concerned about environmental protection. One of the least known fallout effects of the Lac-Mégantic tragedy is the fact that it is going to take decades, and probably hundreds of millions if not billions, of dollars to clean up the affected watershed in that region. That is something we let slip, to a certain extent, in coverage outside Quebec.

Another factor at play, of course, is that there is a trend toward moving more and more oil in Canada by rail. This is worthy of exploring so that Canadians understand what is happening. There are important fundamental questions about our aging Canadian rail infrastructure. There are important questions being raised about the types of railcars that have been used, both in Canada and the United States, for decades and their safety and engineering standards, for example.

Government Orders

Why is there such a trend toward moving more and more oil in Canada by rail? The first reason is that North American oil production is outpacing pipeline capacity. For example, rail shipments of oil to our coastal refineries or export centres have gone from about 6,000 train carloads in 2009 to almost 14,000 carloads this year. That is a massive and significant increase in moving oil by rail. We have seen a concomitant investment by the railway companies in new cars and new capacity to carry more oil, of course, because they want an ever-increasing share of that market opportunity, as one would expect from a private company.

The second reason we are seeing more oil carried by rail is that, as I mentioned, railways want to increase their market share. They have seized upon an opportunity here, because shipping oil by rail as a substitute idea is being encouraged by the Conservatives as a way to circumvent the approval processes, which they often have been weakening or undermining, whether it is the NEB or environmental assessment. We know that this is the case. We have seen it. It has been happening now for years. They are also trying, in certain quarters, to circumvent strong or ferocious opposition to different ideas being put forward by industrial proponents. That is having another effect. It is another force at play that is driving oil onto our railways.

• (1315)

The third factor is that there is enormous pressure on our infrastructure, and I alluded to this, for both rail and pipeline. Even if all current pipeline projects are approved in Canada, oil production will exceed pipeline capacity by one million barrels a day by 2025. That is, in 12 short years we will exceed our pipeline capacity by one million barrels a day.

The first thing I thought of when I came face to face with this statistic was to reflect on the words of the former premier of Alberta Peter Lougheed who asked some very probative and profound questions about the pace of development in our oil sands, whether or not we were having an adult conversation about that pace, whether the effects in the immediate areas were going to be properly mitigated, and so on and so forth. We see that there is a massive push and rush to increase capacity in terms of oil production but not the infrastructure to deal with it.

On that note, pressure on rail, of course, is coming from a plan of doubling oil sands exploitation over the next decade or so. The pressure is also coming from the 10 to 12-year life span of the very huge Bakken shale gas formation in both North Dakota and Montana. There we are seeing an oil and gas field that is presently producing some 700,000 barrels of oil a day. Now, the estimates are that would last for 10 to 12 years with production rising from 700,000 to one million barrels a day.

Interestingly, the light crude on board the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway that exploded in Lac-Mégantic came from this area, the Bakken shale gas formation, on route to an Irving Oil refinery in Saint John, New Brunswick. Bakken, as a project does not lend itself, say the energy economists, to a pipeline because it is not economic. It takes some 50 years for a pipeline to be judged to be economic, to pay for itself, and this, as I mentioned, has a 10 to 12-year remaining shelf life in terms of exploitation of the gas and oil in that particular reserve.

Another important question at play in context as the bill is brought to the floor is the following.

There are some very serious and legitimate questions being raised with respect to the enforcement of railway safety by Transport Canada. Nowhere is this more evident than in the safety management systems, SMSs, which rail companies are required to produce and abide by. For that matter, different companies involved and regulated by Transport Canada also have safety management systems; airlines, for example. However, these safety management systems are not rendered public. They are not made available or disclosed to interested parties, such as stakeholders, flying passengers, company executives, folks who work on railways, people who are in the business of insuring railways and the shipment of these risky products. These safety management systems are not disclosed.

I think we can do a lot better than that in terms of the probity and transparency that Canadians are asking for and deserve going forward.

Transport Canada, once these safety management systems are put in place, then perform audits on a company's SMS. However, for the audits on railways, and the same thing applies with pipeline companies, there is no requirement for an explicit, what we might call, safety culture assessment. An auditor can go in and audit against a document and spot check. However, that does not necessarily mean that there is an explicit requirement for the auditors and inspectors to sit down with senior managers, interview employees, deal with suppliers, talk to other regulators at the provincial level for railways that do not cross provincial boundaries, and so on and so forth.

We can do a lot better with respect to these safety management systems in making them more transparent. I think that transparency shining the light of day on these management systems would help improve them.

I have also heard from a number of inspectors who are retired from Transport Canada or presently working within Transport Canada. They are deeply concerned about the capacity of Transport Canada to perform these audits on safety management systems on a number of fronts, whether it is marine shipping, airlines, railways and beyond.

• (1320)

There are very troubling questions being raised by these inspectors who are good people, of good faith and goodwill, who go to work every day and try to do their jobs, but are now feeling the pinch as they try to cover so many different regulated companies and do not have the capacity to do so. That is something we are going to have to explore in a much more meaningful way at committee in due course, whether it is with respect to the bill or with respect to the promised, deep railway-safety study that the committee was supposed to undertake this fall in the wake of early findings from the Transportation Safety Board in terms of its learnings derived from the tragedy at Lac-Mégantic.

Government Orders

Shifting gears a bit, in some respects the bill would address the liability question but only tangentially, as I mentioned earlier. There are lingering questions. Most Canadians, once they are over the shock of something as dramatic as a bus in this city, here in my backyard just outside my riding, colliding with a train where citizens are killed, or 47 of their fellow citizens having died in Lac-Mégantic, then questions around who is responsible come to the fore. Here is where we as parliamentarians are going to have to examine very carefully the whole question of liability. Who is responsible for the liability, the costs? Who is responsible for indemnifying, for example, the Town of Lac-Mégantic? Who is responsible for helping the families of the victims, those who may be disabled in an accident and those who feel the effects on their human health, perhaps? Who is responsible with respect to spills at sea? Who is responsible for spills on land and environmental cleanup costs? I alluded to that earlier with respect to Lac-Mégantic.

We have seen what happened with a major spill on the Kalamazoo River in Michigan in the United States. We have seen what the National Transportation Safety Board has said about that in the United States which, in parentheses, concerns me because that NTSB evidence is not being heard at the National Energy Board in Canada as Enbridge makes applications for different kinds of pipeline projects. I believe that we should be examining global practice. What has happened in one jurisdiction is something we should be learning from in this jurisdiction, and vice versa.

When our Canadian Transportation Safety Board issues a report eventually and finally on Lac-Mégantic and that terrible tragedy, there will be many findings that are capable of being extrapolated to other countries and locations. I do not know why the Conservatives have closed and narrowed the evidentiary acceptability gap, if I can call it that, at the National Energy Board to the point where the findings of the NTSB in Washington are not being factored into applications being made by a proponent in Canada. It just makes no sense. Most corporations today, as they work hard to earn their social licence, want to be able to have a global code and standard of practice and drive it up everywhere together, roughly at the same time and in the same way.

We have a lot of questions with respect to who is responsible and who is liable.

I had a constituent write to me recently and ask whether liability should extend here to the company that was actually importing the oil, and in this case, whether the Irving Oil refinery is responsible in part. Should it have some fiduciary responsibility? That is an important question for us to examine.

We need a comprehensive approach going forward. It is a wonderful opportunity for parliamentarians to get it better for Canadians. There is fear in Canadian society. We have an obligation to assuage that fear by doing good and better work. I am concerned about what the Auditor General concluded in a report in 2011, which stated that, "Transport Canada has not designed and implemented the management practices needed to effectively monitor regulatory compliance" with respect to the transportation of dangerous goods as set out by the department.

We can do better than that. We owe it to Canadians. We owe it to our companies. We owe it to shippers. We owe it to all the folks out

there with good faith and goodwill who want to ensure we actually do better and do right by Canadians.

• (1325)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend for his thorough review of Bill C-3. Had the Prime Minister not prorogued, the bill probably would have been passed already. It is largely made up of inconsequential and non-controversial measures but they certainly would not achieve the much vaunted rhetoric that flows along with them.

My hon. colleague quite accurately described the legislation as somewhat incoherent in relation to these issues. Does he think we might have done better by taking the recommendations of the environment commissioner on the thematic purpose of where the gaps are in our transportation of hazardous goods, whether by rail, air, pipeline, tanker or by road and truck? Should we have taken those recommendations and looked at all the ways hazardous goods are transported in Canada? Are we addressing whether this are being done safely, whether municipalities have access to information that they should have about what materials are running through communities, and ensuring that the entire scheme of the transport of hazardous goods is addressed?

• (1330)

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, once again my colleague has asked a very insightful question, and in my view she is spot-on. There is an opportunity here to go back and examine the commissioner for sustainable development's report and recommendations to examine precisely the gap she has alluded to.

In July we convened a fairly urgent meeting of the transport committee. I was asked to speak a bit to an NDP motion at the time. I said it was going to be important for us to look back at what reports have been issued, such as the recent recommendations of the Senate report, which made a number of good recommendations. Here I would like to single out the good work of my colleague from Alberta, Senator Grant Mitchell, who really put his shoulder to the wheel to help think through exactly the kinds of ramifications the member's questions raise. We could be looking at other recommendations from the Transportation Safety Board in the past, which I alluded to in my closing remarks.

There is an opportunity here for us to collate and bring together the important good energies, which have already been expended to see how we can improve, and come up with a much more coherent and comprehensive approach.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, given that we do not know much about the contents of the hazardous material generally referred to as diluent, I have been doing some research into this. The hon. minister is telling us in her speech that we can ship oil safely by supertanker, but none of the current proposals for shipping Canadian fossil fuels to other countries actually deal with shipping oil. They all deal with shipping something called bitumen, which is not flowable and has to be mixed with something called diluent.

Government Orders

For example, the proposal by Enbridge called the northern gateway would bring supertankers up the B.C. coastline loaded with this diluent that it buys from the Middle East. It is off-loaded at Kitimat and then sent through a twinned pipeline to northern Alberta where it would be mixed with bitumen instead of upgrading it and refining it in Alberta. It is mixed with this diluent material, which is essentially a petroleum distillate called naphtha, which is mixed with benzene and which I have also discovered is mixed with butane. We do not actually know the chemical composition of diluent because it is more of a trade name. It is a commonplace term. It does not have a scientific meaning. It is definitely toxic. It goes two ways. If we were to allow this monstrous scheme to proceed, we would first ship it in, mix the bitumen in, and ship it out through a pipeline. We have no idea what is in those pipelines or in those railcars as the tragedy at Lac-Mégantic with this Bakken crude showed us.

I would ask my friend for any comments with respect to what he has been thinking in terms of whether we really know what is in those pipelines.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, there is clearly a debate about what is or is not and what the effects would be of this diluted bitumen with respect to pipelines. The debate is raging when it comes to existing pipelines, for example, when it comes to the question of Line 9.

I have a lot of constituents in my riding of Ottawa South who live just on the fringe of the existing location for the reversal of the flow of Line 9 from Sarnia to Montreal. They have some really serious questions about whether or not a 35- or 36-year-old pipeline can withstand some of the toxicity the member alludes to with respect to this new product that is going to be flowing through it. The pipeline company assures us that the science is complete in this regard. I am not a scientist but there is one thing I know about science and that is that science is never complete.

There is a real opportunity here for us to hear more from experts at committee to find out whether or not we have a good handle on the type of diluent that is being used, the potential noxious effects, what happens if there is a spill, and what the effect would be with respect to the acidity and corrosiveness of pipelines. There are a lot of important questions that we should be asking as responsible legislators. The government has a majority at committee. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the government to make sure it calls the right experts so that we can actually hear the evidence.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have been talking about this for some time now and there are some grave concerns with what the bill would do.

Does my Liberal colleague not think this bill is a bit too limited? On the fact that the Conservatives actually rejected the NDP's proposal to broaden the scope of the bill, does the member really think they would be open to some amendments?

We have not seen a government that is making real comprehensive changes to protect our coasts. Could he elaborate a little as to whether he believes the government is really being upfront about what it is trying to do here?

● (1335)

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the question of the ability to amend any bill brought forward by the government, my answer is that there is always hope.

There is always hope that the government might see fit to leave the sloganeering aside sometimes. The title of the bill is "safeguarding Canada's seas and skies act". I hope the person who devised that slogan got a bonus, because that is not what the bill would do at all, but I suspect it is great marketing.

If the members of the Conservative caucus could see fit to leave that kind of stuff aside for a while, maybe we as legislators could come up with something to help improve the situation.

With respect to my colleague's question, there is always hope. There is an opportunity for all of us to bring amendments to bear to try to improve legislation for Canadians. If that is not why we are here, then why are here?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at this very moment, the oil spilled in the latest derailment is still burning. We are well aware of what happened with the tragedy at Lac-Mégantic this summer. There is no point in revisiting this disaster and rubbing salt on the wound—these people have suffered enough.

Does my colleague think that what happened today is trivial and insignificant compared to all other threats facing Canadians? These rail cars travel along rivers and lakes all across the country. I wonder what my colleague thinks about that.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important not to underestimate the risks involved. At the same time, there is no need to exaggerate them. In Canada a lot of products are moved by rail and this is done very safely.

As I mentioned in my presentation, it is important to remember that the percentage of oil transportation by rail is increasing rapidly in Canada—largely because the Conservatives favour rail to avoid the complexity of the regulatory systems in place in Canada. These systems may be complicated, but there is a good reason for that, namely to help protect Canadians and our land.

[*English*]

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off my remarks by congratulating the minister on her new post. I should also mention I will be sharing my time with the member for Western Arctic.

The minister talked about developing a world-class tanker safety regime for marine transport. She talked about job creation. She also mentioned that she would reach out to groups on the west coast that were concerned about marine safety. I would like to touch on those three things in my remarks and perhaps point out a few other measures she should take into consideration when thinking about the bill.

Government Orders

First, if the minister is serious about developing a world-class tanker traffic and marine safety system she should think about reversing the cut that was made to the Kitsilano Coast Guard station, which was shut down, as well as the proposed marine communications and traffic services centres, the MCTS. I am speaking specifically with respect to British Columbia, after a huge public outcry on the west coast regarding the shut down of the Kitsilano Coast Guard station and the planned cuts to these safety centres.

I want to specifically talk about the Kitsilano Coast Guard station. This Coast Guard station has been recognized as playing a significant role in marine safety. In the last two decades in Vancouver, one of the busiest ports in the country, it has played a critical role in saving lives. It is estimated that the closure of the station will now double response times. As members know, in emergency situations time means safety. It means saving lives. Therefore, when we are talking about the doubling of response times because of the closure of the station, I really have to question if the minister is serious about developing a world-class marine safety system.

The Conservative government's short-sighted cuts to the Kitsilano Coast Guard station will put British Columbians at greater risk. The Kitsilano station is one of the busiest stations in the country. This cut will unnecessarily increase risk to British Columbians. The Coast Guard is essential for marine safety on B.C.'s coast and the action by the Conservatives who shut down not only the Kitsilano Coast Guard station but the marine communication and transport safety centres across B.C., and that is very alarming.

We have heard a lot from many groups that have spoken out about this cut and the risk to this. However, it does not seem that the government is listening. Therefore, I am asking the new minister if she will actually listen.

This was one of the busiest stations in the country. Over 300 distress calls went into this station a year. It is no longer there.

I will read what the Vancouver fire chief said about this closure. There were some actions by the government to fill in the blanks of what was left by the Kits Coast Guard station.

He states:

The temporary seasonal services announced for the harbour are no comparison to the professionally trained and equipped officers of the Coast Guard. This closure has put the safety of our harbour and waterways at risk.

This is alarming coming from the Vancouver fire chief when talking about the closure of this station.

The third point I raised was outreach. The minister said that she was willing to talk to and reach out to groups on the west coast. I will come back to that and ask specifically for her to talk to certain groups.

● (1340)

Let me first turn to tanker traffic off Canada's west coast. This is a critical issue in British Columbia as it is in Canada. Specifically looking at the north coast of Canada, British Columbia, I have a private member's bill that looks at banning tanker traffic off B.C.'s north coast.

There is a reason for that and there is a reason why other members have called for a ban on tanker traffic off the west coast. These are treacherous waters, with huge waves, the wind and the unpredictability of the weather systems that roll in. It is also an amazing marine ecosystem. These are reasons why we have to be extremely careful as to how much we want to open up that coast for marine traffic.

It is very important that we look at the safety of the men and women who are operating these large tankers, or vessels or fishing vessels that traverse our seas. I point specifically to the *Queen of the North*. That is a perfect example of why we need to have increased safety and our standards as high as possible so we can ensure the officers who traverse our seas in large ships are safe. The *Queen of the North*, which sank off B.C.'s north coast, is a prime example of just how treacherous these waters can be and just how important it is to have high safety standards.

I also mention the ocean ecosystem specifically in this area. I think many Canadians and people around the world know of the *Exxon Valdez* spill. That caused irreparable harm to the marine ecosystem on the north coast. The impact was felt for years. In fact, some say there are still impacts from that spill today. It just takes one spill or one accident to make a difference in the lives of men and women, of the officers, whether it is a fishing vessel, a large ship or even some of the recreational vessels used by men, women and families using these waters. We need to have the best safety and the best emergency response that we possibly can when it comes to dealing with the ecosystem in the north or the treacherous waters caused by weather in that area.

Canada is definitely not prepared for a major oil spill, especially of bitumen, which is what is being proposed by the government across northeastern British Columbia with the pipeline project by Enbridge, which would put an 1,100 kilometre twin pipeline to traverse bitumen, a very heavy tar-like substance. If that is filled into a tanker and there is a spill off the north coast, I cannot imagine what kind of damage that would do to our marine ecosystem. I also point out that we are not prepared to respond to a spill of that nature. This is a heavy substance. It is not something with which we are familiar in terms of response and cleanup, and B.C. is woefully unprepared for a major oil spill.

We know this because we have not even done a risk analysis of the closure of the Kitsilano Coast Guard station to the MCTS stations off the west coast and the impact that will have on marine safety. I submitted an access to information request and this is the response I received in a letter dated May 10, 2013, "The Canadian Coast Guard has advised that there is no stand-alone risk analysis document". This is unacceptable. We need to have a stand-alone risk analysis that can be vetted and shared with all parliamentarians and interest groups concerned about marine safety. It is unacceptable that we do not have a risk analysis document.

Government Orders

•(1345)

The minister mentioned she would reach out to the groups on the west coast concerned about marine safety. I hope she consults with the Province of British Columbia, the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver police and fire chiefs, the Jericho Sailing Centre, and so many others that are concerned about marine safety. In fact, if she does consult with them, she will find that they unanimously want the Kitsilano Coast Guard centre open, that they want the MCTS stations reopened, and that they want the reverses that the government has made in terms of the cuts to fisheries and oceans and the Coast Guard changed. They want to see an increase in resources and jobs, not the reverse.

I challenge the minister. If she is serious about a world class marine transportation safety system, she should start with reopening the Kitsilano Coast Guard station.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his remarks. Of course, he is also aware of the closure of the marine rescue centre in St. John's and the attempt to close one in Quebec as well.

I want to talk about oil spill response capabilities. Back in February, the environment commissioner talked about Canada's lack of preparedness for a major offshore oil spill on its east coast and warned of a potential 300% jump in tanker traffic on the west coast. In June the B.C. environment officials warned the minister that even a moderate oil spill in British Columbia would overwhelm provincial resources and that industry requirements of Transport Canada are deficient in scope and scale.

I wonder why the minister is tweaking this bill and not doing a consultation across the country to find out what is actually needed to ensure that our tanker traffic, coastal communities, and waters are safe from the dangers that even a moderate oil spill would cause.

•(1350)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague very eloquently points out specifics of the reasons we are inadequately prepared for even a moderate oil spill response. I would add to the type of substance that is being proposed; a heavy tar-like substance, bitumen, is being proposed to be carried on these tankers.

My colleague mentioned a 300% increase in tankers off the south coast. If some of these projects go through, we could see the addition of 800 to 900 tankers a year off the south coast and over 300 tankers off the north coast. We do not have the resources to deal with even one spill, let alone the numerous spills that could occur from such a catastrophe. I mentioned the *Exxon Valdez* in my remarks, which was just one incident; there have been many incidents around the world.

Let us not make that happen in British Columbia or in Canada. Let us make a serious effort to consult with all stakeholders. I welcome the minister's input and I challenge her to get that input from the many interested stakeholders in marine traffic safety on the west coast.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is worthy to note that managing our waterways is critically important to all Canadians. When we talk about the waterways, we are talking about more than just the east coast, the west coast, up north, and

Churchill. Even inland, there are many different issues that our waterways bring.

When we take a look at the legislation, two things come to mind. First, it is inadequate in that it does not do enough. Second, to what degree was there adequate consultation with the different stakeholders?

I wonder if the member might want to comment on those two specific points. From an economic, social, and environmental point of view, they are so critically important to Canada as a whole. Why does the member believe, or does he believe, that the government has fallen short in what it could have done within this legislation?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, that is a critical question. The government should be taking a serious look at all the impacts to marine safety. Yes, there is an obvious focus on the west and east coasts and the Arctic, but we need to look at all the waterways that will be affected by marine shipping right across the country.

We need to look at the MCTS stations in St. John's, St. Anthony, Saint John, Rivière-au-Renard, Montreal, Thunder Bay, Vancouver, Tofino, Comox, and Inuvik. These are centres that will be affected right across the country. Therefore, it is important that the government consider all the impacts and do a full and comprehensive look if it is really serious about developing a world-class safety system.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak to the bill. I will stick with the Marine Liability Act amendments, because they would have a direct impact upon my riding in the Northwest Territories.

It takes me back to seven years ago when I first came to Parliament and proposed that we change the motto from "from sea to sea" to "from sea to sea to sea" because the importance of the Arctic waters is increasing dramatically. Within those Arctic waters we need protection. We need to take care of them, and it is a complex issue.

We have in front of us the Marine Liability Act, which in some ways is the end state of protection of waters. The beginning of protection of waters lies with regulation, and right now at the Arctic Council we should be dealing with Arctic shipping regulations as internationally accepted. That is the body that can deal with that issue. In that way we could create regulations that would allow proper vessels to enter into the Arctic. Those are things that we should be doing right now. Those are things that should have the highest priority with the current government and with other Arctic governments.

Statements by Members

However, that is not the case. Our environment minister, the chair of the Arctic Council, has chosen to highlight economic development as the main ticket in the Arctic right now, while we need to work on regulations that could protect the Arctic and could set the stage for the responsible use of the Arctic in the future.

Let us look at some of the ways that the Arctic is being proposed for use.

We are going to be shipping oil to Churchill, Manitoba, by tankers, through parts of the Northwest Passage. These are uncharted waters. These are waters that are heavily influenced by moving pack ice. What kind of regulations do we have in place to deal with that? What kinds of policies?

The second stage in most efforts to ensure protection of the environment is good policy, meaning we invest in the right places and make the right decisions in government to slow down the frequency of accidents and try to avoid oil spills. This is the second phase of any protection of waters.

The third phase is infrastructure. Right across the country we have heard that infrastructure is sorely lacking. In fact, in the Arctic we have no infrastructure for taking care of large-scale oil spills. In fact, the science does not exist today to remove oil from ice-filled waters.

What we do have in this situation is a failure to act in a sequential manner to provide protection to waters. Instead, laudably, we are putting liability forward as part of our primary objective. Whatever happens, we are going to ensure someone pays for some of it. That is the goal of the government right now.

However, where is the planning? Where is the planning that actually talks about reducing the potential for accidents that cause liability to companies and upset the system and destroy the environment? Where is that work? That is the most important work here. That is the work that would actually protect waters.

What we have is a situation in which we are bringing forward liability as the answer, and it is simply not adequate.

It is typical of the government to look at simple solutions, especially cost. Concern for taxpayers is always laudable, but without planning, we are really putting the taxpayer in a position to have even greater losses when liability cannot be covered by the insurance claims that companies are allowed to make.

•(1355)

How is that a sensible and practical approach to improving the safety on our three oceans? It is not there. It is not there because we are picking the last piece of the puzzle rather than outlining the whole picture of what is required to protect the waters of Canada's three oceans.

When I asked the minister a question about the scope of this bill, it seemed that she did not understand it clearly. However, it is pretty clear to me that the scope of this bill covers all of our waterways and the potential impact of ships on any rivers that reach the oceans. It perhaps has a greater significance in the Great Lakes area than in northern Canada, but these are all issues that we need to look at and understand.

All across the north—

•(1400)

The Deputy Speaker: The member will have four minutes remaining to complete his speech when we resume debate on this bill.

Statements by members, the hon. member for Calgary East.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CELEBRATIONS IN ALBERTA

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this was a challenging summer in Calgary.

The floods impacted southern Alberta, including the communities of Inglewood and Riverbend in my riding. Immediately after the flood, Calgary hosted the greatest outdoor show, the Calgary Stampede. The flood had extensively damaged the grounds, but the hard work of the Stampede board and the volunteers ensured a successful Calgary Stampede.

The floods did not dampen the celebration at GlobalFest. GlobalFest was held in my riding, and this year the Minister of Canadian Heritage was there. It was named in the 2000 top 100 events by the American Bus Association, and it attracted over 100,000 people this year. Each year multiple countries compete, through incredible pyro-musical displays as well as showcasing their culture through many pavilions that are set up during the five days of competition.

The civic, provincial and federal authorities all rose to the challenges of the flooding. Most importantly, residents of southern Alberta showed remarkable resilience. They all deserve a big thanks.

* * *

IMPACT AWARDS

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Dr. Marguerite MacKenzie, a linguist from Memorial University of Newfoundland, on receiving one of the prestigious Impact Awards for 2013, which was presented by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Dr. MacKenzie was recognized for her work over the past 40 years on the Innu language, which is spoken by over 18,000 Innu in Labrador and Quebec. The Innu language project, led by Dr. MacKenzie, was a partnership involving several universities, together with Quebec and Labrador Innu educational institutes.

It has produced the first dictionary in Innu, English, and French, and is an impressive volume that includes more than 27,000 words. This dictionary, together with training and school curriculum materials, will be an invaluable tool, in both preserving Innu language and culture and promoting the advancement of the Innu people within Canada.

Statements by Members

I ask all honourable members to join in congratulating Dr. MacKenzie and all those who collaborated in this project.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Halloween is approaching, and Albertans fear a repeat of scary national energy program thinking.

The NDP wants to suck the life out of us with a \$21 billion carbon tax. Those socialist bloodsuckers want to impale us with a gas tax hike of 10¢ a litre.

Then there is this evil Liberal name that haunts us still and wants to hand out drugs to our kids. This ghost of the NDP wants to acquire heroin with taxpayer money and inject it into the veins of Canada's children.

What is not scary is our Conservative government's recent trade agreement with the EU. This will benefit Albertans by increasing the demand for agriculture products, especially opening the door for our barley farmers. It will also provide better access to European clothing and many other products, at a reasonable price.

While the opposition parties continue with their scary policies, our Conservative government continues to work toward improving Canada's economy.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party of Canada has been calling for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls for years, echoing not only the urging of loved ones, but aboriginal leaders, the international community and all of the provincial and territorial premiers.

[*Translation*]

To bring this tragic situation to a close, a national public inquiry needs to be conducted and we need a national plan of action to mobilize departmental and administrative resources.

