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Monday, November 25, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 25, 2013

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1100)

[*Translation*]

AN ACT TO AMEND THE FEDERAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACT (DUTY TO EXAMINE)

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP) moved that Bill C-481, An Act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act (duty to examine), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present Bill C-481. Years ago, I joined an increasing number of Canadians who have become aware of the urgent need for action on the environment. It is now absolutely crucial to develop sustainable development policies to address the many challenges of our time.

I also want to pay tribute to our environment critic, the member for Halifax, who works so hard to defend our world and the quality of life of her constituents. She is a role model who inspires me every day. As for me, I was elected in 2011 to make Canada greener, more prosperous and fairer for all.

Some people would say that Bill C-481 does not go far enough. However, I feel it is a step in the right direction. My colleagues on the other side and I should support it. Indeed, it is an amendment to an act that the Conservatives themselves passed unanimously in June 2008.

My bill seeks to ensure that any future acts and regulations introduced by a federal minister comply with the principles of the Federal Sustainable Development Act. The Minister of Justice will then report any inconsistencies to the House of Commons, at the earliest possible opportunity. The Department of Justice already has an obligation to examine all bills and regulations before the House to verify compliance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. All that Bill C-481 does is link this process with what has already been created by the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

I would point out there was nothing in the throne speech on sustainable development. However, the idea that human activity can

cause serious and lasting damage to our ecosystems is now a key part of policy.

My bill is a reminder that Canadians want sustainable development to be included in the decision-making process of their representatives in the House of Commons. Placing sustainable development at the heart of all federal public policy is the best way to make Canada greener, more prosperous and fairer for all.

What is sustainable development? It means creating policies that meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations. Sustainable development must also be guided by long-term thinking that takes into account the inseparable nature of the environmental, social and economic impacts of development activities. Unfortunately, we are leaving our children with the worst economic, social and ecological debt in the history of this country. We cannot afford to let this situation continue.

The planet's temperature is already rising. This is an undeniable reality that is hitting Canada hard. Since 1948, the average annual temperature in Canada has risen by 1.3°C, a rate of warming that is higher than in most other parts of the world. Heavy precipitation and flooding have increased in most Canadian cities. Researchers with the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy have noted an increased number of heat waves in every major Canadian city as well as more droughts, particularly in the west. There have also been more forest fires. Moreover, the serious lack of water is affecting land productivity, and that will only get worse.

Insurance plans are not adapted to these situations. In Quebec alone, the compensation paid by insurance companies as a result of storms and flooding has increased by 25% since 2001.

•(1105)

Lastly, scientists have documented deteriorating biodiversity conditions in all of the main types of ecosystems in Canada. Biodiversity is a cornerstone of Canadian competitiveness. It is key to continued growth in ecotourism and recreation. Falling behind on the protection of land and wildlife could lead to the disruption of valuable resource sectors like forestry and fisheries.

Our trading partners see Canada as a steward of globally significant resources. Canada's success as a trading nation depends on continued leadership in meeting international expectations for environmental protection, expectations that are increasingly enshrined in international trade agreements.

Private Members' Business

Negligence is getting expensive. The effects are being felt across the country, and it will only get worse if we do not act now. For many years, a number of provinces have said repeatedly how important it is that Canada take a leadership role in establishing sustainable development policies. Sustainable development means creating policies that meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations. This principle must be extended to all decisions made by the federal government, especially those made in the House.

Informing people and building awareness alone will not make Canada greener. We need leadership. The government and MPs must foster change that stimulates progress and prosperity in our communities.

My bill will give Canada a mechanism that encourages MPs to act in accordance with sustainable development principles. Bill C-481 is one more step in the right direction toward placing these principles at the centre of our decision-making process. By encouraging MPs to develop bills that are in line with the federal sustainable development strategy, Bill C-481 will help them make good decisions and build a greener, more prosperous and more just Canada.

The Federal Sustainable Development Act was the outcome of a private member's bill, Bill C-474, which was passed unanimously in June 2008. In passing the bill, the Government of Canada recognized the importance of making decisions that take environmental, economic and social factors into account. The bill set up a legal framework for the development and implementation of a federal sustainable development strategy.

The purpose of the strategy is to make the decision-making process more transparent in terms of the environment. It is updated every three years with a progress report and public consultations. Within a year of the strategy coming into effect, the main federal departments have to prepare their own sustainable development strategies. These must comply with the guidelines in the federal sustainable development strategy, which has four priority themes.

The first is about addressing climate change now that weather events have become more frequent and severe. We must also improve air quality to combat the growing number of respiratory illnesses.

The second is about maintaining water quality and availability, because even though our bank account is full and oil resources are everywhere, water quality is still the most critical factor for life.

The third is about protecting nature, plants and animals. The fourth is about shrinking the environmental footprint, beginning with government. The goal is to reduce polluting emissions, recycle, and set a good example for the private sector and individuals.

• (1110)

As it stands now, this legislation does not do much, since the current government lacks any political will.

This fall, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development's report criticized the government for missing most of its targets. Most of the targets lack clarity and measurability, which makes it difficult to assess progress over the short and long term.

Well thought-out strategies and effective action to implement them are fundamental to both the credibility and the impact of the strategies. Although the Federal Sustainable Development Act is weak and does not have teeth, I think it provides an excellent tool for us to coordinate our massive bureaucracy in order to implement sustainable development policies.

Bill C-481 will help strengthen this act by ensuring that the House of Commons knows whether a bill is in line with the federal sustainable development strategy. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development noted that the efforts to integrate the sustainable development strategy are incomplete. Bill C-481 would fix that.

We want to show Canadians that we take sustainable development into account in our decisions. If Bill C-481 passes, bills that are inconsistent with sustainable development will pay a political price. I hope that members of the House of Commons will make more of an effort to include sustainable development in their bills.

We must not be leaving environmental, economic and social debts for future generations. We must be concerned with the quality of life of our constituents; focus on prevention instead of repression; provide value-added for small businesses by giving them green infrastructure; promote buying local, which stimulates the regional economy and reduces our greenhouse gas emissions; and there are many more examples. Together, we will build a fairer, greener and more prosperous Canada.

In conclusion, I would like to share a quote from Frédéric Back's film *The Man Who Planted Trees*. This film served as an inspiration to me in developing this bill. Here is an excerpt:

...It is a desert no more. In these [formerly] arid regions...magnificent forests have slowed the winds, retained water and restored life. All this is the result of the quiet perseverance of a single man.