[*English*]

Today I would like to take the opportunity to commend the courage of the Conservative member for Yukon for standing up for his constituents by publicly calling for a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

Canadians from coast to coast to coast have told us that they are tired of sending Conservative MPs to Ottawa to represent their issues when all they get back are messages from the Prime Minister to their communities.

The member for Yukon's refusal to be silenced by the PMO should be applauded. I call on his colleagues across the aisle to follow his example and tell the Prime Minister to finally listen and call a national public inquiry now.

● (1405)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Friday's announcement that Canada reached a free trade agreement with the EU is great news for Canadian agriculture. Any reduction and elimination of tariffs opens a door of real opportunity for our producers.

Canadian farmers have long been leaders. They are determined, innovative and produce great products. They have always been quick to recognize opportunities and will, without question, seize this one.

However, it is regrettable that this momentous occasion is marred by the opposition's total lack of faith in our farmers. Their negativity and doomsday pronouncements are an embarrassment. Once again they show no confidence in our producers.

Our government knows that Canadian farmers from every sector can compete with the best if they are just given a level playing field. This is exactly what the government is providing. We are going to celebrate this tremendous achievement. We invite the other parties to join us in supporting Canadian agriculture as well.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MIA ANDERSON

Ms. Éloïse Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise in the House today to congratulate Mia Anderson, an extraordinary and talented author from Portneuf. She won the 2013 Montreal International Poetry Prize for her poem titled *The Antenna*.

This biennial prize was created in 2011 and is one of the most coveted in the literary world. For the 2013 competition, poets from 70 countries around the world submitted nearly 2,000 works in the hope of taking home the \$20,000 prize.

[*English*]

This year's head judge, the poet Don Paterson, said:

"The Antenna" is that rare thing—a conceit which has the good taste not to outstay its welcome, but which also makes us think again about its subject [or spiritual receivership] in an entirely new way.

However, winning this coveted prize is only one of Mia Anderson's many impressive accomplishments. She was also a familiar voice on CBC Radio dramas, a successful actress as well as a prolific author.

[*Translation*]

Congratulations, Ms. Anderson, and thank you for putting authors from Portneuf in the spotlight.

Statements by Members

[English]

KOREAN WAR VETERANS

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 2013 marks the 60th anniversary of the end of the Korean War. It is also the Year of the Korean War Veteran, and it is our duty to pay tribute to the more than 26,000 brave Canadian men and women who served in South Korea fighting for our freedom. We have to also celebrate the sacrifice made by the 516 brave Canadians who gave their lives during that war.

This weekend I had the opportunity to speak at the opening of the Korean War exhibit at the Colchester County museum. It is a tremendous celebration of the sacrifice that the veterans made. There were many of them there. We appreciate their contribution. I would also like to recognize the efforts of Elinor Mahar and the staff at the museum for the amount of work they put into a tremendous exhibit. I encourage all the people of my constituency to stop in and see it.

Also, we have to give tribute to those veterans and those who lost their lives during this tremendous time in our country's history. Let us not forget their sacrifice.

* * *

NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on October 10, 2013, the world took notice of something that we as Canadians have known for the past 40 years: Alice Munro is a great author. She is the first Canadian female author to win the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature, and only the 13th woman to have ever won the award since its inception 112 years ago.

Alice was born in Wingham, Ontario, and now calls Clinton home. She has published more than a dozen collections of short stories, most of which focus on women living in rural southwestern Ontario.

The people of Huron—Bruce are immensely proud of her accomplishments, and I encourage all Canadians to pick up one of her books and have a read. Alice published her first collection of short stories in 1967 and has continued writing acclaimed Canadian works for the past four decades.

Congratulations to Alice and all Canadian writers, as this is a testament to the skills and the foresight of our heritage. I speak for all of us in this House when I thank her for representing Canada with such a passion and insight. We wish her all the best, in health, spirit and mind.

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GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Union of B.C. Municipalities for passing a motion to make B.C. a GE-free area with respect to all plants and animals. This is a very important statement, especially when it concerns the potential release into the environment of GE alfalfa or GE Arctic Apple.

The so-called “coexistence plan” for alfalfa is currently being developed to pave the way for Forage Genetics International to sell genetically modified alfalfa in Canada. Coexistence does not work

and GE alfalfa will contaminate other crops. A farmer's export alfalfa shipment in Washington state was rejected for this reason. Alfalfa is used as a pasture and hay for animal feed as well as for nitrogen fixation in the soil. It is also manufactured into pellets for export.

The livelihood of both organic and conventional farmers is under threat. I urge the federal government to respect the wishes of B.C. municipalities and farmers across Canada and prohibit the release of GE alfalfa in our country.

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● (1410)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government and our Prime Minister are pleased today to be able to deliver for Canadians the Canada–Europe free trade agreement. This historic trade agreement will provide our producers with access to a market of 500 million people. It will be a tremendous boost to our country.

For our farmers, CETA is a huge win. It will remove tariffs on key agricultural exports, including our world-class beef and pork, wheat, soybeans, canola, grains, fresh and frozen vegetables, and countless other products. Even Canadian maple syrup will finally become duty free.

As we move to ratify this historic breakthrough for Canada, it is very disappointing to see the New Democrats once again cave in to special interests and refuse to support this progressive agreement.

On our side of the House, we strongly endorse CETA. It will create thousands of jobs and provide economic opportunity for all Canadians.

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[Translation]

YOLETTE CAFÉ

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to use my time here today to pay tribute to all the volunteers who dedicate themselves to the well-being of their fellow citizens.

In my riding of Honoré-Mercier, one such person is Yvette Café, a single mother of five who, despite her precarious situation, has been volunteering for 27 years. One example of her vision and dedication is the Centre d'entraide aux familles de Rivière-des-Prairies, which she founded.

The Corporation de développement communautaire de Rivière-des-Prairies recently honoured Ms. Café with an award, demonstrating her community's gratitude for her work.

Today I wish to extend my sincere thanks to Ms. Café and to all those like her who make our community a more caring, supportive place. I hope Ms. Café will inspire others to do the same.

*Statements by Members***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the free trade agreement with Europe is a golden opportunity for the forestry sector.

This agreement will result in the immediate removal of European Union tariffs on forestry rights, which will make them more competitive and create conditions that promote job creation in this key industry.

Unfortunately, we know that the NDP position is identical to that of its provincial wing, Québec solidaire, and that it is opposed to this agreement.

Our Conservative government supports trade and job creation. The NDP bows down before the unions and the Liberals prefer the drug trade.

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[English]

CLAYTON GLENN

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Clayton Glenn was a pioneer and innovator whose remarkable career spanned the most dynamic period of Canada's airline industry. He was, to quote his friend Rémi Lafrenière, "an active participant, indeed more often than not the principal player, in just about every increment made in the aviation industry".

After graduating from university, Clayton Glenn joined a fledgling airline called Trans-Canada Airlines where he worked on the North Star, taking a good airplane from the manufacturer and making it better. He was then seconded to work on the Avro jetliner and later designed improvements to a succession of well-known aircraft for the national carrier.

I was very honoured when Mr. Glenn shared his written memoirs with me. His account of his life in the airline industry is a gift to Canada, a treasure trove for historians. They illuminate key decisions by both industry and government that shaped today's air passenger sector.

To Elaine, his wife of 63 years, and daughter Holly, son Raymond, and their families, we offer our deepest condolences. They have lost a husband, father and grandfather. We have lost a great Canadian.

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●(1415)

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under Elections Canada rules, candidates for the leadership of a political party are required to settle unpaid debts no later than 18 months after the vote. For the NDP, that deadline passed on September 24, yet several NDP leadership candidates are still in debt.

It is an offence under the Canada Elections Act to wilfully use loans to circumvent donation limits. Elections Canada, of course, has the power under the existing act to investigate or recommend charges against anyone who has done so.

NDP leadership candidates from 2012 have hundreds of thousands of dollars in illegal loans.

Elections Canada can and should investigate whether NDP candidates used these loans to circumvent donation limits. The agency has certainly taken much more drastic actions over much smaller amounts. Elections Canada must apply the law and its discretion under the law equally and fairly to all parties.

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[Translation]

ETHICS

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Mike Duffy's lawyer just held a long press conference during which he revealed a lot about the Conservative Senate scandal.

For example, he revealed that Nigel Wright's lawyer is in possession of documents that allegedly implicate the Prime Minister directly.

He also revealed that the Prime Minister's Office allegedly threatened to throw Mike Duffy out of the Senate if he did not follow their plan, which included Nigel Wright giving a \$90,000 cheque to Mike Duffy.

The Prime Minister's Office wrote out talking points for Duffy when the scandal broke. According to Nigel Wright, a number of senators have living arrangements similar to Mike Duffy's.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister's Office allegedly ordered Duffy not to co-operate with Deloitte in its review of his expenses.

All of this information directly contradicts everything the Conservatives have been saying since this whole thing started.

Enough with the cover-up. It is time for the Prime Minister to end his silence and tell the truth.

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[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP came out against the Canada-Europe trade agreement. The member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl said, "[It] will not fix our broken fishery — it will give it away". The leader said, "There's going to be a hell of a price to pay".

With 500 million potential customers, the EU is the world's largest importer of fish and seafood. On day one of the agreement, 96% of the current tariffs being levied on Canada's world-class fish and seafood will be eliminated. The agreement is a huge win for farmers and ranchers, with unprecedented access to delicious Canadian beef and pork. It is a win for Canadian consumers, who will be able to buy more goods at cheaper prices.

The NDP's position on the Canada-Europe trade agreement is the same as its provincial wing, Québec solidaire. We support free trade, the NDP supports no trade and the Liberals support the drug trade.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***ETHICS**

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Prime Minister thinks it was business as usual. Friday we posed straightforward questions and, again, Conservatives refused to provide details about their role in the Senate-PMO expense scandal.

Mike Duffy's lawyer today spoke at length and provided lots of new details. According to him, documents from the PMO outlined how this involved "cash for repayment".

Could the Prime Minister confirm that his office threatened to kick Mike Duffy out of the Senate if he did not go along with their scheme?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that we expect all parliamentarians to respect the letter and spirit of any rules regarding expenses and if they do not respect that, they can expect there to be consequences and accountability for their actions.

I will just say that I have noticed, obviously, NDP members' instant opposition to the Canada-Europe trade deal. I guess the reason we see them asking these kinds of questions is because on the big issues they are wrong.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again, no clear answer.

Mike Duffy's lawyer says that he is in possession of documents that implicate the Prime Minister. Is the PMO really going to wait for Mr. Duffy's lawyer to release this evidence? Why will the Prime Minister's Office not release all documents to the public relating to this matter?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we have given all information to those authorities that are looking into this matter and we have been very clear. If anybody does not respect the rules, he or she will be held accountable. That is the standard Canadians expect and that is what we will continue to do.

• (1420)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again, no clear answer.

The lawyer for former Conservative Senator Mike Duffy just said that the Prime Minister's Office coached Mr. Duffy and provided him with lines for dealing with the media over the repayment of his inappropriate expenses. Could the government confirm that this is the case?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we have made very clear here today and before that we expect all senators, all members of Parliament, to respect rules regarding expenses in both letter and spirit. If they do not do so, there will be consequences and there will be accountability. That is the position of the government and that is how we will continue to act going forward.

[Translation]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in December 2012, the Prime Minister's chief of staff stated that several senators had arrangements similar to Mike Duffy's.

Will the Prime Minister tell us specifically who these senators are?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has answered all the questions on this matter.

In addition, Mr. Wright has taken full responsibility for his actions. We will continue to work with the authorities. We have brought forward a number of reforms to the Senate, but the NDP has consistently voted against them.

When they had the opportunity to call for changes to the Senate, they called for six new seats. I would call that a flip-flop.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, did the Prime Minister's Office instruct Mike Duffy not to co-operate with Deloitte in the audit of his expenses? If so, why?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has answered all the questions on this matter.

[English]

Honestly, NDP members actually have absolutely no leg to stand on. When they had a chance to demand reform in the Senate, what did they ask for? They asked for six seats of their own in the Senate. That is the reform they asked for.

What Canadians are talking about right now is hope and opportunity. It is the same hope and opportunity that we are seeing through a new trade agreement with Europe: 500 million new people open to Canadian small business people and to our farmers. That is good news for the economy. That is good news for all regions of the country.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the ethical scandal engulfing the Prime Minister the crucial issue is that secret \$90,000 deal between Mike Duffy and Nigel Wright.

On June 5, the Prime Minister told the House that Mr. Wright acted entirely alone saying, "Those were his decisions. They were not communicated to me or to members of my office". However, the RCMP says that is false. It says that at least three PMO staffers were informed: van Hemmen, Woodcock and Perrin, plus certain Conservative senators.

Now that he has been contradicted by the police, does the Prime Minister wish to amend his evidence?

[Translation]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I already answered this question several months ago. I answered based on the information I had at that time.

[English]

Of course, the reality is that these actions were the responsibility of Mr. Wright. Mr. Wright has accepted full responsibility for his actions, as he should.

Oral Questions

In the meantime, the government is, of course, focused on making sure we create jobs and growth for Canadians, including the biggest trade agreement that we have ever had, the trade agreement that we concluded this week in Europe.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians would appreciate a focus on ethics. The Prime Minister says there are no PMO emails or other written materials in his office or anywhere in his government that relate in any way to the wrongful \$90,000 Wright-Duffy deal, but again, the Prime Minister has been contradicted by the police. They have hundreds of pages of emails and a binder full of documentation, including that infamous February 20 email, which we learned today was indeed in the PMO's possession, specifically Mr. Woodcock's.

Does the government still have confidence in Mr. Woodcock, and does the government approve of his actions?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Wright, by his own admission, is solely responsible for the decisions that he took. He has accepted full responsibility, and my office has provided authorities with all available information.

Of course, as I have said, we have heard all of these questions before. In the meantime, Canadians are focused on the economy, on jobs. That is what we will continue to do. We have the biggest trade deal in history, and we are going to move forward creating jobs and growth for Canadians.

• (1425)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the behaviour that landed Mike Duffy and the Prime Minister in their ethical scandal was originally discussed by Duffy with the Prime Minister's leading senators—LeBreton, Tkachuk, Stewart Olsen—and then Nigel Wright and others, and they all said okay, but when it all blew up in the government's face, an elaborate cover-up was then orchestrated by the PMO.

How is it credible for the Prime Minister to deny all knowledge, when every important person in his entourage was involved? Does he think people will believe that in Brandon and Provencher?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, as has been said before, Mr. Wright has accepted full responsibility for his decision in these matters. The position of the government, as I have said repeatedly, is that we expect all parliamentarians to respect rules regarding expenditure, not just the letter but the spirit of those rules, and if they do not respect those rules, they will suffer the consequences and be held accountable.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Chris Woodcock in the Prime Minister's Office said, and I quote, "We have been working on lines and a scenario for you that would cover all of your concerns, including cash for repayment."

Can the Prime Minister's Office confirm whether it was informed of this arrangement, and if so, when?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Prime Minister has answered all the questions on this matter.

[English]

What we are really excited about is the fact that Canada just signed a historic free trade agreement with the European Union. The members opposite should really be excited about that too, because in every region of this country, this means hope and opportunity. It means new jobs. It means access to a market of 500 million people. It means prosperity. Eighty thousand net new jobs is what they should be talking about, because that is what Canadians are excited about and that is what they are talking about.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): No, Mr. Speaker, not all of these questions have been answered. The government needs to stop trying to change the subject to its own advantage.

Mike Duffy's lawyer says he has documents in his possession that directly tie the Prime Minister to the Senate expense scandal and the Wright-Duffy affair.

Will the Prime Minister's Office make those documents public?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has answered all the questions on this matter. We are continuing to work with authorities on it. Mr. Wright, at the same time, has taken full responsibility for his actions, as he should.

We are continuing to focus on jobs, growth, and economic prosperity in all regions of this country, because that is what Canadians want us to do—that is what they elected us to do—unleashing the potential of our small businesses, our medium businesses, and our large job creators so that they can seize on all of the advantages that a trade agreement with Europe has to offer.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is another question that remains unanswered. Mike Duffy's lawyer has said that his client was instructed by the Prime Minister's Office not to comply with Deloitte's requests.

Is Duffy the only senator who received those instructions?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have put on the table many reforms to the Senate. We think that the Senate should be reformed or abolished. It is something we restated in our throne speech.

Oral Questions

In the meantime, we are moving ahead with bringing in exciting new proposals, such as the Canada-EU free trade agreement. It is one of the biggest deals, in fact, it is the biggest trade deal, that this country has ever signed. The New Democrats have absolutely no opinion other than the fact that they do not support it. They do not support the jobs that come along with it. They do not think that our small, medium, and large businesses can compete with the rest of the world. We do, and that is why we signed this historic agreement.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week we offered the Prime Minister's latest spokesman a chance to correct the record on the Prime Minister's misleading statements in the House last June that Nigel Wright acted alone. In light of the new revelations that have come out today regarding the extent of the involvement of the PMO, will the Prime Minister's aide perhaps tell us, for example, how many lawyers from the PMO were involved in setting up the secret deal with Mike Duffy?

• (1430)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, where have we come? The NDP has put gerrymander in charge of ethics. The Liberals have a leader whose stage handlers are so afraid to have speak on any topic that they have muzzled him until 2015.

Thank goodness Canadians elected a strong, stable, national Conservative majority government, led by the best Prime Minister in the world, flanked by a Minister of Finance who has won awards, with the strongest cabinet in Canadian history, and Conservative members of Parliament working all over the country to hope for hope, jobs, and economic prosperity. Those are the reasons I represent.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, well, that was bizarre. I am glad to think they can at least still show some gallows humour.

In December 2012, the chief of staff to the Prime Minister told Mike Duffy that they totally supported his spending claims. In February, this position was suddenly changed, when Mike Duffy was told by Nigel Wright that “we” have decided to sacrifice Duffy to appease the Conservative base.

Today let us ask a simple question. Do the Conservatives believe, with the Senate, that Mike Duffy was guilty of gross negligence, or do they believe that he was entitled to his entitlements and still believe that he is the victim of a smear?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will tell him what is bizarre. What is bizarre is a party that has lost 16 straight elections and still thinks that somehow raising billions of dollars in taxes on our small, medium, and large businesses is a good idea; that a \$21-billion carbon tax is a good idea; and that coming out against a free trade agreement that would open up a market of 500 million people to Canadian communities and to our job creators is a bad idea.

The NDP, on every single issue that matters, is against Canadians. Whether it is keeping communities safe, they are against it. We are for Canadians, and that is why we are moving forward.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remind my hon. colleague that we are talking about the

unprecedented investigation of the police into the office of a sitting Prime Minister. What we are looking at now is a document that shows that the Conservatives supported Mike Duffy's dubious claim that he was a resident of Prince Edward Island, and this was approved by Marjory LeBreton, the Conservative House leader, who sat in the caucus with the Prime Minister. Later, they told Mike Duffy they were going to kick him out of the Senate, because he did not meet the residency requirements.

It is a simple question. Did the then-leader of the government in the Senate clear these residency requirements with the Prime Minister? Who was told about them? Why did they think he was not eligible to sit in the Senate?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, so I can refresh the hon. member, we have answered and the Prime Minister has answered all the questions on this matter. We will continue to work with all the authorities with respect to this. Mr. Wright has accepted full responsibility for his actions in this matter.

I can understand why the NDP do not want to talk about the economy. It is because they know nothing about the economy. I know why they do not want to talk about jobs and economic growth. It is because it is another topic they know nothing about. When it comes to community safety, we know that they are not interested in that at all.

We are interested in what Canadians are talking about. That is jobs, hope, and economic prosperity, and we will get the job done.

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RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, speaking about safety, we have another train derailment, another fire, and another community evacuation, and yet unlike her American counterpart, the minister will not make the installation of an automatic braking system mandatory. She will not increase inspections. She will not tell municipalities what dangerous cargoes are coming through their neighbourhoods. Canadians deserve better rail safety.

When will the minister act and prevent future derailments and keep our neighbourhoods safe?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were very relieved this weekend to learn that there were no injuries involved in this incident. First responders are working with CN and the community in order to ensure that they are giving the best support they can to the incident.

Oral Questions

With respect to the specific question, I am puzzled, because our government issued emergency directives this summer, actually, and most recently issued a protective disclosure, as well, with respect to issues brought forth by the Transportation Safety Board. We will continue to work with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities on the information they say they need.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the rail transportation of oil has not just doubled or tripled; it has multiplied by 280, but the rules have never been changed.

The Lac-Mégantic tragedy reminded the government that it was asleep at the switch. The accident that occurred in Alberta over the weekend is yet another reminder of the urgent need to act, but practical measures have still not been taken. DOT-111 railcars are still being used and there is still no plan to phase them out. We need more inspections and better regulations to keep people safe.

When will this be done?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has acted very aggressively with respect to rail safety. We have hired more security. We have invested \$100 million in rail safety in this country. Even with all of that, it makes sense for us to work with shippers and to work with the rail industry and municipalities to determine where we can do better, and that is exactly what we are doing.

I would caution the members, too. Both this weekend's event and the event that happened in Lac-Mégantic need to be followed up and investigated by proper authorities, and we will wait for the recommendations.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2005 CN derailment dumped 700,000 litres of bunker C fuel into Lake Wabamun. The current rail disaster, shutting the main line and the highway in Alberta, is happening only a few kilometres from Lake Wabamun.

In just one year, the government has allowed a 3800% increase in dangerous rail traffic, with zero community notice and zero community consent. What is this, the Wild West? When will the government take its responsibilities for rail safety seriously?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the health and safety of Canadians is the top priority for our government. Indeed, that comes through, because most recently, Claude Dauphin, who is the president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, said:

The government's commitment to increase the safety of the transportation of dangerous goods, and to require shippers and railways to carry additional insurance, directly respond to calls from FCM's national rail safety working group.

Simply put, we are getting the job done.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is refusing to answer any questions

about the Wright-Duffy scandal. He denies knowing anything about the \$90,000 cheque even though other members of his office knew about it.

Does the Prime Minister really believe that the residents of Bourassa, where a byelection is being held, are going to buy that? Thank goodness Mike Duffy has finally started to talk. We are listening, Mr. Duffy.

When will the Prime Minister finally tell us what actually happened in this sordid scandal?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I already said, the Prime Minister has answered all the questions on this matter. Mr. Wright has accepted full responsibility for his actions.

Meanwhile, we have made many recommendations to reform the Senate, but the Liberals keep voting against all of these measures.

[English]

In particular, the Liberals fight for an institution that is so old it needs to be reformed, but they fight constantly for the status quo. When it comes to reforming the Senate, an elected Senate, they are against it. When it comes to accountability measures, they are against them. They should get on board.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's story on the Wright-Duffy affair has fallen apart. Canvassing yesterday in Toronto Centre showed it is clear that no one believes that the Prime Minister did not know about the \$90,000 cheque from Nigel Wright to Senator Mike Duffy.

Today we have learned that the Prime Minister's chief of staff provided assurances that his behaviour was acceptable, and that is why he gave him the \$90,000 to just try to make it go away.

When will the Prime Minister stop the cover-up and come clean with the people of Toronto Centre and all the people of Canada with the real, actual facts on this sordid Wright-Duffy affair?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Toronto Centre is the new finance critic for the Liberal Party because within their own party, the Liberals could not actually find a person who says, "Amen to new taxes".

We know the Liberals have two economic policies. The first is to find a way to tax illegal drugs. The second is to continue to have an advantage for Quebec in the Senate.

The people of Bourassa and Toronto Centre want the advantages that come with opening up a market of 500 million people to their products and their services, because in Bourassa and Toronto Centre and all over this country, when Canadians are given the opportunity to compete, they succeed.

•(1440)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past number of weeks I have talked to dozens of people from the ridings of Brandon—Souris and Provencher. They do not trust the Prime Minister. They do not believe that the Prime Minister knew nothing about the \$90,000 cheque from the chief of staff to Senator Duffy.

Today we learned that the Prime Minister's Office came up with the entire plan, not just the chief of staff.

My question to the Prime Minister is this: when will he stand up and be truthful to the residents of Brandon—Souris and Provencher ridings, and all Canadians?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): I am sure the 20 people who were at the nomination meeting appreciated that he talked to them, Mr. Speaker.

I do not often agree with the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Outremont. I do not agree, for instance, with the fact that he wants to tax our small businesses to death or bring in a \$21 billion carbon tax. I think that would drive business to its knees and it would kill our economy, but at least he has an opinion on something. At least his party can trust him to speak and has not muzzled him until 2015.

Unleash the leader. Let him speak—
[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unless they are living in a parallel universe, Canadians know that we welcomed news of a free trade agreement with the European Union, but we have yet to see the document. This morning, during a press conference, the minister said that the full text of the agreement would be released as soon as the draft was written.

A number of trade and industrial sectors are waiting on crucial answers to move ahead with their strategic planning. Can the minister tell us how long the public and we will have to wait to have access to the full text of the agreement?

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is truly an historic agreement and one that is reflected in the agreement in principle, signed by the Prime Minister and President Barroso last Friday.

All of the salient terms of the agreement are reflected in the summary documents that have been released to the public. We do not expect the legal stuff to change any of the outcomes reflected in those documents.

I would encourage the member to now begin promoting the tremendous benefits that this agreement will deliver for Canadians

Oral Questions

right across our country, for every sector of the economy and for every region of our country.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats are proud to stand up for Canadian jobs, and do you know who praised the NDP's balanced approach to trade? It was the employment minister. Perhaps he could brief the Prime Minister.

As with any agreement, we can only judge its value by its details. Like us, Canadians want to see the agreement and judge it for themselves.

Now that we have heard the minister's hype, could he please inform the House when he will share the actual text of the agreement with Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is some kind of balance over there in the NDP. Its members oppose the trade deal with Europe, they oppose trade with the United States, and they even opposed the Auto Pact when it was signed. By the way, their line now is that somehow they are the only people in the country who have no idea of what is in the agreement.

The agreement is strongly supported by Canadians. It is a historic agreement that Canadians have long wanted. The NDP represents a century that is long past.

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FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are the 21st century. I think it is pretty easy to get a text to members of Parliament to know what is actually in the agreement.

•(1445)

[Translation]

I want to talk about our businesses. Businesses have had to face increasing credit card fees, which are then passed on to the consumer. There was nothing about that in the Speech from the Throne, just an acknowledgement that Canadians are getting gouged.

When will the minister offer up a real solution instead of opting for voluntary measures that are clearly not working?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that Canadian consumers deserve to know the real costs when they pay either with debit cards or credit cards. Given all the aspects—the consumer groups, the industry, the retail groups—it was not easy, but we came up with an agreement, an accord.

It seems to me that voluntary is better than forced when Canadians can come together and come to an agreement, including the consumer groups, and it is working.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, retailers and consumers alike were hoping for more in the throne speech about making life more affordable, but the speech had no such plan.

It is not just the NDP asking for action. The Retail Council of Canada is also saying the throne speech fell short. The so-called voluntary code is toothless. We are still seeing things like merchant credit card fees increase. These fees are hurting Canadian businesses.

Oral Questions

When will the minister commit to mandatory regulations to help small businesses and reduce these high-cost fees?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working, as we said in the Speech from the Throne, to require more disclosure to consumers on transactions, especially on exchange fees, which are a significant challenge.