On that note, I urge all members to vote in favour of my bill.

• (1115)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I love that movie. I watched it when I was taking French classes in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

I would like to thank my colleague for introducing this worthwhile bill. We were chatting earlier and I joked that I wished I had thought of it.

In all seriousness, this bill is founded on a simple and elegant idea. It ensures that development is always part of our work as legislators.

I would like to know what my colleague's constituents are saying about the environment. Are the people of Brome—Missisquoi concerned about sustainable development and future generations?

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Halifax, for her excellent question.

All of the people in my riding of Brome—Missisquoi are asking how we will change things and ensure that sustainable development is taken into consideration. What good is a bank account full of money if there is no economy, no social justice and no environment? I live in a beautiful riding in the Appalachian corridor, where organizations are working very hard to protect the environment, so I would answer the member's question by saying that the environment is an everyday concern.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to join with my colleagues in thanking the hon. member for this excellent bill, which I feel is very important.

The Federal Sustainable Development Act received royal assent in 2008, and the House passed it unanimously. However, as we know, talk is not enough. The same is true for any law. We need to ensure that there is follow-up and that meaningful action is taken.

I would like to ask my colleague if he feels that the bill is a crucial part of truly implementing the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

• (1120)

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie for her very good question.

A law on sustainable development has indeed been in place since 2008. I have read it. That legislation does not have any teeth. That is why omnibus bills and budget implementation bills have undermined environmental rights in many areas. Nothing can be done.

My bill will ensure accountability and make a first step toward transparency. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development will have to take this legislation into account. The Minister of Justice, who plays a symbolic role, has to ensure that legislation is in line with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What is more, whether we are talking about a bill or proposed regulations, the commissioner will ensure that all departments concerned work in accordance with the Federal Sustainable Development Act. If not, he will quickly inform the House. The department in question will have to pay the political price.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-481. In the next 10 minutes, I will explain how the bill would create a massive new and wasteful bureaucracy that would serve no purpose other than to waste taxpayers' money. I will demonstrate how the bill is just more evidence that the NDP shows a complete lack of respect for taxpayers' money. I will show that although the bill would purport to achieve sustainable development objectives, it would actually only duplicate work that is already being done by the government.

Bill C-481 would amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act to require that the Minister of Justice examine bills and regulations to ensure that they are not inconsistent with the purposes and provisions of the act. However, rather than meaningfully doing anything, it would just add another layer of red tape, which is redundant and unnecessary in light of the actions the government is already taking.

Private Members' Business

As members are aware, the purpose of the Federal Sustainable Development Act is to establish a legal framework for developing and implementing a federal sustainable development strategy that will make environmental decisions more transparent and accountable to Canadians. It requires developing and regularly updating a whole-of-government federal sustainable development strategy, which the government began in 2010 and continues to do so.

The first main point I would like to discuss is whether the amendments proposed in the bill are necessary. They are not. As I have already pointed out, the bill would be completely redundant in light of actions the government is already taking to achieve federal sustainability objectives, as well as transparency and accountability. The government already has tools in place for assessing and reporting the environmental effects of its actions, including two particularly significant ones: strategic environmental assessments and regulatory impact analyses.

Strategic environmental assessments, which are required by a cabinet directive, identify and evaluate the potential environmental effects of government proposals. Strategic environmental assessments also involve considering whether further action could be taken to optimize the positive environmental effects of initiatives and minimize or mitigate any negative effects.

Cabinet requires that a strategic environmental assessment be undertaken for all proposals intended for approval by a minister or by cabinet whenever its implementation could result in important environmental effects, either positive or negative. The results of strategic environmental assessments inform the development of new policies, plans, and programs, and support decision-making.

In 2010, in conjunction with the release of Canada's first federal sustainable development strategy, the government further strengthened strategic environmental assessment by requiring departments to consider potential impacts on the strategy's goals and targets when conducting their assessments in the context of a broader consideration of environmental effects.

We see strengthening the strategic environmental assessment process as an important step in advancing the integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations in government decision-making. Departments are now expected to consider the potential effects of initiatives on achieving the government's environmental sustainability priorities.

I should note that unlike the government's approach to strategic environmental assessment, Bill C-481 does not include any assessment against any specific priorities or measurable objectives, such as the federal sustainable development strategy's goals and targets. This just further highlights how the bill would be a wasteful use of taxpayers' money.

In addition to requiring analysis and assessment of the environmental implications of policies, strategic environmental assessments also promote transparency and accountability in decision-making. Whenever the government conducts a strategic environmental assessment, any potential environmental effects identified are expected to be summarized in a public statement that communicates the results of the assessment to Canadians.

Private Members' Business

To provide a broader view of strategic environmental assessment practices and results, the strengthened assessment process also requires departments to describe how policies subject to strategic environmental assessments have affected or are expected to affect progress towards the federal sustainable development strategy's goals and targets. We will continue to advance implementation of this new strengthened assessment process over time.

The other major mechanism I want to mention is the regulatory impact analysis statement, or RIAS. A RIAS is created for proposed regulations, and its preparation is required by the cabinet directive on regulatory management.

● (1125)

A RIAS summarizes the regulatory development process and the analysis conducted in support of a regulatory initiative. It describes the issues to be addressed, a cost-benefit analysis with distributional impacts of a proposed regulation, and the results of consultations. The results of a regulation's cost-benefit analysis summarized in the RIAS includes the cost or benefits to Canadians, the environment, and businesses, as well as impacts on human health and safety. Like a strategic environmental assessment, the RIAS process makes an important contribution to transparency as RIAs are made available to the public in the *Canada Gazette*, along with proposed regulations.

I would also like to highlight the federal sustainable development strategy as another means by which the government is making environmental decisions more transparent and accountable to Canadians.

The strategy required by the Federal Sustainable Development Act provides a whole-of-government picture of federal actions and results to achieve environmental sustainability. These actions support goals and targets under four priority theme areas: one, addressing climate change and air quality; two, maintaining water quality and availability; three, protecting nature and Canadians; and four, shrinking the environmental footprint beginning with government.

Regular federal sustainable development strategy progress reports from the government enable Canadians and stakeholders to track results achieved on the strategy's goals and targets. FSDS indicators are primarily drawn from the Canadian environmental sustainability indicators program, which provides comprehensive and objective information on environmental trends. The government has expanded these indicators to a total of 36.

Canadians are now able to get more information on what their government is doing with respect to sustainable development than ever before. We are continuing to move forward with the second three-year federal sustainable development strategy, which was tabled on November 4.

The second strategy demonstrates the government's ongoing commitment to the transparency and accountability of environmental decision-making. It has strengthened targets introduced in the first strategy. Examples are those on nutrient loading in the Great Lakes, Lake Simcoe, and Lake Winnipeg. The new strategy also reflects the results of public and open consultations. For example, in response to Canadians' comments, we have made targets more specific and measurable through clear timelines, baseline information, and

quantitative benchmarks; identified indicators and actions with social and economic dimensions; and added detail on the important role that others outside government play in achieving environmental outcomes.

Taken together, these improvements, along with the previously mentioned tools in use by the government, provide Canadians with an unprecedented amount of information on the sustainable development decisions being made by the Government of Canada. This is all being done without the massive new bureaucracy the NDP would like to create and the new spending and taxes that the NDP would like to implement through Bill C-481.

As I have described, the government has already taken action to apply sustainable development in decision-making and ensure that Canadians have information on the potential environmental effects of government initiatives. By taking these legislative and regulatory initiatives, our government in ensuring that environmental factors have been fully considered in decision-making processes.

My second main point relates to the examination process proposed in Bill C-481. The examination process that the bill proposes is vague and redundant, and it is a wasteful use of taxpayers' money. I note that this examination process would go well beyond legal analysis and would constitute a significant departure from the current responsibilities of the Minister of Justice with regard to examining bills and regulations. For example, the Department of Justice currently does not have expertise in the area of sustainable development. Thus, the bill would require the government to waste taxpayers' money by creating and developing a new massive bureaucracy to duplicate the measures that I have already highlighted.

Undoubtedly, the NDP wants to pay for all this by increasing taxes on hard-working Canadian families.

In conclusion, given what the government is already doing, Bill C-481 would be a complete waste of taxpayers' money. The bill would add a layer of wasteful bureaucracy and oversight that is simply not needed.

Here I return to the most problematic part of Bill C-481, which is, of course, its true intention of creating a massive, new, and wasteful bureaucracy. This fact, I am not afraid to say, reflects the NDP's priorities completely. Here we have the NDP, which stands for nothing other than creating a massive new bureaucracy while increasing taxes on hard-working Canadian families.

● (1130)

This raises important questions for all Canadians. How exactly does the NDP intend to pay for those new and wasteful measures? Will it be through a \$20-billion carbon tax, or does it plan to create new taxes to burden Canadian families? These are important questions the NDP has to answer that the member did not answer earlier.

Private Members' Business

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to participate in this debate. It is indeed true that Canada has been blessed with incredible natural resources. With those blessings come responsibilities. Over the years, a number of measures have been introduced in this House to protect the environment. The attempt is always to balance the protection of the environment with the economic interests of the nation.

When the Liberal Party was in power, we committed our government to the principles of sustainable development and passed legislation that required each department to submit with any new legislative proposal the sustainability and environmental impact of the legislation or regulation. We also, at that time, insisted that ministers provide a gender analysis of each proposed piece of legislation.

I have noticed that the government has dropped the fiscal analysis of each proposed piece of legislation. This is particularly true for the justice section. There is no fiscal analysis attached other than bromides submitted by ministers from time to time about how this would not cost us anything at all.

As well, the Liberal Party created the office of the Commissioner of the Environment, which is attached to the Auditor General's department. It comments on and does analyses of the various environmental strategies the government puts forward from time to time.

We, along with the NDP, are truly disappointed with the government and its continuing erosion of environmental policies. The Conservative government has systematically reduced the environmental review process in resource development since taking office in 2006.

I note the parliamentary secretary's speech, which is all about taxpayers. It seems that it is all about taxpayers but never about citizens. It is the classic cost of everything and the value of nothing.

Environmental review is about the rights of citizens to know how the environment will be impacted by any initiatives. This has been systematically eroded by the government. Citizens are entitled to know, because these have environmental impacts, economic impacts, and consequences for our international reputation.

We understand and are sympathetic to the impetus of this bill, considering reports put out recently by various international bodies with respect to GHG emissions. One report ranks us dead last out of 27 developed countries in terms of GHG emissions and what we are intending to do. A UN report ranks us 55 out of 58. We beat out Iran, Kazakhstan, and Saudi Arabia. I am sure that will make us all feel a great deal better.

Dr. Chu, the former U.S. Secretary of Energy, was in Calgary last week. With several senior government ministers in the audience, he started off his speech by saying that surely to goodness, we can agree that there is climate change. How the United States views its partner in North America is that it is having a dialogue with the deaf.

In my view, Bill C-481 is a well-intentioned piece of legislation. It is not clear at this point what the costs will be. We can certainly see the benefits. I do not believe my colleague, the Parliamentary

Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, that this would create a massive bureaucracy or that it would cause all the fearmongering nonsense he repeated toward the end of his speech. It would not create massive costs. In fact, if the government were doing the job in the first place, the bill would probably not be necessary.

● (1135)

However, when there is profound mistrust among the Canadian population of the attitude and the actions of the current government toward the environment, we get bills like Bill C-481 as a consequence, because at root, the mover of Bill C-481 does not believe that the Government of Canada is actually doing the job. He does not believe that legislative, regulatory, and economic initiatives are actually receiving a full environmental review.

I have some questions with respect to, in my judgment, the overly broad application of the bill. It says that all bills presented to this House would have to undergo a sustainability review.

At one level, it is a good idea. However, suppose the government puts forward a bill entitled the Prime Minister's award for ethics, accountability, and democratic excellence.

I know that might be amusing to some in this House, but it is possible that the Government of Canada would put forward such a bill on ethics, accountability, and democratic excellence. Would Bill C-481 apply to that bill or to a bill, for instance, on a more serious subject, such as cyberbullying and various things?

We have some questions with respect to the overly broad application of the legislation. Nevertheless, we take the view that this is a bill that is well motivated. It would address a deeply held view that the government has not addressed the environment in a sustainable fashion and that the government's actions to date have had economic impacts, have been negative on the environment, and are negatively impacting our international reputation abroad.