I met with the Consumers' Association of Canada. We have had further discussions on the subject. We think that there are some improvements that can be made, but we have already required clear and simple information on credit card statements, we have banned unsolicited credit card cheques, we have ensured prepaid credit cards never expire, and more.

Unfortunately, the NDP voted against each and every one of these measures.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister announced that Canada has reached a historic free trade agreement with the European Union. Under this agreement, Canada's world-class fish and seafood products will gain preferential access to more than 500 million hungry customers, yet the NDP has already come out and opposed the many new opportunities that this pact will provide for Canadians working in our fish and seafood industry.

Can the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans please tell this House why this agreement is so good for Atlantic Canadians?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on day one of this agreement 96% of tariffs on fish and seafood products will be eliminated. This is certainly great news for fishers right across the country.

The European Union is the world's biggest importer of fish and seafood products. This means 500 million new customers and 28 new markets for our world-class fish and seafood.

I cannot understand why the NDP would oppose the Canada-Europe trade agreement. The MP for St. John's South—Mount Pearl said last week, "It will not fix our broken fishery—it will give it away..."

Perhaps he should start speaking to the industry in his province.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recent events in Elsipogtog, New Brunswick, clearly show the need for consultation of the people affected by natural resource extraction initiatives and the related problems.

Now that they have used their omnibus bill to dismantle our environmental protection measures, how do the Conservatives intend to fulfill their obligation to consult the peoples concerned and thus avoid other conflicts?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon.

colleague that the protests he is referring to concern shale gas, which is a provincial jurisdiction.

All Canadians enjoy the right to demonstrate peacefully. However, you can rest assured that in the presence of improvised explosive devices, burnt out cars and illegal firearms, we will protect Canadians and ensure that people are held responsible under the law.

* * *

● (1450)

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first nations have lost confidence that the government will uphold its duty to consult. They have lost confidence that the government will engage in respectful and peaceful dialogue.

The UN special rapporteur, James Anaya, called on Canada to take a less adversarial, position-based approach in its dealings with indigenous peoples. Will the government heed the words of the UN special rapporteur and respect its duty to consult?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed the United Nations special rapporteur did come to visit Canada. I had the privilege of meeting with him. When he left, he made another statement. He said:

It is clear to me that Canada is aware of and concerned about these issues, and that it is taking steps to address them. I have learned about numerous programs, policies and efforts that have been rolled out at the federal and provincial levels, and many of these have achieved notable successes.

That is why we will continue in the same direction.

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on another subject, there is absolutely nothing new for veterans in the throne speech. What is more, the government is in court trying to block a class action suit brought by a group of veterans who oppose the new veterans charter because some of them do not have access to their pension or to adequate health care.

The government is spending millions of dollars on propaganda and extremely expensive legal battles. Why is the government determined to treat our veterans unfairly?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only unfair thing about that is the very premise.

Oral Questions

Through eight consecutive budgets, our government has invested almost \$5 billion in new in funding to enhance veterans' benefits programs and services. Close to 90% of the department's \$3.5 billion budget is going toward direct services and support for veterans and their families. Canadians can be very proud of our response to their issues.

That is eight consecutive budgets that those parties voted against. I am not surprised that the member would forget about that minor detail.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is one minor detail. During the summer, lawyers on behalf of the Crown indicated that the Crown has no special or moral obligation to assist veterans.

My question to the minister is very clear. Does the government have a moral, social, fiduciary, and legal responsibility to care for those it asks to be put in harm's way?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts tell the tale. Our government has made substantial investments to support Canadian veterans, including almost \$5 billion in net new dollars since taking office. This funding was put forward to improve financial benefits and provide world-class rehabilitation and tuition costs to help veterans transition to civilian life.

While our government is making improvements to veterans' benefits, those parties voted against this new funding for mental health and other support systems for veterans.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we heard that Mike Duffy was told to take the \$90,000, keep his mouth shut, and to go along with the cover-up; otherwise, Conservative senators would kick him out of the Senate.

On June 5 the Prime Minister said, "...it was Mr. Wright who made the decision to take his personal funds and give those to Mr. Duffy... [It was] not communicated to me or to members of my office."

Now that we know that his senior staff and his Senate leadership crafted this elaborate scheme over a period of weeks, when will the Prime Minister end this cover-up and tell Canadians the truth?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons I became involved with politics was the debates between John Turner and Prime Minister Mulroney surrounding the free trade agreement in the 1980s. Although, Mr. Turner was proven to be wrong and free trade was an enormous benefit to Canada, as the European free trade agreement will be, at least he had an opinion that he fought for.

Now, we have a member of the Liberal Party, a member from Nova Scotia, a region that would benefit from the Canada-EU free trade agreement, a former Conservative who used to be a supporter of free trade, standing to talk about a vestige of the 19th century. Shame on him.

● (1455)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister falsely claimed that Nigel Wright was the only one aware of the \$90,000 payment to Mike Duffy. Today we learned more details about how the entire PMO orchestrated a plan for Mike Duffy and we learned that the Prime Minister ordered Mike Duffy not to co-operate with the Deloitte audit.

The RCMP and Mike Duffy's lawyer have shown us that the Prime Minister has not been honest about this scandal. When will he come clean and stop hiding his own role in this scandal?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the Prime Minister has answered all questions with respect to this subject. He has answered with all of the information that he has had available to him. At the same time Mr. Wright is taking sole responsibility for his actions, as he should.

We put on the table a number of reforms to the Senate, including accountability measures, term limits, election of new senators. The Liberals are fighting day in and day out to maintain the status quo in the Senate because part of their economic policy is maintaining the unelected, unaccountable Senate. We will still fight for free trade and opening up new markets for our businesses. Let them talk about the past.

* * *

LABOUR

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, taxi drivers, office cleaners, clerks, support workers, artists and many other hard-working Canadians have no access to a workplace pension or benefits, and more and more young people are working for free as unpaid interns.

This afternoon, I will be submitting a bill calling for a national urban workers' strategy that would reflect the reality of precarious work today. Work has changed. Will Conservatives support this initiative to fix EI and strengthen pensions, or will they remain stuck in a century that has long passed?

Hon. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is dedicated to keeping workplaces safe, fair and productive. Any employee who believes their basic entitlements have not been respected may bring that matter before the labour program. An investigator will be assigned immediately and action will be taken if any violation is found.

Oral Questions

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives simply do not understand the realities of today's urban economies and labour markets. Positions that only a few years ago would have been salaried permanent jobs are now being filled by contract workers, part-time workers, freelancers and unpaid interns.

Why do Conservatives think it is acceptable to do nothing while half the working population of Canada's largest cities is unable to find stable full-time work? Why are they failing urban economies and ignoring the struggles of urban workers?

Hon. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just mentioned, our government is dedicated to keeping Canadians' workplaces safe, fair and productive.

I find it a little rich that the member opposite is commenting on creating jobs. I encourage them to support the new Canada-Europe trade agreement where we are creating and looking at 80,000 net new jobs. This is something that we are focused on. We are focused on ensuring Canadians have opportunities and jobs are being created. I encourage the opposition members to get on board. This is great for Canadians.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since we were first elected, our government has passed over 30 measures to keep our streets and communities safe, yet the Leader of the Opposition said last week that he opposed our entire criminal justice agenda. He actually said things were better before we took office.

Would the Minister of Justice please explain what the justice system would look like if the Leader of the Opposition had his way and reversed our criminal justice reforms?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians should be concerned by the opposition NDP leader's comments. If we were to follow his plan and go back to the Liberal-style justice system, the consequences would be dire. For example, multiple murderers could be paroled after only 15 years, if Pierre Trudeau's faint hope clause were reinstated; judges would not have the option of extending the sentences of multiple murderers; and the age of consent would again be lowered to 14, putting children at risk. These are just a few examples.

The fact is that when it comes to cracking down on violent offenders and keeping Canadians safe, there is only one party in this country that will do that, and that is the Conservative Party.

* * *

● (1500)

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this summer, Lac-Mégantic experienced an unprecedented rail catastrophe.

Unfortunately, that was not the only accident involving trains and dangerous goods. Most recently, there was an accident this weekend, forcing the evacuation of more than 100 Albertans.

Municipalities want to know what is in the cars that are crossing their territory and they want to be involved in developing emergency plans. Will the government finally listen to what they have been calling for?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have met with municipal leaders across the country this past summer.

We have developed a good, close working relationship with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The president and CEO actually said that the FCM applauds the federal government's response to the tragedy in Lac-Mégantic and to the rail safety recommendations that emerged from it.

We will continue to work on these matters with our stakeholders and our partners.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in rural communities, the first responders to a disaster are often the volunteer firefighters, as was the case in Lac-Mégantic.

In the Speech from the Throne, the government claimed it intended to work with the provinces to develop a national disaster mitigation program. In the last session, I introduced Bill C-504 to make firefighters available to respond to emergencies.

Will the Conservatives give me today the unanimous consent required to pass my bill?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed I am very pleased that my colleague noted this important measure in the government's throne speech.

As a government for Canada and the provinces, we have a responsibility to take action in anticipation of natural disasters. That is why we intend to put forward an infrastructure program to reduce and mitigate the impacts of disasters.

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a key part of our government's economic agenda is to open new markets around the world to increase Canadian-made exports.

I am pleased to announce the plan has achieved real success. In less than seven years, Canada has concluded new free trade agreements with nine countries. We are continuing to pursue new agreements with the largest and most dynamic markets in the world.

Can the Minister of International Trade please update the House about the latest success on the trade front?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday we made history.

Our Prime Minister reached an agreement with the EU on the most comprehensive trade deal Canada has ever signed. It will boost Canada's economy by \$12 billion a year, the equivalent of creating 80,000 new jobs or adding \$1,000 to the average Canadian family's income every year.

It means better priced European goods. It means more choice for Canadian consumers. It gives businesses in every sector and region of our country access to a consumer market of 500 million people. This deal is historic for our government. It is historic for Canada. It is a great deal for Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some 4,800 National Defence employees will soon be “restructured” and redeployed. However, the Conservatives are hiding information.

What consequences will this restructuring have on the military base in my riding? How many jobs will be affected at the Bagotville base as a result of this so-called renewal strategy?

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about everyone who will lose their jobs.

With the changes that are happening with the roll-down of operations in Afghanistan, we have gone through a renewal, looking at all our strategic assets and all our operations. We want to make sure that we are investing all our capabilities into our front lines by making sure that we are not investing in unnecessary practices and procedures at this point in time so that we can increase the readiness of the Canadian Armed Forces.

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[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Ottawa has decided to attack

Oral Questions

the Quebec National Assembly's Bill 99, which states that only Quebecers can decide their future.

By challenging this bill, the federal government is going after the recognition of the Quebec nation and its inalienable right to self-determination. The saddest part is that all the federalist parties in Ottawa agree that the power, authority and legitimacy of the Quebec National Assembly should be reduced, saying that Quebec is not big enough to decide its own future.

The Conservatives can no longer claim that it is the sovereignist government in Quebec that is stirring up trouble. How will they justify this direct attack on the Quebec nation?

● (1505)

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that is before the courts, but obviously we know that no one wants another referendum.

* * *

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I have seen an unacceptable lack of safety for women and children in first nations communities. Aboriginal women are seven times more likely to be murdered than other non-aboriginal women in Canada.

A few days ago, the UN special rapporteur found that the government must conduct an inquiry into the large number of missing and murdered aboriginal women. Many cases remain unsolved. Last March, the provincial and territorial human rights commissions made the same request.

What is the government waiting for? When will it launch a national public commission of inquiry?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have already indicated several times, this is an important issue that the government takes very seriously.

That is why we adopted a seven-point strategy in 2010 that the government is now carrying out in co-operation with the provinces.

We know that this situation is unacceptable. We are of the opinion that governments that do not really want to take action conduct studies and inquiries. We, on the other hand, have decided to act.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

● (1510)

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-541, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda).

He said: Mr. Speaker, events this past summer exposed a huge failing in the Criminal Code, so I am pleased today to introduce an act to amend the Criminal Code, specifically the section dealing with hate propaganda.

This bill would amend the Criminal Code to include persons with disabilities among the groups of identifiable people against whom hate propaganda would be prohibited. By so doing, people with disabilities would have the protection of the law from those who would engage in spreading hatred on the basis of a disability, such as suggesting euthanasia for simply having a disability such as autism. The bill would help affirm that persons with disabilities are a valued part of Canada deserving respect and are able to live in our communities without fear of oppression or hatred.

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

* * *

NATIONAL URBAN WORKERS STRATEGY ACT

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-542, An Act to establish a National Urban Workers Strategy.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it used to be that when a person left school, he or she could get a job, work for the same company for 30 or 40 years, earn enough to raise a family and then be able to retire with a pension. However, all of that has changed. More and more Canadians are working as independent contractors, are self-employed, or free lance or working multiple part-time jobs and a growing number of particularly young workers are working for free as unpaid interns. These are what I call urban workers.

This diverse group of workers have a lot in common. They have no access to a workplace pension, no benefits and no job security. Today, with the tabling of this bill, we would begin to change that.

A national urban workers strategy would lay a new foundation in order to prevent the misuse and abuse of unpaid interns by working with the provinces to fill in the gaps in our laws that leave interns without protection, to increase access to employment insurance for all workers, to bring more fairness to the tax system for the self-employed and for workers with fluctuating incomes and to ensure that all Canadians could retire with a livable pension.

This proposed national urban workers strategy will support all Canadians in big cities, small towns and rural areas who are struggling with the issues of precarious employment. It is time our policies reflect the reality of work in the 21st century and that is why Canada needs an urban workers strategy.

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

PETITIONS

CLUSTER MUNITIONS

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by 26 members of my riding.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to: (a) amend Bill S-10 to close the loopholes and make it clear that no Canadian should ever be involved in the use of cluster munitions for any reason, anywhere, at any time, for anyone; (b) include an explicit prohibition on investment in cluster munitions production in Bill S-10; and (c) add mention of the positive obligations Canada has assumed by signing the convention on cluster munitions to Bill S-10.

NAVIGABLE WATERS PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition that comes from constituents in my riding, from Fort Resolution, Northwest Territories. There are some 200 signatures on this petition, which represents 50% of the population of that community.

The petitioners ask that the Slave River be returned to protection under the Navigable Waters Protection Act. The Slave River, which the community of Fort Resolution is on the delta of, is an important connection in the north. It has been a navigable river for 100 years.

HEALTH

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the brain is the most vital organ in the body. It keeps us alive and makes us human, and if it does not work properly, every aspect of life may be compromised. One in three, or 10 million Canadians, will be affected by a neurological or psychiatric disorder or injury at some point in their lives. For example, autism spectrum disorder affects 190,000, multiple sclerosis affects 93,000 and Alzheimer's disease affects 500,000 people.

The petitioners are calling for 2014 to be the year of the brain and for a pan-Canadian action plan for the brain developed with provincial and territorial ministers of health and stakeholders.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have petitions from constituents in my riding who wish for a moratorium on GM alfalfa. They are concerned that organic farming prohibits the use of genetic modification and that the organic sector in Canada depends on alfalfa as a high-protein feed for dairy cattle and other livestock and is an important soil builder.

The petitioners ask that Parliament impose a moratorium on the release of genetically modified alfalfa in order to allow proper review of the impact on farmers in Canada.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to present two petitions to the House today.

The first petition deals with climate change. The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to invest in growing our country's expertise in the economics of climate change impacts and adaptation, cost out and model climate change impacts to inform decisions about adaptation policies, allocate scarce resources to programs that help Canadians adapt and invest in generating and disseminating research to inform adaptation decision making at the community, regional and sectoral levels.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition deals with genetically modified alfalfa. The petitioners call upon Parliament to impose a moratorium on the release of genetically modified alfalfa in order to allow proper review of the impacts on farmers in Canada.

CANADA POST

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition on behalf of the people of Garnish, a small rural community in my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's.

The petitioners oppose the reduction in hours at the Canada Post operation in their community. This is happening throughout rural communities in our country. They ask that these hours be reinstated because they need the service, people in the community depend on the service and of course it will also affect the community economically.

The petitioners therefore ask the government to get involved to try to ensure that Canada Post throughout Canada continues to offer a service that the people are entitled to and that they need and deserve.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today and I have literally hundreds, perhaps thousands, of petitions that have been signed in regard to the birth of baby girls and the action of abortions that are allowed through sex selection. This has denied millions of girls in Canada and throughout the world the chance to be born merely because they are girls.

The petitioners ask the House of Commons and Parliament present to condemn discrimination against girls through sex-selection abortion and to prevent sex-selection abortions from being carried out in Canada.

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

VIA RAIL

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have hundreds, if not thousands, of petitions to present today. The petitioners are calling on the federal government and the Minister of

Routine Proceedings

Transport to back down on cuts to VIA Rail that are resulting in stations being shut down, including the one in Drummondville.

The Drummondville station is the third largest in Quebec, and the number of employees will drop from three to zero. People with disabilities come to Drummondville every week. They use this service and they need assistance. Drummondville is an age-friendly city and we are there to offer services to seniors.

Not long ago, there was a press conference in Drummondville involving a dozen or so organizations from economic, tourist and other sectors to condemn the decision. The public is supporting this common front. The city passed a resolution to keep the Drummondville station open and keep the staff working.

I am presenting this petition today.

[*English*]

JERICO GARRISON LANDS

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition calling on the Government of Canada to coordinate a full process of public consultation prior to the commencement of any disposal of the Jericho Garrison Lands in my riding of Vancouver Quadra.

These lands are 21 hectares of Department of National Defence lands located in the Point Grey neighbourhood, and they have a mix of trees, green space and historic buildings. They are lands that are significant to the heritage and quality of life of the residents of Vancouver Quadra and the broader community. We know that there is a planned divestment of these lands, but there has been no consultation with the public.

The petitioners therefore call on the government to rectify that and to lay out a plan and a timeline for full public consultation before any active divestment or sale of the Jericho Garrison Lands takes place.

CANADA POST

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a list of petitioners who call upon the Government of Canada to ensure that Canada Post supports the local economy by preserving local jobs and maintaining mail processing at post offices in local cities, towns and communities throughout New Brunswick and that prior to making any change to their mail processing and transportation network, Canada Post conduct a true and in-depth study into the service and economic impact on local communities.

The petitioners call for an open and transparent consultation with the local communities that will be impacted by the change and that Canada Post reveal its long-term operational plan to Parliament and to the Canadian public.

Privilege

AERIAL SPRAYING

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have well over 1,000 names of petitioners from the Slocan Valley, Grand Forks and Nelson in my riding as well as other parts of B.C., Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec and Alberta, who are concerned about what they call aerial spraying or chemtrails. They say that aerial spraying is being carried out by aerial entities at high altitudes that create long-lasting plumes. They do not act as traditional aircraft condensation trails. This is being carried out without the knowledge of the people of Canada.

The petitioners call upon the government to fully inform the people of Canada about this aerial activity occurring at high skies and to explain why it is taking place and also to cease this activity forthwith.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a second petition that contains hundreds of signatures from people in Victoria and Greater Vancouver, B.C., as well as parts of Ontario.

People are getting tired of hearing about animals being abused while their abusers walk free. The link between cruelty to animals and cruelty to humans has long been documented. Better protection of animals would also serve to protect humans in the long run.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to work with the provinces to ensure that federal and provincial laws are constructed and enforced and will ensure that those responsible for abusing, neglecting, torturing or otherwise harming animals are held appropriately accountable.

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to rise today to present two petitions.

The first petition is about the supertankers that are threatening British Columbia's coastline.

[*English*]

The petitioners are from Vancouver and Victoria. The petition is appropriate as we debate Bill C-3 today that pretends to talk about a way to protect our coastline.

The most effective way would be, as these petitioners request, the continuation of the federal-provincial moratorium against super-tanker oil traffic, which has been in place since 1972.

● (1520)

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by individuals in favour of my private member's bill, Bill C-442, a bill that would create a national Lyme disease strategy.

Lyme disease is a scourge. It is becoming an epidemic. This summer the U.S. Centre for Disease Control reported that the estimate for Lyme disease in that country has gone from 30,000 new cases a year to 300,000 new cases a year.

Like myself, these petitioners hope that the House will pass my legislation for a strategy.

* * *

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.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STATEMENTS BY PRIME MINISTER REGARDING REPAYMENT OF SENATOR'S EXPENSES

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will keep my intervention relatively brief, as we look forward to the response from the government on the question of privilege that was raised in a very succinct and powerful way by my colleagues from Timmins—James Bay, as well as the opposition deputy House leader, the MP for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

I rise today, because in adding to this question of privilege we are now seeing official court documents clearly indicating, and we take this with the greatest of seriousness, that the Prime Minister deliberately misled the House this past spring. I will not repeat the numerous sources of precedents which my hon. colleagues cited on the seriousness of when a member of Parliament stands before the House and utters things that they know to be patently false.

In this case, either the Prime Minister directly misled us and Canadians, or allowed himself to be misled by his staff. Either way, this matter needs to be investigated in its proper place, at the procedure and House affairs committee, to get to the bottom of this evermore complex scandal that ties directly to the Prime Minister's own office and his inner circle of trusted advisers.

Here is what we learned today from documentation that is currently in the hands of the RCMP. On February 20, 2013, Senator Duffy wrote to his lawyer about the Prime Minister's Office. According to his lawyer, the documentation said, "Then Nigel called tonight. He was expansive, saying we [the PMO], had been working on lines and the scenario for you that would cover all of your concerns, including cash for repayment". He also said, "We are working out this whole scenario for you, Senator Duffy, and the lines you are going to say publicly, and we are even going to pay for it".

Now, these are court-filed documents. These are what the RCMP is currently investigating. However, what is important for us in this question of privilege is that with this information before us now as members of Parliament is that the Prime Minister's chief of staff informed Senator Duffy that the PMO was working on lines and the scenario for Mr. Duffy that would cover all of his concerns, including cash for repayment—obviously an offence under our statutes and laws—and that they were working out this whole scenario for him.

The government House leader wants us to believe that the Prime Minister did not ask his staff what was happening on an issue that was dominating the national media and certainly in question period in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister was facing these questions day after day from the Leader of the Opposition, and day after day he simply did not engage his staff on this question regarding Mr. Duffy and these illegal payments; he was the victim of his chief of staff's single-handed conspiracy against him and against the truth.

It is impossible to believe this rogue actor theory that it was Nigel Wright acting alone, when we have documents that continue to surface showing it was a coordinated effort in the Prime Minister's own office and that his own staff were involved in the cover-up.

We heard it just today. The evidence is completely contrary. This is a most serious matter, and it goes to the very heart of the principle of ministerial accountability, in this case, prime ministerial accountability. One cannot simply brush off the fact that one was caught in a lie by saying that the staff did not inform them and they only had half the information.

The principle of ministerial accountability means that ministers are accountable for what they say in this place with regard to their portfolio. With regard to the Prime Minister's own staff, with regard to the Mike Duffy repayment for cash and the cover-up that followed, it is undeniable that the evidence is mounting that the Prime Minister intentionally or unintentionally misled this House in the spring.

Parliament and Canadians deserve the facts. We can no longer fall to the lowest level of cynicism, that repeating talking points that emerge from the Prime Minister's Office is somehow a replacement for the truth. That is simply not the case.

This matter of privilege, for all members of Parliament, not just the official opposition, but I would argue also for Conservative members across the way, needs to be addressed properly. It needs to be addressed succinctly. We can no longer operate under the cloud of a Prime Minister, and his most recent spokesperson standing in the House today repeating the falsehoods, hoping that by saying that all questions have been answered that it is as if all questions have been answered. That is not the case.

Mr. Speaker, I put forward this brief submission to you with the new evidence that we have been led to today, and I look forward to your ruling.

• (1525)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his further comments and his question. I understand the hon. government House leader will be coming back at a later date, and I look forward to that.

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GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE AND ITS COMMITTEES

MOTION THAT DEBATE BE NOT FURTHER ADJOURNED

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the consideration of government business Motion No. 2, I move:

That the debate be not further adjourned.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period.

We will maintain the same rotation that we did last session. I will recognize the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to say we are getting used to this, but maybe we are even getting good at it.

The fact that the government continues to invoke closure, even on motions which the opposition finds some agreement with, is breathtaking. Its disregard for democratic principles and for Parliament to do its job is something that is historical. No other government has invoked closure and the cessation of debate more than this government. It has shut things down in a majority position, which is quite startling. One could imagine that if it was frustrated in its ambitions to pass legislation that maybe it could somehow justify this use of the guillotine on debate. However, that is not the case.

My question very simply to the government on this motion is this.

We recently received a ruling from you, Mr. Speaker, to divide the votes on this motion to allow members of Parliament to vote with a clean and clear conscience. I know it is a novel concept sometimes, but it is good to remind the government of it.

If the government House leader will be answering this, I would ask if he is in agreement with the principle that you set forth in your ruling, that members of Parliament should be allowed to conduct themselves in a way that aligns clearly with their convictions in representing constituents. If the further practice of omnibus motions and omnibus bills is the way that the government proceeds, it will thereby break the spirit of the ruling that you gave this past week.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I respect all of your rulings, and that applies equally to this particular one.

The motion that we are debating in this House, government business Motion No. 2, is one that in a normal House of Commons would proceed by unanimous consent. That has been the case many times in the past when it has been proposed. It is one that allows bills that were there in June to be restored at the stage they were at, but it goes beyond that. It takes into consideration some of the issues that have been raised, committee mandates that have been sought by opposition parties, so that the interests of everybody as they existed in June could continue to operate on an even-handed basis.

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We thought that went further in terms of fairness; rather than simply cherry-picking the matters that had been proposed by the government, we would look at matters that were proposed by everybody to ensure that everybody's interests were protected, that nobody would be prejudiced by the fact of having a new throne speech, and that we could all proceed with business in an expeditious fashion.

That is what Canadians want, for their parliamentarians to work hard, but they also want them to make decisions and deliver results. That is what we are doing here.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since it achieved its majority the way in which this Conservative-Reform Party government treats the House of Commons is quite disappointing. It treats it with a lack of respect in terms of what is necessary to move things along in an orderly fashion. This is not the way one should be governing. One does not bring in motions and then force the opposition to conclude a debate without allowing for due process.

This government and the Prime Minister have set records for the number of times they have implemented time allocation. This House leader has made it as if it were part of a normal process to bring in time allocation. Then they come up with all sorts of weird statements to try to justify it.

What the government is doing is wrong. The Prime Minister needs to instruct his government House leader that it is time to start sitting down with the opposition to try to work through agreements. There are many pieces of legislation where we would find agreement throughout the House to have the legislation go through in a normal fashion. We have to allow for debate and allow individual members to accurately represent their constituents, by standing up, speaking, and sharing their concerns and ideas about what the government is actually doing.

What the government is doing today, as it has done 50 times before in the last year, is just wrong. It is anti-democratic. It is a poor way for a reform-conservative government to be attempting to run the House of Commons.

My question for the government House leader is this. When can we anticipate that the government will start negotiating in good faith with members of the Chamber through the House leadership teams of all political parties so we can bring back some sense of normalcy to the way things are administered in the House of Commons?