At this point, we in the Liberal Party will be supporting the bill, and I urge all members to have it sent to committee.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by congratulating and thanking my friend and colleague from Brome—Missisquoi. His work on this bill shows that he is an ardent defender of his constituents' interests. As an educator and an MP, he is in regular contact with the members of his community and he understands that the people he represents are concerned about our environment.

The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi also stands up for the interests of all Canadians. This initiative not only benefits his constituents, but all of us.

I would like to congratulate him on taking this initiative and introducing a well-thought-out and carefully crafted bill in the House of Commons. He began an important debate in the House on the type of government that we want and what we expect from our government.

Private Members' Business

We must always take into account the impact that our decisions could have on future generations. Bill C-481 serves to remind us that we cannot be shortsighted when it comes to environmental issues. We are responsible for ensuring that any bill introduced in the House meets the needs of today without compromising those of the future.

As my colleague explained, this bill will ensure that we remain committed to the Federal Sustainable Development Act, which was passed unanimously by the House in 2008.

It is a very simple idea and something that all Canadians expect from their government. If we pass a law that says that we support sustainable development, then all of our laws will be in line with those principles.

My colleague from Brome—Missisquoi's idea is beautiful in its simplicity.

[*English*]

Not only would the bill put sustainable development at the forefront of all federal government decision-making, it would integrate sustainable development principles with the policy-making process itself. It would guarantee that all government decisions were in line with the principles of sustainable development that we all seemed so committed to just five years ago.

Bill C-481 does this by reinforcing legislation that already exists. It turns our current strategy for sustainable development into an effective strategy. Unfortunately, the Conservative government does not share my priorities on the environment or, I think, the priorities of a majority of Canadians, for that matter.

The Conservatives have spoken several times about the importance they give to the Federal Sustainable Development Act. Past ministers of the environment, and by now there is quite a roster, have said that the act ensures that the federal decision-making process on matters of the environment is done in a transparent and coherent manner. However, while Conservatives like to mention the Federal Sustainable Development Act, they are all talk and no action.

The government has not been interested in the principles of the act, but it does like to use it as a talking point to distract Canadians from its dismal record in promoting sustainable development and from its failure to act on the environment. Much like Conservatives like to use the word "conservation" without acting or to talk about their missing-in-action oil and gas regulations, it is all about drawing attention away from their failure on these issues. As I have said in the House before, what we need is less rhetoric and more meaningful, forward-looking action.

In the past few years, because of this inaction, we have seen a regression. We are actually moving backward. The Conservative government has been systematically dismantling environmental protection laws and has been using the least transparent methods available. For proof of that, we do not have to go back too far, just to 2012, when the government's infamous omnibus budget bills, Bill C-38 and Bill C-45, were passed, two of the most destructive pieces of legislation I have ever encountered.

The government has consistently disregarded the principles of sustainable development by using omnibus legislation to weaken

environmental protections and by passing that legislation without proper examination or debate. Gutting the Fisheries Act, ransacking the Navigable Waters Protection Act, muzzling scientists, completely obliterating the national round table on the environment and the economy, and continuing to subsidize the oil and gas industry with \$1.3 billion a year does not sound like sustainable development to me. Neither does denying the science behind climate change, wilfully ignoring the effects of global warming, or failing miserably to meet low emissions targets that we committed to in international climate negotiations.

• (1145)

What else does not sound sustainable? Since coming into power in 2006, the Conservatives have cut Canada's targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 90%. That is not sustainable; it is actually irresponsible. Our actions now mean we are burdening Canadians who will come after us.

The Federal Sustainable Development Act was supposed to signal a change in how the government makes responsible and environmentally conscious decisions on behalf of Canadians. However, it has been five years since this legislation came into effect, and the government has failed to make this crucial transformation.

Implementing an effective sustainable development strategy is an attainable and necessary goal. It is about time that we respect the commitments we made to Canadians in 2008 by passing Bill C-481. We already agreed unanimously to the principles of the bill, so let us give it some teeth.

The bill offers an efficient strategy to achieve this by giving the Department of Justice the responsibility for reviewing bills and ensuring that all proposed legislation responds to the criteria laid out in the Federal Sustainable Development Act, which we all passed. We are not asking for a complete overhaul here. This is not about red tape or another level of bureaucracy; it is a change we can actually implement now.

Bill C-481 should be implemented. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development noted that the integration of sustainable development in decision-making is an incomplete process. Enabling Bill C-481 would help us to bridge that gap. Operationalizing an effective approach to sustainable development has worked well in Canada, and it has already been done at the provincial level in Quebec.

My leader, the leader of the NDP, in his role as Quebec's minister of the environment, sustainable development and parks, wrote North America's first sustainable development law and amended Quebec's human rights charter to create the right to live in a clean environment. That is not a privilege but a right. That is the attitude we should have in this chamber when we talk about legislation and debate ideas and think about how to work together to create a better Canada. It is a right that we need to work toward. It is a right we need to work hard to protect.

Private Members' Business

In my last few moments, I would like to turn our attention to the people who live in our ridings, whom we as members of Parliament, represent. These are families in every riding across the country in Victoria, Yellowknife, Winnipeg, Toronto, and my own riding of Halifax. As legislators, we have accepted the responsibility to represent the hopes and dreams of our constituents. For many of those people, their hopes and dreams are better lives and brighter futures for their kids and their families.

However, as it stands now, our children and grandchildren are set to inherit the worst environmental, social, and economic debt the country has ever seen. This is not intergenerational equity. It is not a future that is bright or shining with promise; it is a future that I am afraid of. It is an injustice to leave this legacy behind to the generations that follow ours.

The reality of the situation is that if we do not go forward sustainably and we do not legislate for the future instead of just thinking about the short-term gains, then we are not working to defend the hopes and dreams of our constituents or the people they care about most. We are not doing our jobs as legislators.

We owe it to future generations of Canadians to pass this bill. For them, sustainable development should not be an afterthought, window dressing, or a buzzword. An effective sustainable development policy demands that the principles of sustainability be a part of the policy-making process from the start.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has had a deplorable environmental record for quite some time. When compared to other OECD countries, Canada is ranked second last. It is very urgent that we adopt a set of measures to help us do better. That is primarily what Bill C-481 would do if it were passed.

The situation is urgent and although some would prefer to ignore the scientific evidence behind global warming, it is a factor that could adversely affect our economy, our health and the future of our children.