● (1530)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the House leader for the Liberal Party for his very constructive negotiations and engagement, in particular on government Motion No. 2, which we are considering right now. The Liberal Party was very forthcoming and agreed to the normal approach, which would be to deal with the matter dealt through a motion for unanimous consent to restore matters as they were back in June.

We appreciated that constructive approach from the Liberal House leader. We thought it was the appropriate fashion in which to operate. I was not surprised that was the response from the Liberal House leader, accustomed as I am to his business-like approach to

dealing with these matters. We appreciated that opportunity to negotiate and discuss it with him and to arrive at that agreement.

I am disappointed that unfortunately the official opposition did not share the same approach. As a result, we are spending a little more House time than perhaps we would have liked to allow us to be where we were in June. To deal with that principle, on a principled basis, to allow everyone's interests to be reflected so there is no prejudice to any party or individual who had business before the House is what this motion seeks to do. It seeks to protect the interests of the opposition and the interests of the government. We are pleased to be putting that forward.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what a surprise. We have returned from a one-month prorogation and we are yet again debating a closure motion that would shut down debate, something that is at the very heart of our democracy.

I always thought that under our system, the only bills that remained active and were not penalized by prorogation were private members' bills. The government knows very well what it is doing when it prorogues. It knows that with prorogation, any government bills that have not passed die on the Order Paper. We might be more open to this kind of request from the government if we had heard a different throne speech.

Since there was an extra month of no work in the House of Commons, we expected to see some drastically different things to justify the extra month the government imposed before rebooting. We were not expecting to simply lose a month of debate on the bills in question. They want to push these bills through without debate and without acknowledging that there is a price for shutting down the House for over four weeks for absolutely no reason.

Before attacking the other parties, the government should show some humility. It should also show some humility when it shoves everything together and moves omnibus motions to bring legislation back to the floor of the House of Commons.

Holding hostage the committee for abused, missing women—

● (1535)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I prefer to take a more optimistic approach to characterizing the work of the people here in Parliament. In fact, our members of Parliament, through the months of May and June, actually sat on some occasions as late as 2 a.m. because we agreed to have extended hours in this House. As a result of that, we did not lose a month of debate; we actually gained more than a month of debate.

Good discussions took place here. People debated bills, and bills advanced as a result of the hard work put in by members of Parliament on all sides of the House, as should be acknowledged. As a result, a number of bills enjoyed support from all sides of this House and were able to go to committee. All we are asking is that those same bills be able to go to the same stage they were at thanks to all that hard work. It was the equivalent of well over a month of additional debate that took place in May and June.

An example would be Bill C-56, the combating counterfeit products act, which was there in May and June. As a result of the support of all parties in this House, that bill passed on a voice vote and went to committee. In fact, the NDP member for Scarborough Southwest said, "...we in the NDP do want to see this bill go back to committee...".

This is the chance to do that, to acknowledge the work that was done by parliamentarians like him in June and to give effect to it by allowing it to be restored at committee as it was in June. It is a bill that would defend the interests of Canadians and it is supported by all parties. That is the kind of bill we are looking to see restored as a result of government business Motion No. 2.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to the House very briefly about the role of democracy.

When I go out to schools in my community, I talk about how the government is responsible to Parliament, the peoples' representatives. We have not seen anything like that in this particular government. Every time the Conservatives bring in a time allocation, it is more and more clear that the current government does not respect the people of Canada because it does not respect the role of Parliament. It wants to change the rules at a whim. That is what this is about. This is about changing the rules to suit the Conservatives so that we can all pretend, or at least they can pretend, that the Prime Minister did not prorogue this place.

I would like to know if the government intends to continue with omnibus motions. We have certainly had our fill of omnibus budget bills that have allowed the Conservative government to push through incredibly destructive legislation, such as all the repeals to environmental protection and the changes to the Navigable Waters Act.

Just this past weekend I was in a community that is suffering in terms of those changes and is facing a dump being foisted upon them.

I would like to know from the Conservative government when it is going to respect communities, respect the role of Parliament, and respect the rules of this place.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the very essence of this motion is to respect the work done by parliamentarians. It is to give effect to the work that parliamentarians did last spring. It is to allow that time not to be lost in vain.

This is to actually give effect to the committee mandates that were given by this House, the debates that took place on bills, and the advancement of those bills to different stages. That respects the work of Parliament. That respects the work of parliamentarians. To do otherwise would, I think, disrespect the work of parliamentarians.

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The legislation the member mentioned is not the subject of this motion. However, an example of a bill that is the subject of this motion would be the not criminally responsible reform act. Again, it is a bill that was supported in a vote by all members of this House. As a result, it was able to advance well beyond second reading.

If I were to listen to the NDP members right now, although they voted to have the bill advance before, they now no longer want that to be the case. They want to go back, start from the beginning, and throw away the hard work of parliamentarians on a bill they themselves claim to support.

I think if we talk to any ordinary Canadian, they would regard that as a little nonsensical. They would regard it as actually disrespecting the work of Parliament.

Our objective with this motion is to show real respect for the work of parliamentarians, allow what we did this spring to continue, and allow the achievements of all of us together during the spring to stand.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to this motion and to Motion No. 2, which the government wants us to pass.

I will not read this long text, because that is not what matters. What matters is understanding why we are debating it and why we are to vote on it here today. I believe it is because the Conservative government decided to prorogue Parliament this summer. As a parliamentarian, I have to wonder why the government did that.

We were told that it was in order to give the government more time to work on the Speech from the Throne, which I found rather insipid overall. I would therefore like to ask the member opposite a question. I wonder if he could confirm what I think. Basically, did the Conservatives want to have another month in the summer to simply relax, because the spring was too tough on them?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the good news was that parliamentarians worked for more than a whole extra month's worth of debate time in the House in May and June. As a result, the House was able to get great things done, and it was not just the bills that we are seeking to have restored at the stage they were read: overall, in the first five months of this year, 37 pieces of legislation reached royal assent. In fact, that matches the most productive year of the Conservative government back in 2007, when we were in a minority, and we did that in just five months. That was done through the hard work of all parliamentarians, including sitting, on some occasions, as late as 2:00 a.m. to get work done here in May and June.

People did not take time off. People here worked very hard. They worked extra hard and put in extra time.

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The question before us now is whether we shall throw away some of the product of that extra time, pretend it did not happen, and force everybody to go back to "go", or should we respect the hard work of parliamentarians, the debates that occurred, and the advancement of legislation, which in most cases all parties supported? Perhaps that was not so in some cases, but bills such as the not criminally responsible reform act and the tackling contraband tobacco act were apparently supported by the NDP.

We would encourage them to once again support their continued processing through the parliamentary process.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again we see another time allocation.

It is about democracy. Democracy means giving us an opportunity to debate the issues and to ensure that the government is not being challenged through court after court for something that it has rushed into, yet this is what we have been seeing over and over again.

These time allocations are not good for democracy. They are not good for the country. How could the member actually stand up and say that this is the best thing that can happen? Yes, there has been a lot of legislation put through, but let us be very clear that a lot of that legislation was done through time allocation and a lot of it was not supported by Canadians.

If the Conservatives were serious about dealing with issues, they would be calling for a national inquiry with respect to the missing and murdered aboriginal women and would not be trying to hold them as pawns. If they were serious about dealing with issues, they would be working extremely hard on making sure that they consult and work on the treaty implementation areas.

Instead of standing up and calling time allocation after time allocation and pretending that the House was never prorogued, why do the Conservatives not do the right thing and make sure that the issues that matter most to Canadians are discussed, as opposed to what they are doing, which is not dealing with the issues of the day?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I think the greatest way to respect democracy is to respect the democratic decisions made in the House, including the decision made on the first nations elections act to deliver democracy to first nations and give them greater democratic rights.

In fact that bill, one of the bills we are discussing and one that passed at second reading on division, would establish an alternative modern-day legislative framework apart from the Indian Act system. It would provide for a more robust election system that individual first nations can choose. It would be up to them to choose whether they wish to opt in, but they can choose to do so. It is actually based on recommendations provided by the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs and the first nations Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

We have a bill to provide greater democracy for first nations, a bill that they have proposed, that is optional, and that advanced in the House. The New Democrats would now have us believe that although it passed on division, they now wish it to go back to the beginning. That would not be a step forward for democracy, but a step backward. That is why a bill like this is a positive one.

At the same time, the motion that we have in front of us is one that would also restore the mandate for the committee looking into murdered and missing aboriginal women. It is balanced in that we are dealing with everybody's mandates, mandates that everyone put forward. The issue the member mentioned is very important to her; that would again be a reason to support government Motion No. 2.

Our approach throughout in preparing this motion has been to go beyond the traditional approach of focusing only on government bills and to take into consideration everybody's interests so that nobody is prejudiced by the fact that we had a new throne speech. That is what government business Motion No. 2 proposes, and that is why I hope it will be welcomed by all members of the House. It is designed to be fair to all members of the House.

● (1545)

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although I appreciate the comments from the government House leader, I wonder what he means by the opposition not wanting to just go ahead with starting things over. When prorogation is invoked, the entire government program is supposed to be reset. It hits the restart button and starts over from zero, from scratch.

On the other hand, the House leader is now saying that Conservatives want to start over with a new throne speech and want the opportunity to make it seem that the government is shiny and new, when in fact they are taking all of their old bills that they could not have passed when we were all working very hard last summer, as he correctly pointed out; all of us together working very hard could not get them passed because they were so faulty. We had a lot of problems with those bills. They were just not ready for prime time.

Instead of saying we should work through the month that just went by and see what we can do about improving those bills, the Conservatives set prorogation in place so that we could not work on those bills. Instead the Conservatives are telling us that we are ones who are trying to delay Parliament, the ones who are obstructionists for their bills, but they pushed the reset button themselves.

They should be consequential. They wanted prorogation so that they could have a throne speech, which, by the way, was highly criticized for being devoid of content, with many words but very little content. They wanted to go ahead with the throne speech and make it seem as though the government had something new to offer, which to all intents and purposes does not seem to be the case, but it has to be consequential.

Prorogation means the reset button. The government does not have the right to redefine the work.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, what my friend failed to mention was that the motion before you, at least the portion of it that would restore government bills, is actually a fairly standard motion at the time of a new throne speech and follows thereafter. In fact, we had such motions in 1991, in 1996, in 1999, in 2002, in 2004, and in 2007. It is not unusual; in fact, it is almost what we might call standard operating procedure. That is why it is normally done as a unanimous consent motion.

However, there were a couple of things that changed here.

One is that in drafting the motion, on the government side we decided to not just deal with government bills but to try to be fair to everyone. We decided to look at all the other things that were going on in Parliament in which other people had an interest.

We knew that the member for St. Paul's had expressed an interest in seeing the committee on murdered and missing aboriginal women continue. We thought that made sense as something members wanted to see. There were other committee mandates out there; an example is the study that the procedure and House affairs committee is going to do into members' expenses. That was requested toward the end of when we were sitting in June, and we thought it would be silly to extinguish it. That is something that had been asked for by the opposition, and the independent members actually had standing on that committee protected, so we wanted to ensure that they could have their interests protected as well.

Therefore, we went beyond just dealing with government bills and looked for everyone's interests to be protected. We looked at anything that anyone had proposed and at all committee mandates that were in place. It was a balanced approach that ensured nobody suffered a disadvantage. It was not just the usual approach of only pursuing the government bills; it was to reflect everybody's interests.

Instead we hear from members of the NDP almost a different kind of approach, which is that not only do they not want a fair and balanced approach, but they want to cherry-pick only the stuff they care about and then allow everything else to be dropped.

That may be one approach to doing business. I am not sure it is productive. I am not sure it is constructive. It certainly does not respect the hard work that was put in by parliamentarians on advancing those bills last spring.

We want to see the work of parliamentarians and the interests of all parties respected. We think that this is a balanced motion that does exactly that.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons did not really answer my question earlier.

I really do not understand why Parliament resumed in mid-October rather than mid-September. Clearly, it was not to give the government more time to produce a better throne speech, given that the one we heard was pretty awful.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons did not answer my question regarding the fact that his party's members just wanted an extra week of vacation. I had to wonder what was going on from mid-September to mid-October. It was hunting season.

Was it because the Conservative members wanted to go hunting rather than return to the House of Commons?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, it is not one of my pastimes, but maybe my hon. friend will be interested in enlightening or educating me.

In any event, the reason we broke and had a throne speech is that it is actually a pretty normal thing to do. We had worked pretty hard,

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and there were only a few substantive bills left on the Order Paper. We have done a tremendous job in getting through our work, so it was a natural time for it, as happens in many parliaments. In fact, there have been well over 100 prorogations since Confederation, and it is a normal pacing to do that to allow for a refocus of the agenda. We have done that. We have seen it. It ensures that our focus on job creation and economic growth remains. It also ensures that we are looking out for ordinary Canadians with an agenda to help consumers, from unbundling TV channels that are offered to cable subscribers to tackling unfair roaming rates.

All of these things reflect what Canadians want. They are the product of our discussions. At the same time, there is a very important commitment to balance the budget in 2015, and on top of that, to bring in reasonable balanced-budget legislation. It would not be a straitjacket type of legislation but rather legislation that would ensure that when a government does respond to a crisis, which it needs to be able to do economically, it would then place a priority, after the fact, on getting the budget back into balance, paying down the debt, and getting the deficit reduced. It would be much as our Minister of Finance has done in ensuring not only that Canada has done well recovering from the 2008 economic downturn but that our deficit has already been more than cut in half.

As was said in the throne speech, the Minister of Finance is on track to deliver that balanced budget in 2015 to ensure that Canada maintains the strongest fiscal position of any of the major developed economies, something that we have enjoyed throughout this time, thanks to the leadership of the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister. These are all things that were reflected in our throne speech. They are things that he may regard as a failure but are things that we on this side of the House regard as the successes that are most important to Canadians.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is trying to show that $a + b$ equals something new when, paradoxically, that is not the case. It is the same old thing because there is time allocation with respect to an omnibus motion. Whether we like it or not, we are dealing with the same old thing, with proposals brought forward before prorogation. Unfortunately, they are still with us after prorogation because the throne speech obviously had nothing new and no significant advances for Canadians.

How can the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons justify and help us better understand this type of anti-democratic decision?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I am very puzzled by my friend, because she seems to be objecting to the notion of doing the same thing all over again. Her posture is to let us do the same thing all over again.

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Never mind that we made some decisions on the combatting contraband products act. Let us go back to the start and debate it all over again. Never mind that we had votes and advanced the prohibiting cluster munitions act to implement that international treaty. She says to go back and do it all over again. She is the one who wants to do it all over again. Notwithstanding that the not criminally responsible reform act is in great demand by victims and their families, notwithstanding that it advanced with the support of other parties, including the opposition, she wants to go back and do it all over again. The member wants to debate the tackling contraband tobacco act all over again and toss out the hard work of members of Parliament in advancing the process. It is the same with the Canadian Museum of History act and the same with the first nations election act.

If they are concerned and do not want to do the same thing all over again, they should do what we are proposing here. The members of the opposition should support this motion to allow those bills to be restored at the stage they were at when this House rose in June so that the work is not lost, so that the bills people care about can continue to advance, and so that Canadians' interests can be respected and the work of parliamentarians on these important bills can be respected.

• (1555)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 3:55 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

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. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

• (1635)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 1)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler

Adams
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Anders

Anderson
Aspin
Bateman
Bergen
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Crockatt
Davidson
Devolin
Dykstra
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Leitch
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Obhrai
Oliver
Opitz
Paradis
Poilievre
Raiitt
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Trost
Truppe
Valcourt
Van Loan
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Yelich
Zimmer — 149

Armstrong
Baird
Benoit
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Daniel
Dechert
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Leaf
Lemieux
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Norlock
O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon
O'Toole
Payne
Preston
Rajotte
Rempel
Rickford
Saxton
Seeback
Shipley
Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trottier
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)

NAYS

Members

Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bélangier
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boutin-Sweet

Allen (Welland)
Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Bennett
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg

Government Orders

Brahmi	Brison
Brosseau	Caron
Casey	Cash
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Cotler
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Easter
Footé	Fortin
Freeman	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Jacob	Jones
Julian	Karygiannis
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Mourani
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Rankin	Rathgeber
Ravignat	Raynault
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
St-Denis	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibeault
Toone	Tremblay
Turmel	Valeriote — 114

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

MOTION NO. 2

The House resumed from October 17 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my opposition colleagues for the warm applause.

Let me start by making a few comments on the motion and what it means. Although many words have been spoken in previous days about government Motion No. 2, particularly by my colleague, the hon. government House leader, I think it is important for those people who may be watching for the first time that I try to explain what government Motion No. 2 is actually about.

Quite simply, government Motion No. 2 purports that all unfinished parliamentary business, which we left when we rose for the summer recess back in June, would return in the same state in which it was before we recessed. In other words, to use the vernacular, we simply want to pick up where we left off.

That in itself is not unusual. Many times before governments have, after prorogation, brought forward similar motions that allowed unfinished legislative initiatives, in other words government bills, to be brought back to Parliament in the same state that they were pre-prorogation. That is what we are doing with approximately seven bills that were still being debated when we rose for the summer and prior to prorogation.

However, we go far beyond that, because although it is normal for governments, previously, to bring back similar motions to try to start the debate on these important bills, we decided not only to just have government legislation brought back but all parliamentary work should be brought back in the same state that it was before we adjourned.

Why is that important? It is important because in committee work there are two, in particular, very important parliamentary studies being conducted by committees. These two studies, I should add, are supported wholeheartedly by members of the opposition.

We appointed a special legislative committee to study the issue of missing aboriginal women. Now, opposition members have been calling for such a study to be enacted for many months, in fact, I think over the course of the last two or three parliamentary sessions. We have agreed to that. We installed a special legislative committee that would allow for such a study to occur. However, if we do not pass Motion No. 2, that committee would be disbanded. That study would be halted.

We think it is incumbent upon us as a government to observe the hard work that parliamentarians did on all sides of the House on that committee, and bring the study to fruition. The only way we can do that is to pass Motion No. 2.

Failing that, what would happen is that there would have to be another legislative committee struck, membership presented and the committee would basically go back to square one on the analysis and study of that very important issue. Why do that? Why should we waste the valuable time that has already been spent on that very important issue? Motion No. 2 would take care of that.

The other study that is ongoing and quite frankly has just started is the study being conducted by the procedure and House affairs committee on members' expenses. I will speak about that in a little more detail in a few moments.

Let me now turn my attention to why the opposition apparently has a problem with Motion No. 2. What the official opposition has stated in its opposition to government Motion No. 2 is that it feels by lumping together government bills and committee studies somehow we are prejudicing the entire motion. They are saying we are somehow playing politics with the facts, because if the opposition wants to approve the continuation of committee studies, it is forced to vote in favour of the motion, which includes government bills.

Not only is that nonsensical, it really defies description to believe that we would even attempt to play politics with such important issues as the study on missing aboriginal women and children. I think any opposition it has to our attempt to pass government Motion No. 2 has now been allayed, because the Speaker's ruling of last Friday said we will now have two votes on the same motion.

Government Orders

● (1640)

The first vote will deal with government legislation. We will vote on whether or not to bring back all government bills in the same state they were in prior to prorogation. We are talking about bills such as the not criminally responsible reform act, the tackling contraband tobacco act, bills that had reached various stages of progression in this Parliament. Some had reached and gone through second reading. Some had reached report stage. Some had even passed third reading. Many of the government bills that we want to bring back had the full support of the entire Parliament, yet the NDP, primarily, wants to see us refuse to bring these bills back, and in effect, reintroduce them and start the debate all over again.

I ask if there is any sensibly thinking Canadian who would look at this opposition and say that this is the way we should go. Rather than continuing on and getting these bills passed, which all parliamentarians support, would anyone say they want to start all over again, have the same debate again, waste Parliament's time and waste taxpayers' time? No. No one would agree to that, except, it appears, the opposition.

Because of the ruling of the Chair, we are now going to be dealing with government bills in a separate vote. If members of the opposition vote in favour of our motion, that is not to say that they are voting in favour of each individual bill. It would merely be to say that they are voting in favour of bringing these bills back to Parliament in the same state that they were before we adjourned in June. To me, it seems like a common sense approach because most of the bills, as I said before, have been approved. Some of them have passed second reading debate. Some of them have passed third reading debate. Many have the approval of the entire Parliament. Why in the world would we want to discard all of that hard work and start over again? It does not make sense.

However, if the opposition was only concerned with the lumping of the committee studies and the government bills, now they should not have a problem with it, because we will have a second vote. That vote will be to bring back other parliamentary work, specifically committee studies, and restore them to the same state they were in before. Clearly, it gives the opposition an opportunity to make their views known on government legislation and on committee work. If the opposition wants to vote against Motion No. 2 with respect to government bills, it can do so. If it wants to vote in favour of bringing back committee studies, it can do so. However, it will be government Motion No. 2 that we are voting on. Even though it is split into two votes, the motion, I predict, will carry, hopefully with the support of all parliamentarians.

Again, on the legislative initiatives, on the government bills, it does not mean that if the opposition members vote in favour of it, they are voting in favour of each of those seven bills. It just means that we return those bills to the Order Paper at the same point they were before we recessed for the summer. It is a common sense approach. It saves parliamentary time. It rewards the hard efforts of all the parliamentarians who debated these very important bills for several hours last spring. That seems to be a common sense approach.

Let me spend a few moments on one of the other committee studies. I want to point out what appears to me to be an apparent

contradiction and the blatant hypocrisy of the NDP when it comes to the second study that I mentioned, which is the procedure and House affairs' study into MP expenses.

Only a couple of months ago, we had a special meeting. It was held in the summer, when most parliamentarians were not in Ottawa, and initiated by the NDP for the sole purpose of trying to initiate some rules, practices and procedures surrounding this ongoing study into MP expenses, trying to increase transparency so that all Canadians would feel assured that their taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely and appropriately. At the time, the NDP went to great lengths to talk to the media and try to convince the media that it was the only party that truly wanted a transparent approach to member of Parliament expenses. New Democrats talked for many days and many hours, trying to convince the media that the other parties in the House, the Liberals and the Conservatives, really did not want transparency, while the NDP, of course, did.

● (1645)

Since that time, interestingly enough, there are only two parties in the House that have voluntarily agreed to post their MP expenses online: the Liberal Party and our party. We are doing this voluntarily.

Our position, quite clearly, is that we would like to see a procedure and a system set up, hopefully approved through the Board of Internal Economy, that all parties could agree to. In other words, we would have a common approach to posting our expenses. However, in the interim, because that may take some time to develop, our party has agreed to have our MPs post hospitality and travel expenses voluntarily on a go-forward basis. The Liberals have also agreed to that. There is only party that has not agreed: the NDP.

On one hand, the NDP is trying to convince the media and Canadians that it is the only party in favour of transparency. On the other hand, it is the only party that does not want to post its expenses online. Let us think about that for moment. Think about the hypocrisy of the NDP. All of this time when its members were talking about their attempts and desire for transparency, it was nothing more than a political stunt.

There is a saying where I come from, and many Canadians share it. It is "put your money where your mouth is". If NDP members truly believe in transparency, I challenge them to stand up today in questions and comments following my presentation and agree that their MPs should post their expenses online. It is a simple thing. One can do it voluntarily. Some members may be doing it individually, and I applaud them for doing that, but as a party they have refused to make their MPs accountable to Canadians. They have refused, as a party, to agree to posting MP expenses online. Let them stand up today and say that they will. I would be the first to applaud them and say they have taken a positive step. However, I cannot sit here, and I certainly cannot stand here during this presentation, and admit that they are in favour of transparency when they have not proven it.

Government Orders

Let us vote in favour of government Motion No. 2 this evening so that we can bring back all of the legislative initiatives of this government to the same state in which they were in order to allow further debate and allow those bills to go to a vote. Some may pass and some may be defeated, but at least we should bring them back without any undue delay.

Also, let us vote in favour of bringing other parliamentary business back in the same state it was, specifically committee studies. Let the committees continue their hard valuable work, the work that Canadians have been asking for.

Finally, let the NDP members today stand in their places and say they will join us in posting MP expenses online. If they do not, it only says one thing: that they are not interested in transparency. They are not interested in allowing Canadians to see their expenses but only in political stunts, and that is something we cannot abide.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would really like to know if my colleague opposite has looked at my Internet site, because, like the sites of all my colleagues, mine has a link to our expenses. Everyone does. I do not know where he gets his information from, but I wonder if we should correct the record of what is said here, because my colleague is misleading people.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, if individual MPs are posting their expenses online, I applaud them. However, that is a link to general information. As all MPs know, those are summary expenses and are already posted online. We have reports every year. Merely to say we have a link to our website that provides the same information that Canadians have been receiving for the last 50 or 60 years is not good enough.

We are talking about detailed expenses being posted online so that Canadians can see exactly where we travel to and why, and who is receiving the benefit of our hospitality expenses and why. That is what I am talking about. That is not being conducted by the NDP. Please, will they stand in their places and say they will do that? Shine a light on the expenses of the NDP.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I continue with questions and comments, I would like to remind all hon. members that the matter before the House is government Motion No. 2. While members in their speeches may stray from that, I would urge all hon. members when making questions or comments to make them relevant to the matter that is before the House.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note that part of Motion No. 2 incorporates what the leader of the Liberal Party talked about last June, and that was the whole idea of more transparency and accountability for individual MPs. We are glad that we are moving forward on this. We are pleased the Conservative Party has come onside with us. It took those members a little while, but we are pleased they have taken the time to come onside with us.

We are the type of people who look at the glass as being half full. We are hopeful the NDP will some day see the light and see the value of being a bit more accountable and transparent and will join the Liberal initiative, which has been endorsed by the Conservatives. Let us get together and pass it. We do not have to wait for PROC to deal with it. We could pass it with the unanimous support of this chamber and make it happen today.

The member has shown enthusiasm with regard to this idea of being transparent to Canadians. Back in June the Conservatives seemed to be open to allowing expedited unanimous support for the leader of the Liberal Party's motion. Would he be prepared to show that support so once again it would be in the New Democratic Party's court as to whether we could make it happen before the end of this month? Would he support that?

● (1655)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of points.

First, I would point out that the member opposite should know the motion he refers to was supported by our government when it was introduced. The only party that refused to vote in favour of the motion brought forward by the member for Papineau was the NDP. However, the point I want to correct for my hon. colleague and my friend from Winnipeg is the fact that the Liberals were actually following our lead on transparency.

I think all parliamentarians understand the fact that our government has been posting ministers and senior bureaucratic travel and hospitality expenses for the last several years. We were the first government to come up with a system whereby ministers would be required to post travel and hospitality expenses. It was not a grand idea from the Liberals. Frankly, they were following a system that we had in place for several years. We are happy they are finally seeing the light and coming onboard with us.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by pointing out to our colleague that the NDP called for greater transparency and accountability, argued very strongly in favour of that, in fact.

We are not criticizing an idea that the NDP put forward weeks, even months, ago. What we are talking about is the government's new tactic: moving a motion to simply undo the consequences of prorogation and the fact that it summarily put an end to the work of parliamentarians.

Our colleague says that it is important to respect the work of parliamentarians. However, the current government is showing no such respect by its actions.

Can my colleague justify any of this at all?