Since 1948, the average temperature in Canada has increased by 1.3°C and much more quickly than in other parts of the world. To get a sense of what that means for the economy, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy estimates that this will cost \$5 billion by 2020 and between \$41 and \$43 billion by 2050.

Of course, a number of us will not be around in 2050 to see the impact for ourselves. That is precisely why sustainable development is important. I will say it again: sustainable. With all the scientific tools available, not only is it irresponsible to take no action to counter global warming, but it is also unfair because it deprives our future citizens of a world that we enjoyed.

That may be difficult for some to understand, but we have an urgent duty to attack a problem that will go down in history as one of the greatest challenges of our time. One day, our children and grandchildren will ask themselves, what did we do?

First, we must recognize that the House passed Bill C-474, Federal Sustainable Development Act unanimously in 2008. Thus, we can say that everyone agrees that something must be done. As for

exactly what to do and how far to go, not everyone agrees on how to handle the challenge of climate change.

Bill C-474 did not stop the Conservative government from getting rid of dozens of climate research scientist positions, from getting rid of the Canadian census form, or from subsidizing a polluting industry at enormous cost to the taxpayers. As the saying goes, you have to walk the talk. When the House says it is going to do something, it would be good if the general public could actually see something happen.

Unfortunately, at this point, this is not the case. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, a position created by virtue of Bill C-474, states that Canada is not doing what it should to establish real sustainable development practices. It was to respond to this problem that my colleague from Brome—Missisquoi introduced C-481, which in fact does nothing more than give real power to Bill C-474. If Bill C-474 is the talk, Bill C-481 is the walk. It only remains to be seen whether this government will dare to put on its shoes.

There is nothing magical about Bill C-481. In fact, it is really only logical. It would make it possible for the justice minister to draw the attention of the House to any inconsistency between bills that have been passed and the Federal Sustainable Development Act. This way we would have a tool for measuring our commitment to sustainable development, so that we might take tangible steps toward making Canada greener, fairer and more prosperous.

In my view, the principal argument in favour of the bill currently under consideration is the fact that the justice minister already verifies all the bills. Making it possible for him to report any potential inconsistencies with the Federal Sustainable Development Act will not require any additional resources and will make it possible for the bill to be something more than just window dressing.

It must be said that sustainable development covers a great deal. It can be used for almost everything, without much regard for its real meaning. However, if we thought about this a little more, we would see that it is a vision of development that is likely to encourage green, job-creating industries, as well as increased citizen participation in public affairs.

• (1155)

The three pillars of this theory are as follows: a vision of economic justice, a balanced social perspective and, of course, the conservation of nature for future generations. By applying this reasoning to all our legislation, we could make a promise to our children that they too will be able to enjoy a world where there is room for everyone and where there are the resources they need to live.

Private Members' Business

In the current circumstances, I think it is urgent to improve the Federal Sustainable Development Act, because we believe that it does not have any real teeth. For instance, how is the government meeting its commitments when it gives money to the oil industry, which is already rich? How is this good for the environment? Has any consideration being given to the fact that development of the oil sands artificially inflated the value of the dollar and resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of jobs in the manufacturing sector? Have the communities that live near oil sands developments even been consulted?

Unfortunately, all too often the answer to these many questions is no. The omnibus bills introduced recently by the Conservative government have proven that the government does not listen to anyone and that it is not even living up to its own commitments.

Many measures included in these bills would fail miserably if they were put to the test of the Federal Sustainable Development Act. For instance, people can no longer oppose the installation of a pipeline for environmental reasons unless the pipeline goes directly through their property.

The government is ignoring the concept of the common good and trampling on our communities' ability to mobilize by allowing the democratic process of a vote only once every four years. Just because the government won a majority with 38% of the vote does not make this a democratic country; quite the contrary. Claiming so much power with so little support is appalling enough, but preventing communities from having their say when it really counts is completely unjustifiable from a democratic standpoint.

Since many of the Conservative government's decrees are bad for the economy, the environment and the survival of Canadian democracy, I strongly urge the House to give this country a regulatory tool, a safeguard, that will bring us closer to our goal of sustainable development.

Accordingly, I fully support Bill C-481, which will help Canada to better meet its own commitments and allow us to give our children a society in which they will want to live, thrive and participate actively.

Let us give ourselves the means to be responsible, and we will finally be able to say that we did what was needed to ensure the sustainability of our communities. At the risk of repeating myself, any attempt to limit enforcement powers regarding the environment makes anything that could be said on the matter sound superficial.

We have a serious responsibility to the future. I would like to be able to tell myself that we are doing everything we can to ensure that Canada moves in the direction of sustainable development, which will provide new opportunities that are worthy of a developed economy in the 21st century.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before resuming debate, I would like to inform the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie that she will have four minutes to make her speech. The remaining time will be available once the House resumes debate on the motion.

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have a few minutes to voice my support for Bill C-481, which I believe is very important. It is not as complicated as my colleague opposite previously suggested.

There is nothing complicated about it. Bill C-481 is intended to make sustainable development a key part of public federal policy. This is not done as if by magic. Rather, this process is based on the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

The purpose of this new bill is to ensure that this act—which, I must stress, was unanimously passed by the House—is actually implemented. Why should it be implemented? To ensure that all our acts and regulations comply with Canada's principles and strategic agenda for sustainable development and the protection of our environment.

I listened to the member opposite, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, repeatedly talk about the massive bureaucracy that will be created to implement this bill. I am not sure how many times he said that. That will not happen. Indeed the Minister of Justice is already responsible for examining all bills and regulations before the House. What we are asking for, through this bill, is that he examine the regulations and the bill in question to verify whether they are in line with the federal sustainable development strategy.

This represents a relatively minimal investment of time and money, especially when we consider the cost of doing nothing.

The members opposite talk all the time about the costs associated with environmental protection. This always reminds me of the old saying that if you think education is expensive, try ignorance. The same principle applies here. Yes, we must protect the environment, and yes, we must provide ourselves with the appropriate tools for sustainable development, thereby minimizing human, social and financial costs, sooner rather than later.

We cannot ignore our planet. We cannot ignore the land we live on. This bill is very important to ensure that no more restrictions are imposed on our environmental regulations under omnibus legislation.

● (1200)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie will have six-and-a-half minutes when the House resumes debate on the motion.

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.

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[English]

OFFSHORE HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

The House resumed from November 19 consideration of the motion that Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House to speak on behalf of the NDP caucus and New Democrats across the country, and indeed all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and Nova Scotians on Bill C-5.

Bill C-5 is about 260 pages long. It has some very useful information and some important policy directions in terms of occupational health and safety and is a very important first step. However, in all 260 pages, and we will find New Democrats speaking about this regularly today as we engage in the debate, we will not find three words that are extremely important for Newfoundlanders, Labradoreans, Nova Scotians, and, I think, all Canadians. Those three words are “independent safety regulator”.

Despite the fact that we have been able to drag the government, kicking and screaming, to take action on occupational health and safety in the offshore, we still find resistance from the government to Justice Wells' recommendation number 29 in the Wells inquiry document and to recommendations that have come from throughout Atlantic Canada, particularly from Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, to put in place an independent safety regulator for the offshore. We do not really understand where that resistance comes from or why.

Despite the fact that we will be supporting the bill and despite the fact that there are some good elements contained within it, the fact that the independent safety regulator has not yet been put into place by the government is an appalling weakness and shows real disrespect to the offshore workers.

I will start today by saying that I think all of us in the House of Commons owe a real debt to the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, the NDP government in Nova Scotia under Darrell Dexter, and the Newfoundland and Labrador government, because those governments and those federations of labour were instrumental in putting the bill forward.

After a series of tragedies in the offshore area, basically about 14 years ago, there was a real call and push to put in place occupational health and safety standards in the offshore. That ball was dropped by the former Liberal government. When the Conservatives came in, they did make commitments that they would address this persistent problem that could lead to the deaths of offshore workers and that has in fact led to the deaths of offshore workers. The Conservatives said that they would put measures in place.

Tragically, it took the combined weight of those two federations of labour I cited, as well as the Newfoundland and Labrador government and the NDP government in Nova Scotia, to actually

push the Conservative government to finally introduce this important legislation.

This is no small thing. Even though we are talking about offshore workers, who are perhaps a small proportion of the overall Canadian economy, the reality is that offshore workers have been hit by a series of tragedies and deaths, ranging from the *Ocean Ranger* in the 1980s through deaths in the 1990s to the most recent and tragic deaths, the 17 Canadians who were killed in the Cougar crash in 2009.

That tragedy was a wake-up call for many Canadians. It told us that work had to be done, and the Nova Scotia government, the federations of labour, and the Newfoundland and Labrador government were able to push the government to finally put into place what is simply a matter of good sense and a matter of common decency: occupational health and safety standards.

We have also had very strong advocates in the House of Commons. I would like to pay particular tribute to the member for St. John's East, who has done a remarkable job of raising these issues. He has been phenomenally eloquent. He is normally a very eloquent gentleman, but he has been even more eloquent on this issue and has spoken up for the offshore workers in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Nova Scotia. I say to the member for St. John's East—through you, Mr. Speaker—that he has done a phenomenal job and really deserves the thanks of Canadians across the country.

● (1205)

I am citing the work of the member for St. John's East, the work of the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, the provincial governments of Nova Scotia and of Newfoundland and Labrador, and those two federations of labour that I mentioned earlier because the government has shown no leadership whatsoever when it comes to offshore safety.

Coming from British Columbia, I can cite three facts that are appallingly bad examples of poor judgment on behalf of the government since it has come to power.

In British Columbia, on the other side of the country, we have seen first-hand how irresponsible this government has been. That is why the introduction of this bill, which takes some significant steps, although it does not go all the way to the independent safety regulator, is an important contrast to what the government's trend has been, generally speaking.

Last year in British Columbia, after a phenomenal public outcry from British Columbians, the City of Vancouver, and a whole range of municipalities throughout the lower mainland, we saw that the government was not listening to their call to keep in place the Kitsilano Coast Guard station.

This is the Coast Guard station in Kitsilano, in Vancouver, B.C. It has actually saved lives over the entire period of its existence. The government, for reasons it has still not explained adequately in any way, decided it was just going to shut down the Coast Guard station.

That could mean that next summer we could tragically, but hopefully not, be looking at the deaths of British Columbians as a result of what was a very foolish, foolhardy, and reckless decision.

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Everyone in British Columbia spoke out against it except Conservative MPs. Everyone in British Columbia, from those involved in the health sector to those involved in the boating sector, as well as municipalities and elected officials at the provincial level, said that closing that Coast Guard station was going to put lives in jeopardy, but the government did it just the same. It was inconceivable to me that it would be that reckless and foolhardy with public safety, yet it has been.

The government then moved on, after closing that down, to close down the marine traffic control centre in Vancouver. This facility is an important component of safety as well. We have seen similar closures in other parts of the country, both in the Coast Guard and in marine traffic control, in places like Quebec City. These are foolhardy, reckless, foolish decisions that put public safety at risk, yet the government has done it. It has closed the marine traffic control centre.

Closing off a series of appallingly foolish decisions on behalf of the government was the closure of the emergency oil spill centre. This is a government that does not want to listen to the public in British Columbia on the northern gateway project. It wants to ram the project through despite the fact that public opinion in British Columbia is about 80% opposed. It jeopardizes thousands of jobs, while at the same time it would create just 104 full-time jobs when it is actually built. It is absolutely foolish.

What was the government's response to the increased concerns about oil tankers on the coast and the government's inability to put in place a public safety regime? It closed the emergency oil spill response centre. That is unbelievable. It closed down the emergency oil spill response centre, and now there is a 1-800 number in Ottawa. If there is an oil spill, British Columbians can phone some 1-800 number in Ottawa. Maybe there will be somebody to answer, or maybe they will have to leave a message.

The contempt that the government has shown for the people of any coast, whether we are talking about the Arctic coast, the Atlantic coast, or the Pacific coast, is very palpable.

The Minister of Natural Resources, in an attempt to try to save face after a series of foolish, reckless, and irresponsible actions, held a press conference to say that the government was going to protect the coast. We can all recall the safety vessel that the government convoked for this press conference actually ran aground before the press conference was held.

• (1210)

It shows both the Conservatives' incompetence and a degree of irresponsibility. At the same time, it shows their reckless disregard for facts in their attempt to try to provoke spin, rather than put in place a regime that actually guarantees the environmental safety of the coast and public safety.