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is a little confused on this one. NDP members always say that they want to do work on behalf of all Canadians, that they want to get the job done for Canadians, yet when that party has an opportunity to bring a bill forward that could pass or at least continue debate on it until the time it finally gets to royal assent, it says no. Those members say the work that has been done previously by all parties, members of their party included, shall now be discarded. Why? I guess they are saying that technically prorogation means all bills die on the Order Paper and we should respect that. They should use their heads for goodness sake.

Through this motion, we have the ability to do what other parliaments have done for the past number of years. We have the ability to pass a motion that would bring back those bills to the state they were in before we recessed for the summer. That is all this says. It does not mean the NDP has to agree with all the government initiatives. For example, if a bill has already passed third reading and is ready to go to the Senate for royal assent, why in the world would the NDP want to start that debate all over again to get to the same conclusion that we reached last spring? Talk about a waste of parliamentary resources and time, but apparently that is the approach the NDP favours. I do not see it.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the way seems loath to discuss one thing in particular: why Parliament was prorogued.

Apparently it was to calm things down and change the channel. Unfortunately, that move was utterly futile except for the fact that we lost a month's worth of time when we could have been getting things done here.

I was embarrassed as I travelled throughout my riding because I was meeting people who work every day and who asked me whether I was working. I told them the truth: I could not work because the Prime Minister had closed up shop.

Now the Conservatives are using their majority government status to “de-prorogue”. Since that cannot happen, they found another way to do it by using their majority. People will see exactly what a strong, majority Conservative government is all about: a month off and an ad hoc parliamentary process in the hopes that people will forget.

In the end, the Prime Minister looks as ridiculous now as he did in June in the midst of the Senate scandal.

• (1700)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, we have to love the Dippers when they come and try to make a rational argument.

The fact is that if he were embarrassed about this prorogation, thank goodness he has not been a parliamentarian for too long. There have been well over 100 prorogations by political parties of all stripes over the last century. This is a common part of government procedure. We go back to a new throne speech mid-term of a four year mandate to try to set the new agenda for the last two years. This has happened with every government in Canada well over 100 times since the early 1900s.

He said, “Why in the world would you because we lost valuable time?” He seems to be complaining that by losing this valuable time, we as parliamentarians and the Canadian public are being disenfranchised somehow. That is why we want to bring the initiatives back to their same state so we do not have to start over.

If the member opposite is truly concerned, he should vote in favour of our initiative to bring back the bills so we do not have to start all over. If he is truly concerned about losing valuable parliamentary debate time, then he should vote in favour of Motion No. 2 so we will not have to have the same debate again.

Sometimes I just do not understand the rationale or the thinking behind some of those Dippers.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for recognizing me to speak to Motion No. 2 moved by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

The implications of this motion, both for the parliamentary process and for the conditions surrounding the members' work, are quite significant and therefore require meaningful debate in this chamber.

True to form, the Conservatives again introduced an omnibus measure that thoroughly confuses the debate and changes the discussion on the most controversial parts.

As it did with the mammoth bills, the government is using questionable tactics to try to push its agenda and bury the contentious measures within a whole raft of technical items.

The motion by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons deals with so many items that it becomes difficult to focus the discussion.

It addresses legislative proceedings, the parliamentary calendar, the Board of Internal Economy, committees and the hearings conducted by those committees.

It goes from themes such as expenditure management to topics like missing and murdered aboriginal girls and women.

Accordingly, in one single vote, we are to take a position on the motion's numerous components, which do not really have anything in common other than being the direct result of the Conservatives' tactics.

This makes no sense, but more than that, it is a denial of democracy, as well as yet another example of the Conservatives' flagrant lack of respect for parliamentary institutions.

In short, the Conservatives are continuing to demonstrate their contempt for Canada's parliamentary institutions.

Fortunately, last week the House leader of the official opposition rose on a point of order, and rightly so. I commend the Speaker for his fairness in agreeing to separate the vote on the motion.

In addition to considering the fact that this is an omnibus motion, we need to look at the content. The first part is undoubtedly the most questionable.

Government Orders

In part (a) of the motion, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is proposing that a bill introduced within 30 sitting days of this motion being passed will be deemed in the current session to have been considered and approved at all stages completed at the time of prorogation of the previous session.

Of course, it must be identical in form to the version introduced in the previous session. Consequently, the government could reinstate legislation at the stage it was at before the House was prorogued.

However, before I delve further into the content of part (a), I think it is important to understand the context of this aspect of the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons's motion.

First, it is important to remember that the government had parliamentarians sit until midnight at the end of the last session and then hastily adjourned the proceedings on June 19.

After forcing members to work overtime, the Conservatives then robbed parliamentarians of precious hours of debate, which makes no sense. It would be like a company forcing its employees to work overtime to then lay them off before the end of a contract.

Second, it is important to point out that the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said this on May 22:

...we are seeking to allow debate to continue until midnight every night so we can get more done, have more debate, have more democracy...

That is an interesting paradox, because despite what his House leader says, on September 13, the Prime Minister asked the Governor General to prorogue proceedings until October 16, 2013.

That was the fourth prorogation since 2006. Coming from a government that claims to want more democracy, this leaves something to be desired.

By doing so, the government is responsible for many negative effects, the impact of which is already being felt and will continue to be felt.

First of all, five weeks of parliamentary work were lost because of the Prime Minister's partisan recklessness.

● (1705)

We lost five weeks during which we could have moved committee work forward; five weeks during which we could have debated various pieces of legislation; five weeks during which opposition members could have asked nearly 1,000 questions in the House of Commons.

This decision also blocked the process surrounding the legislative error in Bill C-60 regarding tax hikes on credit unions. This measure will have a direct impact on institutions like Desjardins, whose taxes will double.

At the same time, the savings accounts and debt levels of Canadians who use those services will be affected. The additional delays caused by prorogation will only add to the uncertainty surrounding this error in Bill C-60.

Similarly, prorogation also created some stumbling blocks in the passing of legislation to stop discrimination against transgendered people, as well as the creation of a special committee to address the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women. These groups

within our population really deserve our full support, along with quick and effective action.

While the government is putting its own partisan interests first, victims will just have to wait. Behind the Prime Minister's decision are the real victims who need us.

Finally, environmental studies on habitat conservation, the Great Lakes, the groundwater near the oil sands and the impact of climate change on northern fish populations were all dropped because Parliament was shut down. That is what we have to remember. Can the environment really wait until it fits the Prime Minister's agenda? I sincerely doubt it.

Clearly, the decision to prorogue Parliament—the main goal of which was to merely serve the partisan interests of this government—had very serious consequences.

Did we need to lose five weeks of parliamentary activity to do that? No. Did we need to miss out on all the work that could have been accomplished? No. Did we need to disrupt the legislative processes that were under way only to come back to most of them in the end? No. This whole situation is ridiculous.

Today, what the House leader is trying to do by moving an omnibus motion is to clean up the mess that his political party made. The Conservatives want to solve a problem that they caused. Let us face it. It does not make much sense.

Rather than acting in the interests of Canadians from the outset, the government has gotten caught up in trying to fix the mess it made with its own actions. Rather than taking action and holding debates in September, the Conservatives simply decided to shut Parliament down.

This series of positions and actions taken by the government demonstrates the Conservatives' ambivalence toward managing parliamentary procedure, something which—let us not forget—they have been doing in an authoritarian, questionable and anti-democratic way. Their management style is the hallmark of an old party that has lost all interest in parliamentary affairs.

On the one hand, they are setting an overloaded schedule and forcing members to hastily debate bills, as they did last spring. On the other hand, they are limiting the time for debate by moving countless time allocation motions and even rising early.

Recently, they completely bypassed the parliamentary process by proroguing the previous session. Now, a few weeks later, they are trying to bring it back by introducing a measure to that effect in an omnibus motion. This is déjà vu.

The government's piecemeal management style has consequences and brings Canada's democratic institutions and the Conservative Party as a whole into disrepute.

Government Orders

●(1710)

Getting back to the motion, we believe that we should pick up where we left off with some pieces of legislation. However, did the legislative process really have to be delayed by five weeks? Definitely not. What we are most critical of is not the proposed measure but its operationalization and, above all, the reasons why we are having this debate.

Regardless of the reasons why the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons introduced Motion No. 2, we have the right to question which specific bills will be fully brought back in their previous versions. We could also ask about the number of pieces of legislation that will be introduced again and then the pertinence of a new throne speech if the government has the same agenda.

Yesterday, there were absolutely no new ideas or any sign of a plan that would bring people together and provide a formal direction. The throne speech's lack of substance makes me seriously wonder about the real reason for the prorogation. All this time and the potential for action were lost simply for partisan reasons. Why prevent parliamentarians from doing their job by closing Parliament if the Prime Minister has nothing new to offer? Why limit the work done by the opposition if the Conservative Party claims to be championing accountability?

It is up to the government to respond.

In theory, a throne speech must set somewhat of a new course and bring something new to the legislative landscape. Restoring the bulk of the bills from the last session would demonstrate that this is a public relations exercise intended to muzzle the opposition and cover up the Conservative scandals.

In short, with respect to section (a) of Motion No. 2, it is obvious that the leader is trying to hide the Prime Minister's lack of vision regarding the prorogation of Parliament. The government wanted to clear the legislative agenda and then fully restore it. This validates the criticism that prorogation and the throne speech were just a smokescreen used to draw attention away from the scandals in which the Conservatives are mired.

That said, there are some parts of the government House leader's omnibus motion that our party agrees with, for example, the proposal to hold public hearings regarding replacing the Board of Internal Economy with an independent body. More specifically, it suggests that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be responsible for holding the hearings, and the Auditor General, the Clerk and the Chief Financial Officer of the House of Commons would participate. This in-depth study could result in some proposed changes to the Parliament of Canada Act, the Financial Administration Act, the Auditor General Act and any other acts as deemed necessary.

Historically, the NDP has always favoured more transparent and effective management of taxpayers' dollars, whether we are talking about government programs management or spending oversight parameters.

We believe in accountability. We believe in transparency. We are therefore open to the idea of closely examining the issue of MPs' spending and particularly the issue of an independent body

overseeing this spending. We think this study deserves special attention and that the witnesses invited could be in a position to make relevant, proactive suggestions.

However, we must remember that such changes require cooperation among the different political parties as well as everyone involved. If we can work together, we can be sure to get the best possible reform that adequately reflects reality. We must absolutely come to a consensus on creating an independent structure that would oversee and control MPs' spending.

●(1715)

Yet another measure in this omnibus motion is the creation of a special committee to conduct hearings on the critical matter of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in Canada, and to propose solutions to address the root causes of violence against indigenous women.

I am especially interested in this matter and I met many of these women during a demonstration on Parliament Hill last year, so I firmly believe that we have already waited far too long to act. These women and girls are waiting and they want government authorities to intervene quickly and investigate these too easily forgotten cases. They want the government to do something to stop these attacks on human dignity. That is what the NDP has been calling for for years, and that is what the government has refused to do.

Obviously, those five lost weeks will just make the process even slower than it already was and exacerbate tensions on the ground. It is pretty easy for the government to blame the official opposition, but the government created the situation itself. Had the Conservatives not made a partisan choice to prorogue Parliament, we would already be working on this issue. Unfortunately for these aboriginal women and girls, who did not choose to become victims of this scourge and government inaction, we have not been able to work on it yet.

In conclusion, the motion moved by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is nothing but a cover for the real reason the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament. We have identified countless paradoxes that indicate this government is worn out, drowning in scandal and unable to give Canadians a real vision for their society. Rather than work in Canadians' interest, the Conservatives chose to engage in pathological partisanship, and that is something the NDP has always opposed.

The motion moved by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons does address some important concerns, but unfortunately for the people we represent, it makes about as much sense as a pyromaniac firefighter.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned that she was not clear about what would be in the content of the bills we put forward as per section (a) of the motion. If she reads the motion, she will see that it says:

...if the Speaker is satisfied that the said bill is in the same form as at prorogation, notwithstanding Standing Order 71, that said bill shall be deemed in the current Session to have been considered and approved at all stages completed at the time of prorogation of the previous Session...

Given that the institution of the Speaker, the Chair, is to be neutral and to deem these things in order, does she not support that institution? I think there is some serious latitude granted there, given that component.

Also, having served on the committee mentioned in section (i) of the motion, pertaining to missing and murdered aboriginal women, I think this is a very important committee for Parliament to be seized with. I am wondering if, when she stands tonight, she will stand in support of that committee being continued.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, the government's ineffective-ness and utter nonsense is what got us into this debate here today.

In my speech, I think I clearly emphasized how the New Democratic Party—the official opposition—has focused on the situation of aboriginal women.

We have worked on this file for months, even years. We underlined the importance of setting up a committee well before the prorogation. However, the government totally ignored our efforts. Today, the Conservatives have no business giving us any lessons that they are not even able to apply themselves.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the simple question that we should be asking government members is this: was there a need to prorogue? The answer to that question can be found in terms of when the government made the decision to go ahead and prorogue the session and what might have led it to make that decision.

I believe that if the government had said it would prorogue the session but would still come back on September 16, there might have been a lot more validity to the argument for a need to prorogue. It cannot say that it prorogued because it wanted a throne speech, because that was not much of a throne speech. The vast majority of Canadians would recognize that it was not much of a throne speech.

The reality is that the Prime Minister did not want to come back to the House of Commons in September. Coincidentally, he wanted to come back in October, when he would not be around to answer questions on the issue of the day, which is not the European deal but rather the scandal in the Prime Minister's Office.

Therefore, I would ask the member if she could pick up on that particular point. Do we have a Prime Minister who is scared of accountability here in the House of Commons?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I would say that the Prime Minister certainly seems to be scared of accountability.

Despite our insistence and all the questions asked in the House, it was quite evident to members of Parliament and the general public that no concrete answers have been given on the Senate scandal so far.

Also, I believe it is important for Canadians to understand just how much this government is abusing our democratic process and our work in Parliament.

We have talked about the importance of collegiality and we promoted this idea, just as we emphasized the importance of having concrete information on the programs the government wishes to introduce; however, we are still grappling with a total lack of transparency and accountability, which is typical of this government.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my esteemed colleague for her speech and ask her a question.

I listened to her speech. This government is hypocritical because it is using a motion to restrict debate so that it can fix the problem it created itself with prorogation.

The government tells everyone that none of this is its fault; it is all someone else's fault. That is what it always says, but I do not get it because even though the Conservatives have a majority, they claim to be the victims here. Unbelievable. They are always the victims. Poor Conservatives. Poor Prime Minister, who claims to have answered all of the opposition's questions. That is not true.

I am asking this question because I want Canadians watching this debate to see the hypocrisy of a government that says it will work with the opposition and Canadians, but is once again using a motion to limit debate to just a few hours to fix the problem it created with prorogation.

• (1725)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

He focused on this government's inherent hypocrisy, and I think that hypocrisy is exactly the right word because that is what we are seeing. They are in no position to lecture other parliamentarians when they cannot even face up to their own shortcomings.

At the end of my speech, I compared the government to a pyromaniac firefighter. I am pretty sure that we all understand what that means.

A pyromaniac firefighter is a person who sets a fire and then calls everyone else to come and put it out even though he, as a firefighter, started it himself. For crying out loud.

To me, this is clearly hypocrisy. Our democracy is taking a beating. Unfortunately, we have yet another omnibus motion before us. Omnibus. Worse still, this one comes with a closure motion. It is déjà vu all over again.

Government Orders

When will the government quit using these tactics?

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my hon. colleague from Saint-Lambert for her eloquent speech.

Nothing has changed since I was first elected to this House. We thought, however, that by proroguing the House, this government would change. It cannot possibly expect Canadians to go on swallowing these affronts.

As I was going door to door in my riding, people were wondering why Parliament had been prorogued and why we were not allowed to finish our work. The answer was simple and they figured it out themselves: it was for partisan reasons, to try to cover up the scandal that the Prime Minister's Office has become embroiled in.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to ask a question. Ever since we first arrived in this House, the government has been introducing one omnibus bill after another. Then—and this is just to make sure Canadians who are watching at home understand clearly—the Conservatives present a time allocation motion, which limits the debate on the matter.

Before I was elected, I had the opportunity to work on the issue of violence against aboriginal women and the issue of aboriginal women being murdered.

Will the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women have to be postponed by five weeks because of prorogation? When will a committee finally be created in order to have a real and sincere discussion about the problems they face?

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

As I mentioned in my speech, clearly, it is very important to take a closer look at this tragic reality that is affecting aboriginal women and girls.

In closing, there is just one really simple question: why did the government think that prorogation was needed? The Conservatives have not been able to answer for their own actions. What we know for sure is that this prorogation was meant only to cover up the scandals and to allow the Conservatives to avoid being accountable to Canadians.

• (1730)

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today in support of the motion to reinstate the not criminally responsible reform act.

As you know, former Bill C-54 was awaiting second reading debate in the Senate when it died on the Order Paper. I urge the members of the House to support this motion to reinstate the bill to permit the Senate to continue its study of this important piece of legislation.

It is my view that the reinstatement of the bill to second reading debate in the Senate would avoid duplication of the considerable amount of work already undertaken by the House and by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights with respect to the study of this bill.

Members of the House will undoubtedly remember that former Bill C-54 was considered and debated by the House for 15 hours between February 8 and June 18 of this year. All parties had a significant opportunity to present their views and be heard on this issue. It would seem to me to be an inefficient use of resources to repeat this process on the exact same issue.

In addition to the vigorous debate in the House, the bill was exhaustively studied by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights this past June. Over a period of five days, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights heard from more than 30 witnesses with a wide variety of backgrounds and professional experience.

The committee heard testimony from the former minister of justice and his officials. Victims' advocates, such as the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, also testified, as did representatives of the Mental Health Commission of Canada and representatives from other major mental health organizations.

Review board members from two jurisdictions were able to attend, as well as a psychiatrist from one of Canada's busiest forensic institutions. Several members of the legal profession and major non-governmental organizations also testified.

All of these witnesses presented valuable viewpoints on former Bill C-54. This greatly enriched the study of the not criminally responsible reform act. The justice committee was well served by their participation.

Furthermore, the committee also had the benefit of hearing directly from a number of victims who had become involved in the criminal justice system as a result of having lost a family member in an incident involving a mentally disordered accused.

It took great courage and strength for them to speak to the committee about their loss and express how the justice system can be improved. We are grateful for their participation and for the perspective that they brought to the study of this bill.

The committee heard all of these concerns and proceeded to return the bill to the House with two substantive amendments to improve it further. Reinstating the bill at second reading in the Senate would avoid unnecessary duplication of all the valuable work done by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights just this past spring.

In support of this position, I would like to take a few minutes to remind hon. members what exactly is included in the bill and why it is so important that the parliamentary review of these proposed reforms be able to continue as expeditiously as possible.

The not criminally responsible reform act seeks to amend both the mental disorder regime of the Criminal Code and the National Defence Act to enhance the protection of the public and improve the involvement of victims in the process.

The mental disorder regime in both statutes sets out the powers and procedures that govern an accused who has been found either unfit to stand trial or not criminally responsible.

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Individuals who fall under the mental disorder regime are supervised by provincial administrative tribunals that are referred to as review boards. These review boards are made up of legal and psychiatric experts whose task is to monitor the progress of accused persons and evaluate their potential risk to the public. They review each case on an annual basis, although in certain circumstances it could be every two years, until the individual no longer poses a significant threat to the safety of the public.

Issues of criminal responsibility for individuals who suffer from mental illness have been a vexing issue for policy-makers and lawmakers for centuries. These issues are complex and challenging from both a technical legal perspective and a societal perspective.

The not criminally responsible reform act is a targeted and reasonable response to the concern about high-risk, not criminally responsible accused who pose a higher risk to the public.

The not criminally responsible reform act has three main elements. First, it seeks to ensure that public safety is the paramount consideration when decisions are made about not criminally responsible and unfit accused. This element is intended to add clarity to an area of the mental disorder regime that has presented some confusion.

Although the Supreme Court of Canada has stated on more than one occasion that public safety is the paramount consideration in determining the proper disposition with respect to a not criminally responsible accused, there remained some concern that this interpretation was not being reflected in practice.

• (1735)

In fact, various witnesses who testified before the justice committee had varying views as to whether public safety was truly the paramount consideration or simply one of four listed factors to take into consideration. By clarifying that public safety is the paramount consideration in decisions regarding the mentally disordered accused person, the government is ensuring that public safety is the primary consideration of decision-makers.

Second, the bill proposes a new scheme to designate some not criminally responsible accused as high-risk accused. This scheme is intended to apply to only the small number of not criminally responsible accused who are found by a court to represent an elevated risk to society so that they would be subject to the extra protection provided through this designation.

The high-risk designation would ensure that a not criminally responsible accused would be held in custody in a hospital and could not be considered for any kind of release until the high-risk designation was revoked by the court. High-risk not criminally responsible accused would not be eligible to receive unescorted passes into the community and would only receive escorted passes in narrow circumstances, such as for medical reasons. This designation would operate to protect the public by ensuring that the not criminally responsible accused who posed the highest risk would not have unsupervised access to our communities and neighbourhoods.

Another outcome of the high-risk designation would be that the review board would be able to extend the time period between reviews. As I mentioned, the review board usually reviews each case on an annual basis, which can be extended up to two years in certain

circumstances under the current law. This bill proposes to provide the review board with the discretion to increase the period of time between reviews to up to three years if the accused has been designated a high-risk not criminally responsible accused. The review boards would be able to extend the length of time in two circumstances: if the accused consents to the extension; and if the review board is satisfied, on the basis of relevant information, that the accused's condition is not likely to improve and that detention remains necessary for the period of the extension.

Finally, the bill also proposes significant changes to the victim-related provisions of the mental disorder regime to improve information-sharing and victim participation in the mental disorder regime.

The government is very committed to addressing the concerns of all victims of crime, not just those impacted through the mental disorder regime. In fact, over the summer, the minister travelled to many parts of Canada to engage in consultations with stakeholders on developing a federal victims' bill of rights that would provide victims with a more effective voice for victims in the criminal justice and corrections systems.

Our government is taking action to ensure that our streets and communities are safe. This includes enhancing the rights of victims so that they know that they have a voice in the criminal justice system. One of the key themes that emerged from these consultations was the desire for victims of crime to be kept informed and involved at every stage of the justice process. The victim-related reforms in the not criminally responsible reform act are a step in that direction. They address this concern by increasing the information that would be made available to victims and by ensuring that their safety was considered when decisions were made. For example, the bill would require courts and review boards to specifically consider the safety of the victim when determining whether a not criminally responsible accused remained a significant threat to the safety of the public.

Another improvement to the victim-related provisions in the mental disorder regime would be a requirement that review boards consider in every case whether to make a non-communication order between the victim and the mentally disordered accused. The review board would also have to consider whether to issue an order preventing an accused from going to a certain place. These elements would be in place to both increase the safety of the victims and to ensure their peace of mind.

Victims who have become involved in the mental disorder regime have also expressed concern that they have no way of knowing when a not criminally responsible accused is going to be released or discharged into the community. They expressed apprehension about encountering the accused in their neighbourhoods or communities with no warning.

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In response to this concern, the bill proposes that for victims who want to be notified, the review board would be required to notify them when a not criminally responsible accused was being discharged into the community. This provision was amended by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights during its deliberations to increase the amount of information the victim would receive. Specifically, the amendment would provide that a victim could receive information regarding the intended place of residence of the accused upon discharge. This amendment was intended to ensure that interested victims were made aware if the accused was going to be located in their community upon release. The committee felt that this amendment would be a positive addition to the victim-related components of the not criminally responsible reform act, and I agree with them.

• (1740)

It is important to note that the victim-related reforms were supported by every witness who testified at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. All of the witnesses who commented on these elements were very supportive.

There are a few final things I would like to emphasize with respect to this legislation. The bill should not be interpreted as implying that people with mental illness are presumptively dangerous. That is not what the bill does. I can assure all hon. members that the proposed reforms are consistent with the government's efforts regarding mental illness and the criminal justice system. In addition to seeking to protect the public, it also seeks to ensure that the mentally disordered accused receive fair and appropriate treatment. I am confident that the not criminally responsible reform act would not have a negative impact on the broader issue of mental illness in the criminal justice system, nor is it intended to fuel stigma against the mentally ill.

Before I conclude my discussion on the substance of the bill, I would like to bring to the attention of the House one other amendment made to the bill by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. This other amendment provides for a parliamentary review of the mental disorder provisions five years following royal assent. The committee members unanimously agreed that it would be beneficial to review the amendments to ensure that they were having the intended effect. Given the highly technical nature of this area of criminal law, I think hon. members would agree with me that the amendment is a welcome one and would likely provide Parliament with valuable information as to the impact of the proposed reforms.

I would like to return now to the issue at hand, the motion currently before the House to reinstate Bill C-54 at the stage it was at in the Senate. I encourage all members to vote in favour of the motion to avoid significant duplication of effort, and most importantly, to ensure that this important legislation, whose main focus is aimed at protecting the public and addressing the concerns of victims, can quickly become law.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, honestly, I found that the hon. member's speech was basically a waste of time because we never should have needed to listen to him defend the work that was done on Bill C-54. The member never would have needed to make that speech if his

government had not decided to go into hiding for five weeks to avoid the Senate scandals.

Honestly, if I were linked to people as unscrupulous as Patrick Brazeau, Mike Duffy and Pamela Wallin, I would want to hide for five weeks, too. Despite all that, there was work to be done. As for the bill that the hon. member so strongly believes in, we would not be in this situation and the bill would not be on the verge of failing. I doubt that is what the hon. member wants.

Did the hon. member make these same remarks to the Prime Minister and the government House leader? Did he try to convince them not to prorogue the House and waste the effort that was put into the bill by the justice committee?

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, what would really be a waste of time would be starting the whole process of Bill C-54 over again. It went through all stages of debate in the House. It was debated at length here in the Chamber. It was debated for five days in the justice committee. We heard from over 30 witnesses. Then it received final third reading support here and went to the Senate and was working its way through the Senate justice committee. To start that over again would be absurd, in my view.

In addition, if the member heard my speech, she will know that a number of amendments were made to the bill, which of course, would then have to be reintroduced, and that would take even more time. We could have the absurd result of the bill looking different from what was passed in the House previously.

However, to the point of her question, the throne speech was 8,000 words long, I believe. If she was standing at the back of the Senate, as I was the other day, listening to every word, she would know that the government put forward a number of new legislative initiatives, especially in the area of criminal law reform. Those things needed to be done to reset the agenda of the government. I look forward to working with her to make sure that those new reforms go through the House and the Senate as quickly as possible.

• (1745)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting that the member said "8,000 words". They did a word count on the throne speech because of how long it was. I must tell him that it is not the quantity of words but the quality. This particular throne speech failed when it comes to quality. In terms of the word count, it might have a higher number of words than previous throne speeches, but in terms of quality it suffers in many different ways.

My question for the member is related to the whole idea of the Prime Minister choosing to avoid returning to the House of Commons. We were supposed to be coming back on September 16. The Prime Minister could have prorogued the session and still have come back on September 16 or September 18. However, he intentionally chose to come back on October 16 and then went AWOL to Europe on October 17 for the European Union trade agreement, maybe, as many individuals would believe, because he was nervous about what was happening in the Prime Minister's Office.

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Why was there a need to have us return on October 16, thereby avoiding—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. We know we have a 10-minute question and comments time, and we will try to use it the best way we can.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, to the member's point, the throne speech actually contained many new initiatives. There was an initiative on the balanced budget amendment. Perhaps, as a Liberal, the member does not think it is important to have balanced budgets. That is something the government announced in the throne speech that will be very important and that Canadians are very interested in. Certainly my constituents are.

As I mentioned in the last question, there were a number of new justice initiatives including on cyberbullying, on a victims' bill of rights, and on greater sentences for perpetrators of child sexual assaults.

There were new initiatives on consumer-related items: cellphone fees; bank charges; cable television fees. Perhaps the member does not think those are important.

These, taken together, represent a very significant change of course for the government going forward, and of course, it is in the usual processes of this place to have a period of time to prepare such a throne speech and present it to the House for its consideration. That is what has been done, just as it has been done over 100 times previously.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must say that proroguing is very commonplace. Every government has done it to come back and restart. There was a very short period of prorogation. Not supporting this Bill C-2 would cause months of starting all over again on these very important bills.

We heard the member speaking about Bill C-54. This is an extremely important bill, and it has to move through quite quickly to protect citizens. How important does the parliamentary secretary think it is for those members to support this bill?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question. She has made a career out of standing up for the voiceless in this country and deserves to be commended for doing so. This legislation would stand up for some of those same people, the victims of people who were found to be not criminally responsible.

There are many across the country waiting to be released. They could be released any day, and without this bill, they might go back into the community and commit harm against one of those victims or their families again. That is something we want to prevent. This House voted in favour of the legislation. To go back through the whole process again and waste that time in doing so would be a real disservice to those victims.

• (1750)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest as my friend described all the merits of the legislation that had been caught up in this conversation.

I would like to set some context and then ask a question. The context of this is that the government has grown somewhat fond of

these tactics of prorogation, shutting down Parliament itself, and also the tactic of shutting off debate. Doing so more than any government in Canadian history does call some questions to mind. We will check *Hansard* for my friend in the corner as to how many times the government has shut off debate.

With respect to the actual bill in hand, it is a normal circumstance after a prorogation, whatever its merits, to negotiate various bills, particularly those that have seen some advancement through the House to not, as the member says, waste time.

What is not normal is to then take a whole series of legislation and attach them to bunch of other things, studies and motions going on at committee, and then say to the opposition "Give us a motion to call whatever bill we want at whatever stage we want".

I will give the member an example of a bill that this would be a very bad idea for, which the government is giving itself power to do under this motion. It is a bill on political loans to those who are seeking candidacy for leadership. As we saw, particularly in the Liberal leadership race, Elections Canada has no teeth to enforce this.

The government introduced a bill and everybody, including Conservatives and Elections Canada, by the way, have said the bill is so fundamentally flawed that it actually cannot be rewritten. It is dead in the water, but with this motion the government is asking us to allow it to reinstate it, having passed through the House of Commons at a serious stage.

That is a bad idea, but the government has allowed itself this power. Could there not be room for negotiation, to take the bad, separate it from that which has actually seen pleasure and favour in the House and to allow those bills to go through, separate them from the bad ideas that the government itself has admitted should not see the light of day again?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, it would be an absurd result for this Parliament to get into the habit of using prorogation as a way of revisiting the same legislation it had already passed.

It is supposed to do that debate one time, study it in detail, make amendments as was done with respect to Bill C-54 and then send it off through the rest of the process, which includes the Senate. If the bill the member is referring to should be reviewed, I assume it will be reviewed in the other chamber in the normal process.

However, to have bills going back and forth and having the government use prorogation to revisit a bill that has already been passed by the House, I think if he were on the other side of that issue, he would probably say that was an absurd result.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I will try to make it very brief although there are many points I want to make.

I think I am one of the few members of Parliament who actually objects to Bill C-58, not criminally responsible bill. I did attend the hearings. There certainly were a lot of witnesses who were very concerned that it would further stigmatize the mentally ill and that it was not justified based on any of the empirical evidence of how the current system was working.

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I note the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health noted that “the seriousness of the offence does not equate to the likelihood of reoffending”.

I hate to see capitalizing on quite horrific sensationalized individual acts of violence and convert that into an attack on an entire regime that has not been shown to be at fault, in fact, has no connection to any of these quite sensationalized individual acts.

I would urge my friend, the parliamentary secretary to reconsider and allow Bill C-58 to go for further study and amendment.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, it is Bill C-54 to which we are referring.

I can assure the member that these new provisions would only apply to a very small number of people who fall into the category of not criminally responsible accused.

The member rightly said that she was one of the very few members of Parliament who opposed the legislation. That points out exactly my point in answer to the earlier question about how absurd it would be to have the vast majority of members in the House pass legislation, then have prorogation happen, which is a very normal thing, which has happened over 100 times over the last 100 years as we heard from the government House leader a little while ago, to then have that legislation revisited so the few people who voted against it could take another kick at the can. To me that seems a really great waste of parliamentary resources.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think it would be helpful to those watching, and certainly to some members of Parliament who are here and have already participated in the debate, to set the context of why we are having this conversation.

Various members seem to have connected this to one piece of legislation or another, or the government's intention on one bill or item in the throne speech. It has nothing to do with any of that. All of this has been created. It is a manufactured crisis and a manufactured inability of the majority Conservative government of the day to simply negotiate in basic common sense and good faith.

A prorogation, which I will remind my colleagues across the way of the Conservatives own making, bears a small parenthetical moment because the prorogation was for what again? Right, it was to help the government reset the channel. It was in desperate straits.

If we cast our memories back to the end of the last parliamentary session, it was Whack-a-Mole on scandal with the Conservative government. Every day we woke up to another scandal by either a member getting accused by Elections Canada of fraudulently running the last campaign or another senator perhaps having stolen money from the Canadian taxpayer, all of which was associated to the Prime Minister and going right into the very heart of the Prime Minister's inner circle, his chief of staff and directors of this and that.

We find out today that the scandal was at an even deeper level, a more rotten level, because the Prime Minister assured all Canadians at the time, in the spring, that it was the grassy knoll theory, it was a rogue chief of staff, as if those two things go together for a prime minister like this that he would hire a chief of staff who would

suddenly one day just go rogue and keep him in the dark of something that was dominating the news of the day.

Now what the government came back with after its attempt to reset the channel to change the conversation was a throne speech with a number of items borrowed from the NDP's last platform. The Conservatives are welcome, and I hope they actually do them.

The second set of things is to protect consumers, which is nice. I know the Minister of Finance may have had a bit of an itch watching these various announcements come out because so much for the invisible hand of the marketplace. The Conservatives with their deep-founded ideology that the market solves all in all cases now find themselves a finance minister in charge of measures that come out of a social democratic party's previous election platform to help on credit card fees potentially, maybe moving from voluntary, which is very nice. Perhaps the Minister of Finance would like to have voluntary tax measures for Canadians such that, “You can pay your taxes. We would like you to, but if you don't want to pay your taxes, we'll have a cuddly relationship like we do with the banks and they can voluntarily reduce those fees for Canadians, or not, without any consequences”.

Also, they would see their Minister of Finance having to be responsible, and maybe even interfering in the marketplace, for the cellphone rates that Canadians pay. Members will remember that the Conservatives went out on a very high horse and said that they were going to bring in competition for the Canadian cellphone market.

How has that been going so far? It is an absolute disaster. The Conservatives have created uncertainty in the telco market. There has been absolutely no new entrance into the cellphone market and the Minister of Finance laughs at those very consumers he now pretends to care about. One wonders about the authenticity of those words in that throne speech.

However, I will come back to why we are here, which is another closure motion. It is another motion to shut down debate.

I do not know if the Minister of Finance is paid per heckle, but I wonder if he could, for the next 18 minutes, contain his enthusiasm for my remarks and then he and I can have an exchange of ideas through what we call the question part of this debate. Apparently he cannot contain himself nor have any ideas.

The political loans bill is legislation that the minister and his party supported through the process. It is a political loans bill that was meant to catch those members of Parliament, or generally Canadians, who ran for political office, ran for the leadership of their parties, and allow for Elections Canada, as it simply did not have the ability, to go after those who had not repaid after a certain time. Now the Conservatives wrote this bill, with the support of the NDP in principle, but they then brought in a bill that was so ultimately flawed that Elections Canada said that it was utterly unworkable. The Conservative members on the committee said that it could not be rewritten. Now we have a motion—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, if only a moment could go by where I could perhaps string a sentence or two together without having the parliamentary secretary feeling that I need the aid and assistance of his wise and deeply provoking comments.

● (1755)

The idea is the bill was so flawed the Conservatives now want to introduce it and tell the opposition that it will put this into a super motion.

In fact, in this omnibus motion to reintroduce all the legislation, good and bad, that it killed through prorogation, the government is also attaching two fundamentally critical studies that the House was engaged in at the time it shut down Parliament.

The first study was on MPs expenses, the procedure and a motion that the NDP introduced to allow the procedure and House affairs committee to get to the bottom of a battered system for members of Parliament to report their expenses to Canadians, not a voluntary measure as the Liberals have done with vague lines and some reporting and some not, not as the Conservatives have promised to do, which is to follow suit into that epic vagueness that does not actually bring accountability. It was universal, one-size-fits-all enforceable measures that all MPs, whatever their political background, report their expenses on behalf of Canadians. This would be audited and absolutely clarified by House staff rather than internally by themselves.

The second study that was going on is one that is extremely important to me and to many Canadians. It was a study that looked at missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada. The New Democrats supported this study. I represent an area in northwestern British Columbia that has borne the brunt of much of this violence. Successive governments simply will not call for an inquest and inquiry that so many families of those victims want.

The Conservative government continually talks about standing up for victims. My friends have been deeply scarred by the tragedy of particularly young aboriginal women going missing and ending up murdered and yet governments time and time again have simply said that an inquiry is not enough. I have talked to RCMP officers, friends of mine, who have had to sit with those families. They tell them that they can only do what they can with the resources they have. They tell them that until they have the full scope of an investigation that would be done by an inquiry, they cannot do much more.

The government is asking Canadians to trust it when it does not trust Canadians. This could have been an easy fix. We do not need to be having this debate. We could have absolutely moved certain legislation forward. Other legislation that were clearly walking disasters would not be reintroduced and we would not waste more parliamentary time. We could have had a stand-alone vote on these two independent studies on MPs expenses and missing and murdered aboriginal women.

We offered that to the government. We told the government that it should not put these things together because there was a principle in the House of Commons that every vote should be free and fair and that people should be able to vote with a clear conscience. The Conservatives used to believe in that as well. Thankfully, the Speaker was able to intervene after we asked him to separate the

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votes. That was all. The government argued against it, saying there was no need to have two votes on two completely different things. What sense would that make?

I remember the Conservative government being elected in 2006 as the good sheriff coming in to clean up corrupt and entitled Ottawa. While the Prime Minister came to change Ottawa, I am wondering if Ottawa did not change him in the end.

I will quote from the right hon. Prime Minister in 2005:

There's going to be a new code on Parliament Hill: bend the rules, you will be punished; break the law, you will be charged; abuse the public trust, you will go to prison...

Reflect that upon the scandals that have been going on in the very same Prime Minister's own office with people he chose, people he hand selected, people he laid hands on to go to the Senate and represent the Conservatives. I am talking of Mike Duffy, Pamela Wallin and Patrick Brazeau.

The Prime Minister chose his chief of staff, probably the most important appointment a prime minister can make because the individual has so much influence over the direction of the prime minister, who said that it was ethically correct to pay a senator \$90,000 to stay quiet. Today we found out today he conducted the speaking notes for this under siege senator to go out and say s was the plan, that he was covered. The Prime Minister stood up day after day and said that it was just one lone wolf in the Prime Minister's Office, that there could not have possibly been anybody else.

Let me quote the Right Hon. Prime Minister again:

We must clean up corruption and lift up the veils of secrecy that have allowed it to flourish. We must replace the culture of entitlement with a culture of accountability.

We could talk to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the old one or the new one, about what it is like to actually have accountability from the Conservative government. It is just numbers. These individuals just want the stats, the figures, the money being spent or not being spent on programs. They could not get it. They had to go to court.

● (1800)

Ask the Auditor General, the Ethics Commissioner or the information commissioner what the government is like when it comes to accountability. Every watchdog that we have established over many hard years of debate to hold government to account has said that the most transparent government in history is not here, that the current government has thrown more of a cover over what is going on within its office than any government in Canadian history.

The RCMP raided the Conservative Party headquarters in 2008. One small note of helpfulness is that the government has kept the RCMP busy. Unfortunately, it is because of all these bad things going on. As well there is Elections Canada, the in and out scandal and laundering money through the central offices to make sure it could spend well above the limit, thereby not playing fairly.

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Let us not forget Peter Penashue, who sat in that chair. My friends will remember that day after day we would ask questions of the good minister, who was being well paid, provided with a limo and had lots of staff. We would ask devastatingly difficult questions, like what the minister's mandate is, and he would stay seated. We would ask the minister what his plans were and he would stay quiet. We would ask him where he has visited and what communities he has consulted with. He was the intergovernmental affairs minister, and he spent all of his time in Labrador. That is not intergovernmental affairs. Lo and behold, he broke the election law and had to return a whole bunch of money because he spent over the limit.

There is the Senate scandal, Bruce Carson, Arthur Porter, and the former spokesperson for the Prime Minister, the member of Parliament for Peterborough, who was also being taken to court by Elections Canada. There were robocalls, and the Wright-Duffy affair that I mentioned.

It seems amazing to me, and perhaps a culture. One cannot string all of these things together and say there is not a patterned language within the government. Time and time again, it simply says the rules do not apply to it, that somehow the democratic institutions that we have established, the watchdogs and the checks on power, do not apply to them. That is a level of arrogance that is dangerous in a free and fair society. It always catches up.

The government has used closure to shut down debate and discussion and avoid having to justify its policies. Here is the real danger with all of these closure motions. This is how it typically happens now. We get a motion like we did a couple of days ago, and the debate may not even have started and the government brings in closure. It does not matter whether the opposition agrees with the legislation or not, the government shuts down debate.

The challenge, risk, and difficulty is that these bills mean something sometimes and can have devastating effects if they are done badly. The government stacks witness lists at committee and limits the amount of time that government or opposition members can move amendments on legislation. Some of the pieces of legislation are incredibly complex. Any time we touch the justice system one has to be aware of unintended consequences, trying to go after one issue and not realizing it is doing more harm on another. These are things that the Conservative government has not been able to rectify.

What happens is that the government rams a list of pieces of legislation through Parliament by invoking closure and shutting down debate and then has to abandon them because they are illegal or unconstitutional. Or, it has the audacity to pass it all the way through the so-called chamber of sober second thought. Then it becomes law and we find out that the government's constitutional lawyers warned the government that its new bill was against the charter. Someone brings a charter challenge in the real world and wins, and the Canadian government and taxpayers spend millions of dollars defending a political photo op for some minister to say he was doing something. In effect, he was doing worse than nothing; he was doing harm because he gave people hope that something was going to change. The government writes a bad piece of legislation, rams it through and does not listen to anybody else.

However, never mind the opposition, what if the government members listened to themselves? This is what the current Minister of Industry said regarding these closure motions that we are under today. He stated:

Mr. Speaker, here we go again. This is a very important public policy question that is very complex and we have the arrogance of the government in invoking closure again. When we look at the Liberal Party on arrogance it is like looking at the Grand Canyon. It is this big fact of nature that we cannot help but stare at.

That was the current industry minister arguing against the Liberals using closure inappropriately, but at not even half the pace that the Conservatives now do.

I have quotes from the whole front bench. It is incredible. Essentially, anybody who sat in opposition in the Conservative Party at some point detested this act. In particular I remember when the Reform Party came in. It not only wanted to clean up the corruption and entitlement that had grown under the Liberals for years, but also the basic fundamental democratic values that we hold, that Parliament should be the sacred place in which we come together and debate those issues as hard as we want, but that we debate and offer evidence: point and counterpoint.

● (1805)

Closure sends the absolute wrong message to Canadians about the health of our democracy.

The use of closure is another symptom from a government that does not only attempt to muzzle Parliament and the opposition. We saw the little fiasco in the dust-up with the media the other day where the government did not want reporters in, and heaven help any journalist, or the PBO, the Auditor General, government scientists, and even its own backbench, who asks the Prime Minister a question that is not scripted.

This is an interesting one for me because there is a unifying quality with these different folks, from the media to the watchdogs of Parliament to the government's own backbench from time to time. The unifying quality is that we do not accept every utterance that comes from the Prime Minister's Office as gospel. We do not treat what the government introduces as perfect and sacrosanct. The making of legislation is a difficult thing. It is hard. One should not be so arrogant as to think that when one writes it the first time one gets it right. A student writing a paper in high school does not believe that. Why would a government writing a 300-page justice bill think that every utterance, comma and period in that bill is perfect before it has heard from anybody else?

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Now, the muzzling of the Conservative backbench is an interesting phenomenon. It bubbles up and simmers down and bubbles up and simmers down. It seems to be very much connected. The job description of somebody sitting in the so-called backbench is to hold the government to account. That is their main role: to hold the government to account.

I will quote from the member for Edmonton—St. Albert, who said:

I joined the Reform/conservative movements because I thought we were somehow different, a band of Ottawa outsiders riding into town to clean the place up, promoting open government and accountability. I barely recognize ourselves, and worse I fear that we have morphed into what we once mocked.

The reason he was upset was not because he did not get a softball question that the government throws out every once in a while; it was because the government refused to support his bill on transparency. He dug in his heels and showed some conviction.

For my colleagues on the Conservative benches, I wonder if that was not a signal. When the MP from British Columbia dared to bring up the issue that his constituents wanted to talk about, the issues surrounding a woman's right to choose about abortion services in Canada, the amount of pressure put on him to not even raise the issue was extraordinary. We end up with these very bizarre scenarios in which we, the opposition, go to the public to defend his right to represent his constituents, while his own party, his own government, suppresses that freedom to make a 60-second statement in the House of Commons on what he chooses. That is what we have come to.

For my colleagues on the backbench of the Conservative Party, it seems that there must come a point where enough is enough, as it was for our friend from Edmonton. There is the carrot-and-stick approach of the current Prime Minister the dangling of certain opportunities and trips, and maybe one day making it into cabinet so they can be shown what to say and do, versus the ability to actually represent people.

I can remember my first nomination race and the speeches we gave, or the private conversations we have had with supporters, saying, "I want to do things differently. I want to restore the faith. I want to diminish the cynicism. I want to take further power away from the guys within the PMO". Remember when we used to say it is who one knows in the PMO? Well, who one knows in this PMO can get one thrown in jail it seems. This is a dangerous place that we have come to, where the federal police of our country are investigating the highest levels of power in the Prime Minister's Office.

Here we are today with a government that is so arrogant as to say that whatever it suggests should be decreed in law, regardless what Parliament thinks and regardless of how Canadians voted in the last election. It is that rot, that growing entitlement and arrogance, that moves so far away from the original intention of what that party may have once stood for. It will eventually, and of course, be its undermining, yet it cannot see that when it comes to these omnibus motions and shutting down debate more than any government in history.

This is a government that has refused to look at the evidence as it is. The evidence is that this place can function. Parliament can be a place where we engage with one another with our best ideas, our best

thoughts, and the best voices we can have on behalf of the constituents we seek to represent. It need not be this place of acrimony, of a government abusing the tools available to it, of constant scandal, police investigations and Elections Canada investigations.

• (1810)

It can be a better place, where ideas from the right and the left can form a better and more perfect country. That is what Parliament is built to do, not what it is doing here with the government. In 2015, we will rectify that.

• (1815)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what I have heard throughout the day is verbal diarrhea from the members on that side trying to put the blame on this side for everything they have done. They prorogued government and then told us we were the ones holding up legislation. That is shameful.

They prorogued government to bring in a throne speech. I will quote what people think of the throne speech. This was sent to me. It was in reply to some of what was in *The Globe and Mail*.

David Wood from Mildmay, Ontario wrote:

Does the promised effort to allow consumers to pick and pay for only the channels they want include the one that [the Prime Minister] seems to be asking us to tune in to with the Throne Speech?

I've seen the season preview and suspect this channel carries nothing but fluff and reruns.

Could my colleague tell me how many more he has heard from with respect to this type of legislation that the government is trying to put through? This is a government that kept stating it should not be proroguing. Can my colleague also explain when proroguing should actually be used?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, we have made suggestions. However, because it seems that suggestions do not work so well with the current government, we will bring in legislation that would describe a couple of important measures: one is when committees should go into camera. This is an important tool available to parliamentarians to take committee business out of the public light for issues dealing with personnel, compensation, or anything that has legal implications.

What we consistently see from the Conservatives at the committee stage is that a committee moves into camera whenever the conversation turns against them, or during a vote that they do not want to be seen.

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In the case with prorogation, when Jack Layton stood in this place he talked about there being a certain test within the House, that a prime minister should not have the power to simply shut down Parliament. This happened just after the Prime Minister of the day, facing certain defeat in the House of Commons when he was in a minority status, drove down the road to the Governor General's house and said, "Please let me get out of town". It was meant to be a thirty-minute meeting. We know that because he had booked a photo op at a car manufacturer's an hour later. It lasted for three and a half hours. The poor media were standing outside the door. It lasted for three and a half hours because the Governor General said that governments wanting to get out when the heat turns up have a tendency to use the hammer of prorogation. It is a hammer. What does it do? It shuts down the very bills that government states it cares so much about.

Did we need the throne speech? Absolutely not. Anyone could have given that speech and told us all of the wonderful things they had to say. Instead the government brought down the hammer, destroyed a whole bunch of legislation that it stated it cares about and then claimed that it is somehow the victim of this crime. It should properly define "victim". If it is doing it to itself, it is no longer the victim of what has happened. That is some sort of strange psychology with the government to always feel like someone, the media, this constituency here or these powerful environmental groups there, or the mighty unions, is doing this to it. At some point, responsibility is required.

The government chose this. It wanted to come and negotiate with us about what bills should be allowed back in and what bills are too toxic to see the light of day according to everybody involved. Of course, we entered into those negotiations. If it wants to bring them in *carte blanche* and state that it gets whatever it wants because it is the government, then that is a different conversation. That is when we end up here. If it is expecting the opposition to roll over, it must be thinking about a different opposition. That is not what New Democrats do.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saainich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as much as it pains me to do this, I need to point out that the prorogation that just occurred was not unconstitutional. The previous two, in 2008 and 2009, were clearly unconstitutional. In differing from some of my friends who spoke previously today, there are no previous examples of Liberal Prime Ministers or Progressive Conservative Prime Ministers proroguing to avoid a confidence vote that they knew they were going lose or to avoid political difficulty.

It is quite shocking what the Prime Minister has done. In the whole of the British Commonwealth, as studied by an institution in London that looks at these things, only one previous example could be found before the 2008 prorogation where prorogation was used to shut down Parliament to avoid political difficulty, and sadly, it was also Canada. It was Sir John A. Macdonald during the Pacific scandal. However, he returned to Parliament and immediately had an election.

I wanted to make this one little point. This prorogation, in hitting the reset button, I agree with my friends in the official opposition, could have been done midsummer, could have been done any time, did not need to delay the House till October. However, clearly, it was

much more in the norm of the tradition that the government had basically run out of steam. Sitting till midnight, one in the morning, every day through the last of May until the last of June with time allocation on every bill, the Conservatives could pretty much force everything through if that was what they chose to do. That, to me, was a larger offence than the prorogation.

● (1820)

Hon. Ron Cannan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In terms of decorum, I would like to bring to your attention to page 150 of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms* related to appropriate language.

We all want to have decorum and respectful debate in the House of Commons. The hon. member from the NDP used the words "verbal diarrhea" with regard to the government. It was totally inappropriate in this situation. We want to respect one another. I would ask you to ask the hon. member to rescind her comments and to respect the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing would like to address the point.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I wish to withdraw that comment if it has offended the hon. member. I was trying to say that obviously government members are full of themselves at times, so I am sorry for that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): For the benefit of all hon. members, while there is indeed a list of unparliamentary terms and words in Beauchesne's, the practise of the House is to look at how words are used in the context of whether they cause disorder in the House, and so on. I note that in this particular case it was not in reference to an individual member or parliamentarian, but was rather a general reference.

That said, members should be discouraged from taking up the kind of language that can cause other disorder in the House. I certainly appreciate the comments of hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing, although the end of her comments was not necessarily helpful toward creating the kind of goodwill that we know works well for a good civil debate in the House of Commons.

We will now go to the response. The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, in the effort to have civility and decorum, perhaps I was inarticulate in my comments earlier about how we are viewing this particular prorogation and what it means. At no point did I talk about this being unconstitutional. It was unwise, and apparently now unnecessary that the government shut down Parliament using prorogation in an effort to reset the agenda. That was the attempt, yet we are back here and we have had a press conference this morning about the Senate scandal, finding out that the Prime Minister may have misled Canadians in the spring.

All the effort of shutting everything down for five weeks, killing all of that legislation, was to switch the channel over from the Senate scandal, which is of the Prime Minister's own creation. He has no one but himself to blame for this. These are his appointments. It was his promise not to appoint unelected senators to the Senate, and he broke that 59 times. Maybe he should have stuck with his promise. He would not have Mike Duffy haunting his dreams right now. He would not be dealing with Patrick Brazeau and Wallin. Those are choices that the Prime Minister made.

My point on this particular sequence is that the government only seems to have one tool in its belt: the hammer. Therefore, everything looks like a nail. Any time there is an opportunity to have a discussion, the Conservatives shut down the discussion. Any time there is an ability to have a debate and have that free exchange of ideas that you talked about, Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives come in with closure, again. They cannot seem to negotiate to save their lives. Then they try to blame somebody else for it. It is time to take a little ownership on that side. Denial is a river in Egypt. Let us get them focused on what is really happening.

•(1825)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again commend the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

He attempted to point out the lack of debate. Over the four weeks we spent in our ridings, people kept asking us why we were not in the House of Commons debating about things that Canadians need.

What Canadians need are clear and democratic debates. That means a democratic debate in which everyone can participate and discuss topics such as the Senate, employment insurance and the plight of aboriginal women.

However, we need to be here to debate such issues and we did not have that opportunity. Now, the Conservatives want to bring all those issues back in an omnibus motion in order to cut short debate, which shows an unacceptable lack of democracy in a modern society such as Canada. I would like to hear my colleague's comments on that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

That is exactly it. We have a role here. We have a job to do for all Canadians. The Conservative backbenchers have the same job. It involves showing some responsibility in the House of Commons with regard to employment insurance and the economy, among other things.

It is good that Quebeckers and Canadians were asking us why we were in our ridings rather than in the House to present the government with new ideas to help improve their circumstances and prevent tragedies like the one in Lac-Mégantic. These are the issues and the reason for debate. We do not debate just for the sake of debate, but to improve things here. However, this government is against debate. It is too bad. I would like to thank my colleagues for their questions.

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to seek

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agreement from my colleagues to reinstate an important piece of legislation, which is Bill C-49, an act to amend the Museums Act in order to establish the Canadian museum of history.

As members of the House may recall, the former Minister of Heritage and Official Languages announced our government's plan to establish this new national museum just over a year ago on October 16, 2012. Our government believes that Canadians deserve a national museum that tells our stories and presents our country's treasures to the world, but Canada does not actually have a national museum that presents a comprehensive narrative of our history.