When we talk about Bill C-5 being an exception to a generalized rule, whether we are talking about Quebec City or the Atlantic coast or the reckless disregard for British Columbians on the Pacific coast, we can see on all coasts a similar attempt by the government to shut down institutions that should be there for the public safety. We have one bill that does show improvement. This is why I say that the exception proves the rule. Bill C-5, despite the fact that it does not

put in place an independent safety regulator, is the only exception to what has been a litany of irresponsible, foolish, foolhardy, and reckless decisions by the government.

We are not just talking about marine safety. When we look at the number of pipeline spills, we see it has tripled under the Conservative government. When we look at the Transportation Safety Board of Canada's statistics, we see the number of leaks and spills under this government has substantially increased because it simply does not take public safety seriously.

When we look at rail safety, the tragedies and the number of fatalities increasing each and every year under the Conservative government, we can see that what we have is a toxic mix of a government that is reckless and foolhardy with public safety and the environment. It just does not seem to care about Canada, Canada's environment, or Canadians.

This brings us back to that singular exception, Bill C-5. It is the one thing the Conservatives can point to that they have put forward, thanks to public pressure from the federations of labour, from the governments in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, and from good NDP MPs.

However, it lacks the independent safety regulator that I mentioned earlier. How important is that? Let us hear from Justice Wells, who conducted the inquiry into the tragedy of the Cougar crash in 2009, when there were 17 deaths and only one survivor. That means there were 17 families in mourning, families that lost their breadwinner forever. We can imagine the intense mourning over these types of deaths, which do not need to happen.

One might say that 17 deaths are only part of the 1,000 workers who will lose their jobs this year, but our point is that we need to bring down the death rate across the country. We need to expand occupational health and safety. We need the federal government to show leadership in this regard.

What we have heard from Justice Wells and from key people in Atlantic Canada is that an independent safety regulator will be a key component in bringing down those deaths and reducing the number of families in mourning and that have to live with the indescribable tragedy of losing a loved one in the workplace, whether it is offshore or in any other workplace.

The Hon. Robert Wells in the 2010 Offshore Helicopter Safety Inquiry said:

I believe that the recommendation which follows this explanatory note will be the most important in this entire Report....I believe that the Safety Regulator should be separate and independent from all other components of offshore regulation and should stand alone, with safety being its only regulatory task....I believe the safety regulator should be powerful, independent, knowledgeable, and equipped with expert advice, hence my following recommendations...It is recommended that a new, independent, and standalone Safety Regulator be established to regulate safety in the...offshore.

That is clear. It could not be more clear. However, it is not only Justice Wells' voice that has been so eloquent in this regard. The Minister of Natural Resources in Newfoundland and Labrador said that while discussions had been ongoing with the federal government on the implementation of this recommendation 29 to establish an independent safety regulator, the federal government had not indicated any interest in establishing this separate safety agency.

Lana Payne, the president of the of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, said:

It's a positive step forward for health and safety for workers in the offshore, but it's not an independent safety agency, and that's ultimately what we do need for the offshore, and we'll be continuing to push and advocate for that.

• (1215)

The inquiry of Justice Wells is very clear. Workers are very clear. The governments in Atlantic Canada are very clear. The independent safety regulator is a best practice that other governments have put into place.

The member for St. John's East mentioned this in his speech a few weeks ago, when he talked about Norway, Australia, and the United Kingdom putting in place independent safety regulators. The workers deserve no less.

The steps listed in Bill C-5 would be initial steps, but without the independent safety regulator, which Justice Wells called his most important recommendation, the government is not putting into place the safety regime that workers deserve and that workers' families need to protect the offshore workers and to protect their families so that we do not see the tragedies we saw with the Cougar crash in 2009 or the tragedies we saw with the *Ocean Ranger* and with other deaths offshore.

Today in Canada, four workers will die at work. Four workers will go to work in the morning, either offshore for a few weeks or somewhere else in Canada, and four of them will pass away.

Tragically, the numbers since the Conservatives have come to power have increased. The average over the last 20 years was 900 deaths a year, which is an appalling level.

However, under the Conservatives, more recently, we have seen over 1,000 workers die every year. That is a substantial increase in the number of families mourning, a substantial increase in the number of workers' families that have lost a loved one and have been left with that indescribable sadness that never goes away. When a family, sons and daughters, lose a father or a mother, that loss never goes away. That tragedy is never something from which they can come back. When a husband loses a wife or a wife loses a husband, when they got married until death do they part, there is an undesirable level of sadness and tragedy.

Yet under the current government, we see a steady increase in the number of workers' deaths. It is simply because this government shows no leadership when it comes to putting in place the kinds of practices that will lower the number of workers who die in these needless tragedies.

The federal government should be showing that kind of leadership. The federal government should be taking Bill C-5 and saying, yes, that it is going to put into place, according to what Justice Wells has recommended and according to what Norway, Australia, and the United Kingdom have done, an independent safety regulator. Workers on the offshore deserve no less.

Then beyond that we offer to work with the government to ensure we start to lower the tragic death rate that we have seen with workers across the country. We will continue to make this offer. Even though the current government seems not inclined to take workers' safety

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and occupational health and safety seriously, we will continue to offer that help.

However, the tragedies seem to be increasing. Very many people are saying, and with reason, that we need a new government, a government that would put workers' safety and occupational health and safety first, a government that would show that leadership nationally, working with the provinces, to dramatically lower the death rate.

One worker's death is too many. A thousand workers' deaths a year are far too many. We have to stop the tragedies. We have to show leadership. That is why we will continue to press in the House of Commons for real leadership, for independent safety regulators, and for addressing the tragedies that happen each and every day.

Four workers today will lose their lives. That is four too many.

Let us all work together so one day we can stand in the House and say that no workers lost their lives this day, this week, this month, and that Canada is succeeding in putting in place that occupational health and safety regime that all workers in Canada deserve.

• (1220)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech on safety, particularly in our offshore and in industry throughout Canada, was very passionate. I thank him for his kind remarks concerning my involvement in this.

I note the member talked about the recommendation of Mr. Justice Wells to have an independent safety regulator, what he called his "most important recommendation". It was supported by the federations of labour in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Nova Scotia and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador most strongly, but it is not implemented here.

I would point out another problem that we have discovered since the legislation has been tabled, which is the so-called "budget implementation act", Bill C-4. I do not know what this has to do with budget implementation.