As Canada approaches its 150th anniversary in 2017, we are approaching a once-in-a-generation opportunity to better understand and examine the defining chapters of our country's history. Canada's history is vast. It is important that all Canadians appreciate the courage of our ancestors, from Samuel de Champlain's mapping of the St. Lawrence River to the last spike at Craigellachie, British Columbia, which marked the completion of the Canadian Pacific railway tracks that took us from east to west and back again. Bill C-49 would retell stories such as those by creating the Canadian museum of history.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind my colleagues of the mandate of the new museum as it is described in the legislation. It states:

The purpose of the Canadian museum of history is to enhance Canadians' knowledge, understanding and appreciation of events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada's history and identity, and also to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures.

I would also like to provide a brief summary of why we introduced the legislation and why we want to reinstate it. Our government believes that the vast majority of Canadians who have the privilege of visiting our national museums recognize that they are our national treasures. That is why we have opened two new national museums: the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg.

Canada needs a national institution that will tell the stories of how Canada came to be the prosperous land we now live in. Our country needs an institution that will independently research and explore our history and present it to the over 35 million Canadians in this country. This country needs a national institution that celebrates our achievements and what we have accomplished together as Canadians. Our children need to know more about Canada's past.

That is why we introduced the legislation to create the new Canadian museum of history. The new museum's home would be in what is currently the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Our government would make a \$25-million, one-time investment so that the museum could be built to host and hold the new exhibitions that would take place, and also transition to its new mandate with a focus on Canada's history and Canada's identity.

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As soon as we hear about the expenditure of funds, all of us wonder where those funds would come from and whether or not the taxpayer would have to pay more for this investment. However, I remind the House that the funds would come from the existing budget for Canadian Heritage. The museum itself would also allocate internal resources to the project and it would launch a public fundraising campaign with an initial target of \$5 million. These funds would allow the museum of Canadian history to renovate more than half of its permanent exhibition space. The result would be almost 50,000 square feet of space in which to present a comprehensive telling of our country's history. The museum would actually renovate 7,500 square feet on the street-level floor of its main building, and this space would increase its capacity to host travelling exhibitions, for example exhibits from other museums across the country.

As members will hear, and as many of us have heard when we talked about the potential of this museum, it would not just be a museum situated here in Ottawa. The transition of using museums across this country from a historical perspective would be implemented at the same time. It would be to refresh its mandate and orientation so that we could tell the story of this country. As we have mentioned in past debates, the Children's Museum would continue to be an integral part of this new museum—

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher is rising on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I would love to debate the Conservatives' wonderful bill to turn the Canadian Museum of Civilization into the Canadian museum of history, but that is not what we are talking about right now.

Can we get back to Motion No. 2?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would like to thank the hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher for his point of order.

With regard to the subject that is before the House, it is true that all honourable members must ensure that what they are talking about is relevant.

[*English*]

In the course of debate, members have been making references to the pieces of legislation that are part and parcel of the motion and would be affected by it. This has been a debate that has touched on those topics in the past. I recognize the hon. member's point and encourage the parliamentary secretary and others to continue to ensure that their arguments and commentary do refer to the question that is before the House.

The question pertains, of course, to a procedural matter in terms of reinstating the various pieces of legislation to the stage at which they were left in the first session. At the same time, discussion around those pieces of legislation can give rise to arguments as to why the question should be supported or opposed.

The Chair recognizes these points in the same vein that there has been debate regarding the Speech from the Throne, prorogation, and other issues that are perhaps not directly related to the question but that in fact do have some pertinence in this case.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

• (1835)

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I think the key word in your decision was the word “affect”. The fact is that what we are presenting very cautiously but very consistently is the whole reason around what we would like to see reintroduced in the House. I happen to represent and speak to a piece of legislation, Bill C-49, that we would like to have reintroduced in the House. I thank you for your decision and judgment on that and I will continue.

As we have mentioned in past debates, the children's museum will continue to be an integral part of the new museum, as will the Grand Hall and the First Peoples Hall, which present chapters of our story and our history that are of immense importance, the history of Canada's first peoples.

However, more than just the name of the museum would change; so too would the mandate and the exhibits. Canadians living from coast to coast should be able to benefit from the 3.5 million items currently in the collection at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. That is why we are building and encouraging partnerships between the new Canadian museum of history and over 2,500 museums, including one in my riding of St. Catharines, which just opened up an exhibit regarding 1812 and the role that Sir Isaac Brock and the Niagara region played in the War of 1812.

The partners will have access to the new museum's collection which, as I mentioned, numbers some 3.5 million artifacts. As is the case with most museums, the vast majority of the new museum's collection has been in storage. With that goal in mind, the future Canadian museum of history is signing partnership agreements with a number of museums to establish a nationwide museum network. The agreements being negotiated with the largest institutions that have a mandate to cover the history of Canada will play a key role in moving this collection across the country and making it accessible to more Canadians.

In fact, I would like to update the House that there are currently three such partnership agreements, one with the Royal B.C. Museum, another with the Manitoba Museum and a third with Calgary's Glenbow Museum, and there will be others right across our country.

The Canadian history museum network will enhance the production and the reach of exhibitions focusing on Canadian history. By helping museums throughout Canada provide more opportunities for us to learn about our history, the Canadian museum of history's partnerships with other museums will serve as a tremendous resource in the future.

I would like my colleagues in the House to know that this project has received support from prominent Canadian historians, such as Jack Granatstein, Charlotte Gray, and many others. Michael Bliss, Canadian historian and award-winning author, said that it is very exciting that Canada's major museum will now be explicitly focused on Canada's history.

Organizations such as the Canadian Museums Association, Canada's History, and the Historica-Dominion Institute have also expressed their support. Yves Fortier, member of the Historica-Dominion Institute board of directors, said, "...the Historica-Dominion Institute enthusiastically supports the creation of the Canadian museum of history."

Historians and historical associations across the country see tremendous value in promoting Canadian history, and so does our government. John McAvity, executive director of the Canadian Museums Association, stated, "The Canadian Museums Association welcomes these improvements to one of Canada's flagship national museums."

We are creating the Canadian museum of history, but it does not stop there. We are also taking other steps to protect and promote Canada's history. For example, we have created the Canada history fund, which will provide awards to outstanding students and teachers of history. As well, we are providing supporting for the Historica-Dominion Institute to create two new *Heritage Minutes* each year between now and 2017, when Canadians will celebrate this country's 150th birthday.

We are also increasing support for projects like the Memory Project Speakers Bureau, which makes it possible for thousands of young students to meet Canadian veterans and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces right in their own classrooms. This project is a fantastic way for all of us to pay tribute to our veterans and to learn more about this very important part of our country's history and our country's heritage.

Our government will also increase our present funding for reference sources, such as the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* and *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. These are extremely valuable tools that help teachers in the classroom, and because they are online, they are available to anyone who has an interest in exploring these fascinating entries.

● (1840)

As I mentioned, the Canadian museum of history's partnerships will encourage museums big and small, and from all parts of the country, to share more exhibits and more artifacts from one side of the country to the other. This is not something that people are going to have to come to Ottawa to see; this is something that Ottawa is going to ensure spreads out across this entire country.

Moving exhibits and artifacts does cost money, though, so the Canadian Heritage museums assistance program will now support travel costs associated with moving materials from the Canadian museum of history to local museums right across our country. To ensure more local history circulates, we have also changed the program to support museums that want to circulate history exhibits within their own province or their own territory.

Ours is a fascinating history that dates back long before the first European settlers arrived on these shores. It tells of people from around the world coming here to seek a better life for themselves and for their families, and how, bringing with them different languages, different religions, and different customs, they learned to live together in mutual respect and be an example as a country to the rest of the world. Together our ancestors built a country that is the envy

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of many people throughout the world. What an incredibly proud heritage we have.

With the approach of Canada's 150th birthday in 2017, we have a golden opportunity to learn more about our past. What a wonderful time to discover the perseverance, innovation, and creativity of great Canadians who have been instrumental in building our communities and our country and to pay tribute to the dedicated men and women who brought distinction to Canada in so many different areas of endeavour.

Over the course of 150 years of nationhood, we have earned an international reputation for excellence in many fields, including the arts, sports, and literature. In fact, I want to congratulate Canadian Alice Munro for recently winning the Nobel Prize for literacy. It is just another example of the role that she and other Canadians play and their role in history that we will see in the Canadian museum.

This is a perfect opportunity to celebrate the people, places, and events that have made Canada the incredible country that it is, events such as Canada's first Arctic expedition. This year marks the 100th anniversary. It was 100 years ago that it took place.

In 2015 we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the flag of Canada with our much-loved red maple leaf. As well, over the next few years, we will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the births of Sir George-Étienne Cartier and Sir John A. Macdonald's, as well as the 175th anniversary of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's birth.

These people and events that helped establish our nation are critical to understanding where we came from and where we are going. In learning more about them, we can discover much about how we got to where we are now: democratic, proud, and free, a strong country that is building on its past to pursue excellence today and to pursue excellence tomorrow.

Our government believes all children in this country—indeed, all people in this country—should have the opportunity to learn about our rich heritage. In so doing, we hope they will be inspired to make their own contributions to this great country.

That is why I am very pleased that our government is investing in the initiatives that I have outlined and is creating the new Canadian museum of history. A new national history museum will allow us to learn more about our past and by doing so inspire us to even greater achievements in the future. As members know, we as a country and as peoples continue to write history.

Bill C-49 was introduced and received first reading last year on November 27. It would make a number of changes to the Museums Act in relation to the current Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation that would allow it to evolve into the Canadian museum of history.

As the bill made its way through the House, there was a great deal of discussion. Although sometimes the opposition is not always thrilled to hear this, in fact it was debated for more than 14 hours in this chamber. During second reading, many members had the opportunity to express any concerns they may have had or to speak about why they consider the Canadian museum of history to be significant.

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When the legislation was referred to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, the minister at that time, as well as many other individuals and associations and organizations, was invited to speak about the bill.

• (1845)

For example, committee members heard from the Canadian Museum of Civilization, through its president and chief executive officer, Mark O'Neill, and from the Canadian Museums Association, through its executive director and CEO, John McAvity. Anthony Wilson-Smith, the president of the Historica Canada, appeared before the committee as well. These are just a few examples, but there were many others who came to the table at the heritage committee to express their thoughts, their vision, and their belief in why we should move forward with this piece of legislation, but more importantly, with this new piece of history.

It is also important to point out that at report stage last June, Bill C-49 was debated a further six hours, for a total of 20 hours of debate in the House of Commons on our new Canadian museum of history. All the debates that took place during the last session of Parliament are still applicable today, because the bill we want to reinstate is exactly the same.

A good deal of the House's time, energy, and effort has been invested in studying this legislation, and the government sees no further value to be gained in repeating what has been an extensive review so far. For that reason, we ask, respectfully and humbly, that the said bill be deemed, in the current session, as being considered and approved at all stages completed, at the time of prorogation, in the previous session.

As we approach Canada's 150th birthday, it is an unprecedented opportunity to celebrate our history and those achievements that define us as Canadian. The establishment of the Canadian museum of history would provide Canadians with the opportunity to learn, appreciate, and understand the richness of Canadian history. I hope all members will join me in supporting the reinstatement of Bill C-49 at third reading. The opening of the Canadian museum of history in 2016 is going to be one of the highlights leading up to 2017.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments by my friend from St. Catharines. I am sure *Hansard* will reflect that he meant to say that Alice Munro has won the Nobel Prize in literature, not literacy. I am sure that he just misspoke.

I have a very quick question. I know that we are talking about this larger bill with all these bills in it. My friend across the way was talking about writing history, and I am assuming the corollary is rewriting history. I wonder if the intention of the Conservative government is to rewrite history as it has repainted the government jet Conservative colours. I wonder if that is the intention with this particular bill.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for two things. One is his question, and second is his clarification. I thank him for the correction. His office is next to mine, and he keeps a very close eye on what I may be saying or doing, so I appreciate it. It is always done in the context of trying to deliver better and more, so I appreciate it.

To respond to his question, I think he knows full well that although its mandate will change in terms of moving from civilization to history, the structure and the manner in which the Canadian museum of history is run by its executive, its CEO, its directors, and all of its staff, and the way the facility is managed as a crown corporation separate from the government, shows very clearly that the intentions will remain as stated in the bill and as stated by the individuals who do such a great job for us at the museum.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it bears repeating that to prevent returning to the House on September 16, the Prime Minister had to prorogue the session. That allowed him to avoid accountability for an additional month. Unfortunately, there were many consequences, but I will focus on one, that being the area of debate right now. It meant that everything had to be restarted. As a result of the Prime Minister wanting to avoid accountability, this motion was moved, because the House was prorogued.

The member spent a great deal of time talking about a bill and why it is important that we continue with that bill. I have heard other members talk about other issues. I could mention individuals like Crystal Saunders, Helen Betty Osborne, Roberta McIvor, Fonesca Bruyere, Danielle Vanasse, Therenia Silva, Stephanie Buboire, Aynsley Kinch, Evelyn Stewart, Cherrisse Houle, and many others. These individuals were murdered or are missing. There are 600 individuals in total. This was started to try to deal with this issue. This is one of the reasons the Liberal Party will be voting in favour of this motion. Liberals recognize the importance of carrying things over.

However, does the member not believe that the Prime Minister, when he prorogued the session, could have and should have, at the very least, come back in September? He did not have to wait until October. It is very suspicious that the reason he did that was to avoid accountability.

• (1850)

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I was not sure, now that I have been moved to heritage as parliamentary secretary, that I would continue to debate and dialogue with the member for Winnipeg North. I can see, as will my good friend from Thunder Bay—Rainy River, that he is going to be dogging me and following me pretty much everywhere I go. I look forward to his questions and debate over the next number of weeks and months.

In answer to his question, the fact is that we have introduced a new throne speech. We have signed an agreement in principle with the European Union in terms of a free trade deal. If those are not examples of the direction this government is going to take, he needs to take another look at the throne speech to understand the aggressive nature in which we will be moving with respect to legislation and introducing the second part of our mandate for the 41st Parliament. I continue to look forward to debating those issues with him.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague a question about what the member opposite asked about rewriting history. I would like him to comment on presenting history and the colour of government jets. We have colours that symbolize many things. Red is our national colour. Blue is the colour of the Canadian Armed Forces. I would like to ask my hon. colleague to comment.

Government Orders

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that one of the favourite colours on this side of the House happens to be blue, but it is also a colour that happens to be a favourite of many in this nation. When it comes to understanding and relating to the colours of our country, I mentioned in my speech our Canadian flag and the fact that we will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Canadian flag leading up to our celebration of the 150th anniversary and the 150th year of this country. Whether it is red, blue, or white, those colours fairly represent the direction and purpose of this country when it comes to identifying it.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering whether I am the only person here who is feeling a little manipulated by this debate.

The motion before us is to give any minister opposite the power to reinstate any bill before the House in the last session to its previous place on the Order Paper, merely by getting up and reading it. The member has taken the opportunity, with this motion, to talk about a particular, individual, separate bill, yet the reality is that if this motion passes, nobody on this side of the House will have an opportunity to debate any piece of legislation on this list introduced by any minister over there.

The member is taking the opportunity to use up the time on this motion to have his say about a bill that we are not really going to have a chance to talk about, because this is not a debate about that bill.

• (1855)

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure what the member was saying. Would he rather debate process here in the House of Commons or just stand to complain about the government? Would he actually like to take a few minutes and be productive and say he is going to come here to help build this country, represent his riding in a positive fashion, and when he has the opportunity to stand to talk about the promotion of the new Canadian museum of history, do so in a proactive manner?

We are here to talk about action. We are here to move this country forward. All I am hearing from the other side of the House, and this member has represented this extremely well, is, "Let's debate process".

I spent the summer and the additional time I had during prorogation back in St. Catharines. No one in my riding said to go back to Ottawa to debate process for us. They asked me to take action and to make sure that we put people back to work in this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to my colleague that I can certainly see why he would want to debate an issue as important as changing the Canadian Museum of Civilization's mandate.

I am talking to you, Mr. Speaker, but as I look across the way, I can see that the member is talking and not looking at me.

The member is getting to know this file and has quoted directors and others who supported changing the mandate, but does he know that the museum's former director expressed strong opposition to the change? Is he quoting only the people he wants to hear? Two or three

others have spoken out against changing the mandate. The government has to stop going on about everything that will change along with the mandate. Imagine if I told my wife we were going to renovate the kitchen and then I would do the cooking and we could make babies. That is how they talk to us about the museum. Hold on a second. Changing a museum's mandate does not necessarily mean switching the artifacts. In other words, that could have been done with the museum as it is now because it is a very good museum just the way it is.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, it certainly does not surprise me to hear that when it comes to Canadian history in our country and trying to get it represented in a museum for the first time in our country's history, someone from the NDP would stand to say that he is opposed to that. The NDP is opposed to Canadian history. It is opposed to talking about who built this country. It is opposed to talking about how this country stands out, whether in the G7 or the G20, in terms of its economic agenda and in terms of humanitarian compassion and the assistance we provide. I would only expect from the NDP that we would hear that.

On this side of the House, it is about how great this country is in its history, its present, and its future.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to join in a debate that I find increasingly difficult to stay out of. The more I listen to some of the diversionary tactics being put forward by my Conservative colleagues as they try to obscure the depth and the breadth of the real substance of the issue that we are debating today, the more increasingly uncomfortable I get. They either do not get it or they are deliberately trying to avoid the reality of what they are doing today to undermine, sabotage and diminish our parliamentary democracy as we see it today.

I agree with my colleague from St. John's and also my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley who made the point that there is nothing untoward, nothing particularly unconstitutional about prorogation. However, when that legitimate parliamentary procedural tactic is abused in a systematic way, it undermines and diminishes the integrity of the parliamentary democracy that both sides of the House dedicate ourselves to.

Maybe the masterminds, the architects of their strategy, realize it, but I am not sure some of the backbenchers realize what a fragile construct we enjoy in our Westminster parliamentary democracy. It requires the two requisite parts to play their roles, to effectively debate and test the merits of legislation put before us. Our strict and rigid guidelines with which to do that are being systematically undermined as we speak because there is nothing normal about using prorogation to avoid being accountable to members of the House of Commons, and by extension to the people of Canada that those members of the House of Commons represent.

By the same reasoning it is completely an affront to democracy to bypass after prorogation the normal negotiations that often take place in order to put certain pieces of legislation of particular merit and virtue back where they were before prorogation.

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What is happening today and what my colleague from St. John's was trying to point out is that the government is trying to do an end run on all of that. The Conservatives are trying to have it both ways. They prorogued Parliament to avoid accountability for the increasingly embarrassing Senate scandals. They delayed for an extra six weeks because they said they needed more time to craft a new legislative agenda for the fall session. That is what they told the general public, yet when we have taken this extra six weeks off so that they can presumably recalibrate their legislative agenda, the first item of business, Motion No. 2, would reinstate everything that happened before. Everything would start exactly where it left off as if prorogation never happened. The Conservatives cannot have it both ways. They should not be able to have it both ways. I would argue that it is an affront and it should offend the sensibilities of any member of Parliament who considers himself or herself a democrat.

The Senate scandals are perhaps deeper and more fundamental than we even realize. I am sure Conservative members are reeling with shock and horror at every revelation that comes forward. It now becomes apparent that the good senator currently at the eye of the hurricane is not going to go gently into that good night. In fact, he is going to go down kicking and screaming, and he fully intends to take a lot of people down with him.

The Conservatives have not done a very good job of avoiding the very reason that I believe they prorogued Parliament, but let us put it in context.

The whole idea of prorogation and a new Speech from the Throne is to put forward a new vision for where the government wants to take the country. A Speech from the Throne should not simply tweak existing programs or make minor alterations to what had already been under way. We did not hear anything of substance in the Speech from the Throne to deal with what I believe is the biggest problem that Canada has right now, and that is the fact that it has now become increasingly obvious and declared by the courts that the 2011 federal election was decided by widespread electoral fraud.

● (1900)

One would think that the ruling party, the government in power, would be concerned by this now that the courts have ruled that in 246 ridings, by their count and they are not finished their examination, there was widespread fraud that sought to undermine the democratic process and deny Canadians the right to cast their ballot in a free and fair election, free of intimidation, harassment and molestation. In fact, people systematically tried to deny Canadians the right to vote. That should horrify every person in this room, yet the Speech from the Throne is silent on it and there is nothing in the legislative agenda to correct it in the 18 months or two years that we have before we go to the polls again in another federal election. We are just as vulnerable to those who would seek to defraud the electoral system and steal another federal election by cheating. It concerns me that not a single word in the Speech from the Throne deals with this, whether it is robocalls or widespread electoral fraud. As I have said, people should be horrified by this.

The Conservatives have made reference to the loophole loans bill. In fact, we used to call it the Mazda bill because it was the Conservative member for Mississauga—Streetsville who used his own Mazda dealership to loan himself a quarter of a million dollars

to run his election campaign. Of course, when is a loan not a loan? If one never pays it back it is not really a loan, it is a gift or a donation. This is what gave cause to bring in some kind of a loophole bill to plug this loophole. We are not going to have any satisfaction in that either.

We have a problem. We have a serious democratic deficit. We have a democracy that is really only a facsimile of a democracy. I mean, our democracy today in 2013 reminds me of one of those California strawberries or those tomatoes from the supermarket that taste like cardboard. It looks like a tomato but it does not taste anything like a tomato. That is kind of what the public sees. They see us going through the motions of a democracy here, but in actual fact the people across the aisle with their logic that the end justifies the means in every single case have been sabotaging and undermining this fragile democratic structure that we call the Westminster parliamentary system in every way imaginable.

Going back to the widespread electoral fraud, one has to look to motive and opportunity I suppose any time one looks for who committed an offence. The courts have been very helpful to us, but failed to point out specifically, or could not say specifically, that it was the Conservative Party of Canada that orchestrated this widespread electoral fraud. However, the courts did say that it was the Conservative Party of Canada's CIMS database that was used to orchestrate this widespread electoral fraud. One looks to who would benefit from cheating at this level. I mean, why would all the NDP and Liberal voters be phoned in a riding and lied to that their polling station had moved? I do not think we would do that ourselves.

These are some of the concerns that I have as I listen to this debate about what is really red herrings and smoke screens. We are debating the relative merits and virtues of having a museum change its name, when the big picture here is that we have a democratic deficit that is severely problematic. I do not know how we can continue unless that is dealt with. Therefore, if one is going to prorogue Parliament and come back with a Speech from the Throne, one is either negligent or demonstrating wilful blindness if one does not talk about what I think is the most serious thing facing us today as members of Parliament.

I have mentioned the political loans bill, but I would also like to point out some of the things that are happening in Parliament today, never mind political loans and electoral fraud. There is the whole notion of omnibus bills. We are dealing with an omnibus bill now. Essentially this motion is omnibus by nature in that it affects however many pieces of legislation introduced in the 41st Parliament.

Government Orders

●(1905)

However, there are two things I would like to point out about what is problematic in the period of time leading up to the situation in which we find ourselves. This whole notion of omnibus bills is, by its very nature, undemocratic and has to be challenged. We have 60 or 70 pieces of legislation rolled into one with a few hours of debate and a few hours of committee hearings. Some of the things that happened within those omnibus bills are wide, sweeping and deserve a great deal of national attention and scrutiny. How much time did we really spend in the House of Commons on the issue of changing the age of retirement from 65 to 67? How much time were we allowed? How much time at committee could we call witnesses to ask them about the need to change the age of retirement to 67 years old?

There were pieces of legislation affected by these omnibus bills that had huge impacts on industrial sectors where not a word was spoken. It was by accident that we stumbled across one bill that was repealed and was called the construction fair wage and hours of work act. It set minimum wages in the construction industry. Then the same omnibus bill has changes to temporary foreign workers legislation where people can get a temporary foreign worker in 10 days. In one step, they would eliminate the minimum wage laws for construction workers to where people can pay them the provincial minimum wage, and in the second step they invite contractors to bring in temporary foreign workers within 10 days. How is a fair contractor in this country who hires construction workers at a living wage ever going to compete on another job if contractors can now pay a minimum wage on a federal construction project and bring in temporary foreign workers? These things would have come up if we had the opportunity to test the merits of their arguments with rigorous, robust debate as was intended by the very structure of the House of Commons.

Then these things go to committee stage where they also gerrymander the type of witnesses we can hear. Committees used to be the last bastion of some non-partisan co-operation, where we would leave our political baggage at the door and do what is right for the country. I have been a member of Parliament for awhile here. I was here when the Liberals had a majority government and I was the only NDP member on that committee. I used to move amendments to pieces of legislation and have them succeed. That sounds like pie in the sky today, it sounds like a fantasy.

Mr. Speaker, do you know how many amendments have been passed? You probably do, or the table can help us.

Not a single amendment to a single piece of legislation in the entire 41st Parliament has been allowed. Does that mean the Conservatives have a monopoly on all good ideas? Does that mean they would not benefit from any suggestion from anyone? Amendments are being denied and declined on the basis of where they come from, not the merits of the language.

This is what I mean about undermining some of the most fundamental principles of our parliamentary democracy. It is almost absurd when we think about it. The Conservatives will not allow any controversial subjects to ever be debated anymore. We used to have some really interesting exchanges. Studies that I think elevated the standard of political discourse in the whole country occurred at

parliamentary committees once upon a time, but not anymore. If we suggest a study that is any more challenging than pabulum, we will not get it through. The Conservatives will deny it. They want to tie us up with busy work for 18 months, studying nothing and producing reports that go nowhere and gather dust. That is the state of the nation.

I am not proud of it and in fact I think we are wasting our time. In actual fact, our democracy is in tatters. We are getting these omnibus pieces of legislation so there is no scrutiny, no oversight, no due diligence, pieces of legislation flying past us. We hardly even get a chance to read them by the time this guy, the House leader for the Conservatives moves closure. He sometimes moves closure on the same day that he introduces legislation. There is nothing unconstitutional about time allocation or closure. It is permitted by our rules, but it is supposed to be the exception, not the rule. When I asked how many amendments were allowed into legislation, I could pose the same question about how many pieces of legislation had time allocation applied to them. The answer is easy: all of them, every single bill, every stage of every single bill. Time allocation and time allocation, it is absurd.

●(1910)

I would not have believed 10 years ago that this would be the state of the House of Commons and that our parliamentary democracy would have been so undermined, so eroded and so diminished that we find ourselves in this almost embarrassing situation. That is what I mean when I say we have a mere facsimile of a democracy. It is enough, perhaps, to fool an, unfortunately, quite unengaged public, but for those of us who are locked into this situation, it is depressing. I have talked about the parliamentary committees that used to be a last bastion for some semblance of co-operation. They, too, are gone.

The Conservatives seem to have the attitude that the winner takes it all. In actual fact, when a party wins a razor thin majority, with 39% of the popular vote, the system is such that there is an obligation to take into consideration some of the points of view put forward by the majority of Canadians who, quite frankly, did not vote for the Conservatives. They voted for the people on this side, and they are putting their ideas through their representatives to have them added to the mix and to make good legislation that is for the whole country. That is the way it is supposed to work. However, again, it sounds like some distant fantasy dream now, because I have not seen any evidence of that kind of responsibility whatsoever.

Government Orders

I have a real concern that there are fundamental changes going on in society. There is an agenda going on. There might be two parallel legislative agendas going on. One on the face of it and another, far more sinister, situation going on behind the scenes. I am concerned that the Conservatives have essentially launched a war on the middle class. I saw a bumper sticker the last time I was in Washington that said "at least the war on the middle class is going well". The same could be applied to this country.

The Conservatives are consistently trying to undermine the influence of unions. There is going to be an attack on labour. They are running out of red meat issues and hot button issues that they can raise funds for their base with. I am surprised they gave away the gun registry and that they finally did do away with it because that was the real money-maker for them, was it not? They were fundraising on the gun registry for years. That has gone.

The Conservatives do not have the Wheat Board to raise funds on anymore, so how are they going to excite their base? They could pick on the public service pension plans, they could pick on unions and they could try to pit worker against worker. It is easy pickings. It is the last refuge of the scoundrel to start picking on the public service and blame workers' pensions for the deficit hole that they have dug for other reasons. We can almost predict that is coming down the pipe.

The Conservatives are going to declare war on what they call "legacy costs". They have already done away with the minimum wage laws associated with construction workers, the largest employer and the largest industrial sector in the country. Now the Conservatives are going to pick on public servants and say that their pensions are too fat. They will get into the *Sun Media* newspaper chain and try to convince other working people that the public servants have big, fat pensions.

It is one of these mug's games that is offensive, but it is effective. I can almost guarantee that the Conservatives will be fundraising on that.

I would like to go back, if I can, to another element of what I believe is widespread electoral fraud and some of the examples. I have an example of one guy who phoned me during the federal election, Gerald McIvor, who is an aboriginal man who lives in my riding. He received a phone call on election day, telling him that his voting station had moved across town. He replied that it could not be across town as he and his wife had just voted right across the street. He could see the voting station from his window. They had just got back from voting, so the caller was wrong. He demanded to know who it was, but the caller refused to say and hung up.

This is the kind of thing that went on right across the country and nobody is talking about it. We have been waiting for legislation to fix this since God knows when. We would think that if the Speech from the Throne would create a new vision for Canada, there would at least be some recognition of the problem that took place in the last election, so we could go with some confidence into the next federal election, knowing that our forefathers went to war to fight for democracy and that it is still alive and well in our country.

I put it to the House that it is not. It is sick, it is tattered and it desperately needs attention.

●(1915)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, we appreciate the comments and really insightful perceptions of our friend from Winnipeg Centre.

At the risk of making a sad situation sound even sadder, one thing I do know for sure is that there are backbenchers on the Conservative side who agree with the member, who agree with us that our democracy is heading into the tattered territory.

Would the hon. member like to comment on the following? We are fond of painting the opposite side in one broad stroke, but there are many on that side who believe exactly as we believe and exactly as the member for Winnipeg Centre believes.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I take no pleasure in the speech I just gave. I do not accuse colleagues on the other side of any kind of particular malice in this regard.

I can accept that most of us want a robust and well-functioning parliamentary democracy, that we believe in it and that we ran with all the right intentions. However, it is getting to be a widely held view that there are some very bad people who sabotaged the last federal election.

We do not know who the actual architects of this electoral fraud are. We do know it took place. The courts have now ruled that in at least 246 ridings this kind of electoral fraud took place. The Conservatives won by a 12-seat majority.

Let us do the math. If there was not this kind of interference, trying to systematically deny Canadians' right to vote in a free and fair election, we do not know what the outcome would have been. At the very least, the ruling party should consider the legitimate points of view of the majority of Canadians as represented by the opposition. Those are the two requisite parts of Parliament.

There is an obligation when a party wins an election to rule for all the people. There is an obligation to at least accommodate some of the legitimate concerns brought forward. There is an obligation to consider amendments if they have merit. Amendments to legislation should not just be denied based on who moved them.

I saw a bizarre example where our colleague in the justice committee moved six amendments to a crime bill, because it was clearly unconstitutional. They were denied at committee and the former minister of justice had to stand up in the House of Commons at third reading and amend his own bill because we were right and he was wrong, but there was no way he would allow them, just because of where they came from.

●(1920)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy and am somewhat entertained by my hon. colleague across the way, but I think he was being a little disingenuous in his response to that last question in suggesting that there was somehow some doubt as to the results of the last election.

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The conclusion by everyone who investigated that, officially and unofficially, was that there was no impact, zero impact, on any election results. To suggest that it might have changed somewhat is certainly disingenuous.

Let me give the member some facts. It is true that in the last election 62% of Canadians did not vote Conservative, 72% did not vote NDP, 82% did not vote Liberal, 94% did not vote Green, and 98% did not vote Bloc. Since we have had more than two parties, there have been 29 governments, 29 elections. There have been 16 majority governments and only 5 have reached more than 50% of the popular vote. Pierre Trudeau did not have one. Jean Chrétien did not have one.

I would like to point out that suggestions that somehow our government is illegitimate because we got less than 50% of the vote would suggest that there have been many illegitimate majority governments in Canada's history. The hon. colleague should maybe acknowledge that.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Elections Canada is not finished its investigation and neither is the Commissioner of Elections. Therefore, my colleague from Edmonton Centre cannot make the claim that it has been decided that no one was denied their right to vote.

In fact, one of the biggest problems with the Elections Canada investigation is the Conservative witnesses either refuse to cooperate and the elections commissioner does not have the power to compel production of papers or testimony and some of them leave the country, bailing out so that they do not have to testify.

Somebody knows who dialed those robocalls. Somebody knows who read that script. Somebody, I believe, on that side knows.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I realize it is the nature of the motion tonight that the debate is far-ranging. However, I would urge all hon. members to stick to the matter before the House as best as they possibly can.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Western Arctic.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I do not enjoy hearing the sad tale of this 41st Parliament and I certainly would like to see changes to it.

He spoke to the action at committees. I have been sitting on the aboriginal affairs committee over the past two and a half to three years and have seen legislation brought forward that simply impacts aboriginal people. I have seen the lack of consultation, the failure to consider amendments and the strangling of debate over these issues. We are talking about legislation that is specific to the first nations, the history and part of the future of our country. Those failures speak so much to what is happening with our democracy. The only people being affected by legislation are not being given their proper due at committees. That is one of the great failings of the government. It demonstrates its arrogance toward the Canadian population, those who are interested and so vital to us.

That is why we are debating this today and why we do not accept simply returning legislation after the arrogance of a prorogation that was really not required.

● (1925)

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague opened his remarks by lamenting this state of committee work. Not a single amendment was allowed to a single piece of legislation in the entire 41st Parliament. That is a record. It must be an unprecedented situation. As I pointed out in my remarks, I have been here during Liberal majorities and minorities as well as Conservative minorities and a majority. We used to get amendments through. If a lone NDP member of a parliamentary committee with very little power brought an idea that had merit, the amendment could succeed, the legislation would be amended. Therefore, the people who I represented were having their voices heard in the democratic process.

This arrogance and idea that not a single amendment should ever be allowed to any bill, even when they are dead wrong, or a former minister of justice humiliates himself by standing up at report stage to move amendments that we tried to move at committee, is an absurd situation. I take no pleasure in that whatsoever.

We have to start objecting to this because the public deserves to know that it is really not a well-functioning democracy. Rather, it is nostalgia for the facsimile of a democracy that we are working under.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éloise Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Winnipeg Centre on his eloquent speech, in which he clearly explained the negative effects of prorogation, not to mention most of the decisions the government has made since coming to power.

The Conservatives needed to have their memories refreshed because since earlier today, the Conservative members have been standing up one after the other to whine and complain. They say the opposition does not want to let them move forward and do their work. They claim that we are blocking them at every turn when it is their own government's fault. Their Prime Minister, their government leader decided that we would have to waste our time today talking about a prorogation that was essentially meaningless because they are the majority and they intend to put all of the bills they want back on the agenda anyway. It is absolutely ridiculous.

I heard members in the far reaches of the back benches across the way shouting and uttering little cries of false indignation. My colleague must have touched a nerve or two.

I would like the member to explain to my colleagues yet again why it is undemocratic to prorogue in an attempt to run away from Senate scandals, only to bring back all of the bills that should have been dropped.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her remarks and her grasp of the issue.

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My message to the Canadian public would be that as offensive as it is that the Prime Minister's chief of staff gave \$90,000 to some errant senator, we are missing the bigger picture. There is an expression, a medieval nursery rhyme, that says:

They hang the man [...]

Who steals the goose from off the common,

But let the greater villain loose

That steals the common from the goose.

That is the bigger picture that we are losing here. It is up to us as members of Parliament to fight for the integrity of our parliamentary institution, because there are people who are willing to run roughshod and cut a swath through everything that is good and decent about our parliamentary democracy to achieve their own ends. They do not have a mandate to trample all over Parliament. They may have a mandate to govern, but it is with the checks and balances that people smarter than we are put in place to make sure that Parliament works. It is not working now. It is dysfunctional.

• (1930)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in this place to speak about an important bill, Bill S-6, the first nations elections act, which, during the last Parliament, passed into committee.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I am at a bit of a loss. The member says that he is rising to speak to Bill S-6. Bill S-6 is not before Parliament. I understand that we are debating government business Motion No. 2. I do not think that bill has been called yet. Perhaps he should wait until it is called, and then we can debate it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair would agree with the member for St. John's East. All hon. members ought to address the matter that is before the House. As I have said a couple of times, I appreciate that this conversation has wandered a bit, given the nature of government Motion No. 2. Nevertheless, I would ask all hon. members to speak to the matter before the House.

On that basis, resuming debate, the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member giving me two sentences to launch into my speech before interrupting with a point of order. We are talking about the government motion, which includes the ability to bring the legislation that was before the House last June and that was referred to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. That is what I will be addressing in my remarks today. I am going to speak briefly, to allow for some questions.

There are currently 240 first nations that are under the Indian Act when it comes to their election processes. There are currently three options available to them. The first is to carry on operating under the outdated and paternalist Indian Act election system, complete with a long list of identifiable problems. The second choice is to develop a community election code. The third option is self-governance, which is the ideal scenario, in which first nations decide on their own electoral system linked to their own community constitutions and traditions.

What we are talking about here is an option for first nations to operate under the Indian Act. There is no compulsory buy-in for this program. It is strictly those first nations that wish to be part of this

new election regime. I want to talk briefly about the support we have received for this idea.

The Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs has been unwavering in its support of this initiative since it asked our government to come to the table to work on first nations electoral reform over five years ago. Back in the spring of this year, they wrote every Atlantic member of Parliament, including the member for St. John's East, urging them to take the necessary steps to pass the bill as soon as possible.

Just recently, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development received a letter from the congress asking that we reintroduce Bill S-6 as soon as possible. In that letter, John Paul, executive director of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, described the current failings of the Indian Act. He stated:

As you are aware, for years, many First Nations members have been critical of the Indian Act election system, which they believe sets out an electoral regime that is antiquated and paternalistic. Terms of office that are much shorter than municipal, provincial and federal counterparts, a loose nominations process and an absence of penalties for offences related to the electoral process are just some of the key concerns we seek to have addressed through this legislation.

We also received a letter from the former Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Ron Evans, urging the minister to bring back Bill S-6, in its current form, at the earliest opportunity. In his letter, he stated:

When enacted, Bill S-6 will change the way First Nations are governed, create stability and credibility, strengthen self-governance and allow First Nations to move forward. The current Indian Act election system is not working; it is proven to be weak and creates instability for our communities and their economies.

These communities have been working hard to come up with a system. This has been first nations led. It was developed with first nations. It is something they have been calling for.

I think we need to get this bill back to committee as soon as possible so that we can move forward with giving first nations the tools they have been asking for to give them an option for a new elections regime. That is what I am asking all members of this House to join with me in doing.

• (1935)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did not really see him talk a lot about the legislation. He talked about Bill S-6. He knows very well that a lot of the legislation that was going to the Senate was not being supported by a lot of the first nations. For example, with respect to the throne speech, I could tell members that today, Chief Shining Turtle sent a letter to the Governor General, to the Prime Minister, to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and to Buckingham Palace. In it, he says, "I am going through the text of the Speech from the Throne delivered by the Governor General".

In particular, he seeks clarification on the following statement:

They forged an independent country where none would have otherwise existed.

Government Orders

He asks, “Are we to believe that the indigenous peoples with complex societies throughout North America simply did not exist prior to the arrival of the pioneers?”

Then he goes on to say, “In our view, this is a gross misrepresentation of the true history of North America. Can you provide your historical facts that fully support this claim? There surely must be some misunderstanding on your facts”.

That is not the end of the letter. However, what I am trying to tell members is that the government attempted to press the reset button, and now it is just bringing back everything that did not need to be reset, as far as they are concerned. How is that democratic?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, exactly what I talked about was improving the democratic process for first nations that want to opt in to a new first nations elections act. That is exactly what some other people have said.

I will continue with some positive comments. Chief Candice Paul, then executive co-chair of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, said:

Our member chiefs do support Bill S-6 as it currently stands. We feel it reflects the recommendations in a resolution we adopted in January of 2011, asking the minister to draft legislation that would present a strong alternative to the Indian Act election system.

Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould from British Columbia, my home province, and regional chief of the Assembly of First Nations, said:

In conclusion, for nations that want to use them, there is no question that the election rules that have been developed in Bill S-6 and that will be expanded in regulations are superior and more thought through than those under the Indian Act.

This is something that first nations have been calling for. We are responding. We will continue to work with willing partners, first nations that want to see these sorts of things go forward. We would ask the opposition to, for once, join with us in supporting first nations across the country instead of voting against every positive measure that we take in those communities.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I personally share the concerns over the aboriginal affairs legislative agenda getting tied up in what is quite obviously just opposition procedural games and endless frustration. It is disturbing. The plight of our first nations should obviously come first and foremost.

I certainly appreciate the information that we have received. Could the member, at this particular time, explain how long this bill has been in development, why it has been delayed for so long, and how critical it is for us to ensure the passage of this legislation?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Prince Edward—Hastings for his thoughtful question and for his concern for this issue.

The development of the bill was a direct result of collaboration and partnership with first nations. We are simply responding to a process that was started in 2008, five years ago. The bill is based on the recommendations of the Manitoba chiefs and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, following extensive consultations. This is something that has been led by first nations. They are asking us to pass this portion of the motion and pass it back to committee as soon as possible so that we can get on with the important work of

delivering an option for first nations that want more stability, more clarity, and a better election system.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, they are trying to say that they have this great working relationship and that first and foremost they are trying to move the issues of first nations forward. Well, let us look at the press release from Chief Beardy after the throne speech. It says that the federal government’s lack of action on murdered and missing Indigenous women and its dismissive statement that Canada was “empty” before the pioneers arrived only fan the flames of anger and frustration.

Tell me how you are working with the first nations on this issue. Why did you prorogue Parliament, knowing full well that we were already making some movement and some progress on some issues? We also know that some of the legislation that is before the House is not conducive to being supported by first nations.

● (1940)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the parliamentary secretary, I would like to remind all hon. members, including this one, that the Speaker did not prorogue Parliament. I ask her to refer to the Chair in this context rather than directly to her colleagues.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, of course we are all hoping that someday you may have those powers granted to you in the future.

When we have had legislation dealing with first nations before the House, such as the safer water act for our first nations, the NDP voted against it. We brought in matrimonial real property rights for women living on reserves to give them the same protections that are offered to women living outside a reserve; the NDP voted against it. We brought in transparency for first nations chiefs and councils so that grassroots first nations members would know what was happening with the funding that is going to those reserves; the NDP voted against it.

Every single time we bring forward positive measures for first nations, there is one thing that we can count on: the NDP standing in the way of progress. We see more of it today.

We are going to get this passed because this is what first nations are demanding, and we are going to give it to them.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know our government, as stated by the parliamentary secretary, has been working very hard at improving governance on reserves and allowing Canada’s first nations to have alternatives to an archaic and outdated Indian Act.

I would ask the parliamentary secretary to inform the House, particularly our colleagues across the way, why we must have the opportunity to bring back Bill S-6 and the first nations elections act as part of this bill?

Government Orders

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London is the hard-working chair of the procedure and House affairs committee, and I know he is respected by all members in the House.

The NDP and Liberals, whom I have stated oppose every measure we take to work with first nations and improve conditions for first nations living on reserve, apparently do not want to see progress. With Bill S-6, again they are showing with their questions and delaying tactics that they do not want to provide an option for first nations who have been demanding more options for their election process. They have been demanding clarity, clearer regulations and extended terms of office when they opt in under this plan. This is something that first nations have been calling for. This is not something that was cooked up in the backrooms of the department somewhere. This is first nations led and first nations driven, and it is time that we deliver this for first nations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I call on the hon. member for Winnipeg North, I would remind members that this debate is scheduled to end at 8 p.m. The member will have the floor for his entire 20 minutes even though that may exceed eight o'clock. However, once it is past eight o'clock, there will not be questions or comments. I leave that with the member.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Everything is in the timing, Mr. Speaker.

I always appreciate the opportunity to express a few thoughts with regard to important issues, and this is an important issue before the House today. I would like to put everything in a proper perspective.

I would like to give a couple of doses of reality, if I could put it that way, because there is no doubt that it has been an interesting process. Should a government be able to prorogue a session? Is it proper to prorogue a session? Why do we find ourselves in this situation today where we have what appears to be a divided House on an important matter?

Ultimately it is in the best interests of Canadians that we move forward and continue to apply pressure where it needs to be applied, and that is right to the Prime Minister's Office. Let there be no doubt whatsoever that is ultimately the reason we are where we are today on the legislative agenda.

New Democrats often talk about the Senate and issues relating to the Senate and so forth. There are all sorts of issues. We are concerned about the Senate. As a member of an opposition party and of the House of Commons, I do not want to lose focus on what this is really all about. It is about the Prime Minister's Office and the unethical behaviour that has come from that office.

We need to remember that when we were sitting in this place in June a great deal of pressure was applied to the Prime Minister, as the public were demanding answers with regard to a \$90,000 cheque. That \$90,000 cheque appeared to have originated somewhere out of the Prime Minister's Office. We have been challenging the Prime Minister to be straightforward with us, to tell us what actually took place, but there has been a great deal of disappointment.

I asked a question earlier in question period today. I have had the opportunity to talk to residents in Provencher, Brandon, and Souris, many of my own constituents, and other Canadians. There is a credibility issue here. Even the Prime Minister's own Conservative members are starting to seriously doubt him. He is losing the confidence of Canadians in a rapid fashion. I believe we are witnessing a Prime Minister who wants to avoid accountability, and at the end of the day he cannot do that.

The Prime Minister successfully came up with an idea on how to prevent the House from resuming on September 16, the day it was supposed to resume. We were supposed to be here on September 16, and in mid-September we found out that the Prime Minister did not want to return to the House. We found out he wanted to come back on October 16 as opposed to September 16. Why? He found the tool that he could use. He prorogued the session. Because he prorogued the session, that meant to could pick the date to return, and he chose October 16. We lost 20 sitting days.

What would likely have happened during those 20 sitting days? I suspect that the Prime Minister would have been on his feet answering questions with regard to the Prime Minister's Office and the behaviour of not one but many within his office in relation to the \$90,000 cheque that was used in essence to pay off Senator Duffy. The Prime Minister was concerned about that to the degree that he felt he would just prorogue.

● (1945)

I also believe that he chose October 16 intentionally, because he had a sense of what was going to be happening on the following few days. He picked a day for the throne speech, and then in the days that followed, he was in Europe talking about a free trade agreement in the hope that the free trade deal would ultimately make Canadians forget about the scandal taking place that appears to be well rooted within the Prime Minister's Office.

It is a growing scandal, as we heard this morning at a press conference with Mr. Duffy's lawyers. It is really starting to open up. It does not look good for the Prime Minister. Where was he the day after the throne speech? He was nowhere to be found and was only to resurface after he had a tentative deal with the European Union. Yes, the free trade agreement is very important and will be given due diligence in the chamber and will ultimately be voted on, but that is not the issue we should be talking about.

I believe that we should be talking about the Prime Minister's Office and what has taken place there. There are very serious allegations of illegal activity. Before we broke last June, the Prime Minister said he knew nothing about the \$90,000 cheque and what took place inside his office. He only found out about it after the fact, once it became public through the media. That is what he was proclaiming to anyone who listened.

Mr. Scott Andrews: He fired him right away.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No, I do not believe that he fired him right away. He hung around for a little while, and then I understand that it was Mr. Wright who took the initiative to do the right thing.

Government Orders

The Prime Minister chose to try to give the impression to Canadians that he had no idea whatsoever that there was anything behind this \$90,000 payoff to the senator. Granted, I have only been around the House for a few years. I have had an opportunity to get a sense of how much of a hands-on individual the Prime Minister is. I have seen the disciplinary action taken for those who decide within that caucus to challenge the Prime Minister. There is no doubt in my mind that this is an individual who insists on having control within his office.

If we take the Prime Minister at his word when he said that he did not know and that it was only the one person, that is a stretch. It is hard for a lot of people to believe that. Over the summer, we had court filings from the RCMP and found out that it was not just Nigel Wright but that other individuals were involved, individuals the Prime Minister knows well. This is, in fact, his inner circle. These are the individuals who carry a great deal of clout. We are not talking about deputy ministers or high-end civil servants working for different departments. This is the inner circle, individuals such as the chief of staff and his legal advisers. They are individuals he confers with on a weekly basis. The Prime Minister wants Canadians to believe that he knew nothing about this.

• (1950)

He had an excellent opportunity to stand in his place today. We had a matter of privilege that challenged whether the House has been misled on this issue. Whenever I have seen that sort of challenge before, often we will get the minister in question wanting to address that matter of privilege to ensure that his or her side is being heard, but not this Prime Minister.

He has chosen not to answer the questions straightforwardly and honestly. How many questions did we ask today? I think there were eight questions on this issue. We are only given nine questions, but we asked eight of those nine questions on this very important issue. What did we get in terms of response? We got some very vague comments, and they were completely off the mark, in terms of relevance, in 85% of the responses to the questions we brought forward.

The Prime Minister continues to want to hide from the truth. It seems that he does not want Canadians to know what he knows and to what degree the Prime Minister's Office is directly involved in the Senate and that \$90,000 cheque. Why cannot Canadians see the actual cheque that was written? Why cannot Canadians get a straightforward, honest, transparent answer on this important issue? One would think this is something on which the Prime Minister would want to provide clarity. Even if he does not want to provide it directly to the House, he could have a press conference and convey it directly to Canadians. They have a right to know.

I will tell members that the Liberal Party will continue to hound the Prime Minister on this issue until we get to the truth on it. It is only a question of time. This issue is not going to disappear, no matter how the Conservatives try to change the channel. That is what they have been trying to do: change the channel. They would love to see this as nothing more than a Senate issue, where we have some rogue Prime Minister-appointed senators who have apparently inappropriately spent taxpayer dollars. That is a serious issue. There is no doubt that we will get more clarity on that issue.

Now motions are being brought forward, all in an attempt to try to change the channel, I would argue. However, the more important issue has to be what the Prime Minister knew, when he is going to come clean with Canadians on that issue, and when he knew the information. Very importantly, did the Prime Minister not tell the truth to Canadians when he responded, whether inside or outside the House, as to the level of his understanding of what took place with that \$90,000 cheque and how his office attempted to influence what was taking place with Senator Duffy? I believe that it will only be a question of time before we see that this issue has been resolved.

• (1955)

Even though we talk about the proroguing of the session, we in the Liberal Party recognize the value of such work as the committee on the 600 missing and murdered women and young girls. We see that as a positive initiative. There are a number of initiatives that are very positive. We want to see that work continue on, such as the work in terms of transparency and accountability, which is something the leader of the Liberal Party started in June. We do see some momentum on that. The Conservatives are now inside. We want to see that continue on along with some of the legislation.

With those few words, I am sure people can appreciate the concerns that we have within our party. Ultimately, we believe that we will get to the truth in one fashion or another.

• (2000)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 8 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of Motion No. 2 under government orders.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to the Speaker's ruling on Thursday, October 17, 2013, the first question will be on paragraph (a) of Motion No. 2 under government orders.

[*English*]

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. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

• (2025)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 2)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Armstrong	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Bélanger	Bennett
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Brison	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Casey
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Cotler	Crockatt
Cuzner	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dion	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dykstra
Easter	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Foote
Fry	Galipeau
Gallant	Garneau
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
Hsu	James
Jean	Jones
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komamicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lauzon	Lebel
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Murray	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Connor
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	O'Toole
Paradis	Payne
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton

Scarpaleggia
Seeback
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trottier
Uppal
Valeriote
Van Loan
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
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Schellenberger
Sgro
Shipley
Smith
Sorenson
St-Denis
Strahl
Tilson
Trost
Truppe
Valcourt
Van Kesteren
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brosseau	Caron
Cash	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Crowder	Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dewar	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Fortin
Freeman	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Godin	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes	Jacob
Julian	Kellway
Lapointe	Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)	Leslie
Liu	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mourani	Mulcair
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Rankin
Rathgeber	Raynault
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Scott
Sellah	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Tumel — 86

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*Translation*]

The next question is on paragraphs (b) through (m) of Motion No. 2 under government orders.

[*English*]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (2030)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 3)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Anders	Anderson
Andrews	Angus
Armstrong	Ashton
Aspin	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Baird	Bateman
Bélangier	Bennett
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bevington	Bezan
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Blaney	Block
Boivin	Borg
Boughen	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Braid
Brison	Brosseau
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Casey
Cash	Chicoine
Chisholm	Chisu
Chong	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Clarke	Cleary
Clement	Comartin
Cotler	Crockatt
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Daniel
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Dykstra	East
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Foot	Fortin
Freeman	Fry
Galipeau	Gallant
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Gill	Glover
Godin	Goguen

Goldring
Goodyear
Gourde
Groguié
Harris (St. John's East)
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Hsu
Jacob
Jean
Julian
Karygiannis
Kellway
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lapointe
Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leaf
Lemieux
Liu
Lobb
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Martin
Mathysen
Mayes
McGuinty
McLeod
Menzies
Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Mourani
Murray
Nicholls
Nunez-Melo
O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon
O'Toole
Payne
Plamondon
Preston
Rafferty
Rajotte
Rathgeber
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Saganash
Saxton
Schellenberger
Seeback
Sgro
Shipley
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sopuck
Stanton
Stoffer
Strahl
Sweet
Tilson
Toone
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Valeriot
Van Loan
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
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Goodale
Gosal
Gravelle
Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Hughes
James
Jones
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Lauzon
Lebel
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leitch
Leslie
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Masse
May
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis
Merrifield
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
Nash
Norlock
Obhrai
Oliver
Opitz
Paradis
Pilon
Poilievre
Quach
Raitt
Rankin
Raynault
Rempel
Rickford
Rousseau
Sandhu
Scarpaleggia
Scott
Sellah
Shea
Shory
Smith
Sorenson
St-Denis
Storseth
Sullivan
Thibeault
Toet
Tremblay
Trotter
Turmel
Valcourt
Van Kesteren
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)

NAYS

Nil

Government Orders

PAIRED

Nil

It being 8:34 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.(The House adjourned at 8:34 p.m.)

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