This bill is designed to give stronger powers to health and safety officers named in the act, with amendments to such in section 144 of the Canada Labour Code to give certain powers and immunities to health and safety officers. However, it is contradicted by Bill C-4, which also amends section 144, but, in fact, it takes the words "health and safety officers" entirely out of the Canada Labour Code and gives all of their powers to the minister or his delegates.

I am wondering about two things.

I know this is a technical point, but what does that say about the current government's approach to legislation when this bill, which is very much the same as Bill C-61 in the last Parliament and has been around a long time, can be thwarted by a budget implementation bill, one of these omnibus bills that would amend the Canada Labour Code and dozens of other acts? What does it say about the Conservative government's handling of these important matters?

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•(1225)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for St. John's East for his ongoing work in promoting occupational health and safety for offshore workers. He has been a very strong and eloquent voice in the House of Commons about this.

The member is not raising a technical point, but a very important fundamental point. Indeed, workers across the country are now concerned about the impact of the budget bill.

One might ask why the government would put forward Bill C-5 to establish occupational health and safety, but then in the budget bill take away the health and safety officers who are part of the provisions of Bill C-5 and give those powers to the minister. That makes no sense. However, much of what the Conservative government does makes no sense whatsoever.

The Conservatives like to talk a good line about health and safety, but we have seen a number of tragedies in rail safety, pipeline safety, and grain safety increasing because the government is so foolhardy, reckless, and irresponsible.

The Conservatives say that they are against crime, but then they cut crime prevention programs. They say that they are for our police officers and firefighters, yet they refuse to put in place the public safety officer compensation fund that would compensate the families of police officers and firefighters when they pass away in the line of duty. This compensation fund was approved by Parliament.

Everything the government does seems to be clumsily implemented. The Conservatives just do not seem to understand the importance of getting it right in government, and we have seen this.

The member for St. John's East raised this point. We have seen bill after bill botched in the first attempts, which then have to be corrected later on.

This is not a small technical issue. The Conservatives have to come clean and explain why they are trying to cut Bill C-5 at the same time they are presenting it in the House of Commons. I hope somebody from the government will actually understand and explain these discrepancies and contradictions over the course of the debate this afternoon.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster, for his very passionate speech today on this important topic.

Could the member explain or perhaps speculate as to why the Conservatives would reject the need for an independent regulator?

I have done a little research, and the British in 1992 created the Offshore Safety Act after the 1972 report of Mr. Cullen. In that act, one of the key aspects was an independent regulator. I then looked at Norway and found that the Norwegians have created what they call the Norwegian petroleum safety authority, another independent regulatory body. Last, our fellow federation commonwealth member, Australia, created what is called the national offshore petroleum safety authority.

All three of these countries have seen it absolutely essential to create such an independent regulatory body. Why is it that the

current government, also in a federation like the Australians, could not see fit to create such a key element of this reform initiative?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Victoria is a new member, elected less than a year ago, but is doing an outstanding job protecting the coast and standing up for the safety of British Columbians. On all those issues I mentioned earlier about the foolhardy, reckless, and irresponsible approach on public safety of the current Conservative government, the member for Victoria has stood up in the House and has been fighting those mean-spirited attacks on British Columbia. I thank him for his work.

What the member has just raised makes no sense at all. The government is refusing to implement an independent safety regulator when other governments that seem to be a lot more responsible than the current Conservative government, whether we are talking about Norway, Australia, or the United Kingdom, have already put an independent safety regulator into place. That does not make any sense at all.

Here is something else that does not make any sense. In a speech from the member for St. John's East just a couple of weeks ago in the House of Commons, he talked about the Transportation Safety Board's recommendation following the Cougar crash. The Cougar helicopter was supposed to be able to run dry even if there was no gearbox lubricant for about half an hour. The pilots were unaware that there was an exemption given to the company and that the helicopter was unable to run dry for 30 minutes. After 10 minutes the helicopter crashed and killed 17 of the 18 people on board.

In February 2011, the Transportation Safety Board recommended that all class A helicopters be required to have that 30-minute run-dry capability, and asked Transport Canada to enforce that ruling. Therefore, we have the Transportation Safety Board recommending to Transport Canada to enforce the run-dry capability for gearbox lubricant to be half an hour, and that it is critical for safety to preserve workers' lives in the future. Transport Canada has not accepted that recommendation.

This is the government saying no to common sense, no to decency, and no to workers' safety. I do not think that workers or the people here are the only ones to hope that the current government will be gone as soon as possible, and that in 2015 we get a new government that takes safety seriously.

•(1230)

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it occurs to me, in listening to my colleague, that it is not just the current government that has not taken public safety seriously. The legislative gap the bill would address emerged 21 years ago in 1992. Negotiations to fill that gap began, as I understand it, in 2001. Therefore, there was a previous government too, a Liberal government from 1993 through to 2006, that seemed to have the same attitude to public safety as the current government does.

Perhaps my colleague could address the issue of our responsibility here in the House to the health and safety of Canadian citizens.

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Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Beaches—East York is also extremely eloquent on these safety issues. He is absolutely right that the Liberal government was just as bad as the Conservatives. The Conservatives, at least, offered this one bill. They have contradicted it and are presenting other legislation that may eliminate the benefits of Bill C-5, but that is one bill more than the Liberals were able to produce in their years in power. It is a reckless disregard for occupational health and safety. It is a reckless disregard for workers' families.

It is an elitist attitude that somehow the increasing number of workers' deaths does not matter, that it is something that government should not be concerned about. New Democrats take a different view. Workers' safety is essential and every Canadian family, when they send their workers off in the morning to go to work, has the right to expect that at the end of the day those workers are going to come home safely. The NDP caucus is going to continue to fight for that, that all workers' families can expect workers to go to work and come home safely every day of the year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

It is not easy to take the floor after such a passionate speech. However, this is an issue that affects us all. Although Bill C-5 is especially important to the Atlantic provinces, we all have a role to play in the overall issue of workers' safety. We definitely need to do more to improve working conditions.

As my colleague said, it is unfortunate that other than this bill—and not to mention the fact that Bill C-4 is undoing some of the work of Bill C-5—the government is not listening to these concerns. I could list numerous examples to demonstrate why I am saying that.

The most important aspect for me is my own riding. When I am replying to people's letters or attending events, I often hear people saying that they get the impression that businesses in our communities are increasingly being given *carte blanche*. The example that comes to mind in the rail industry is this summer's tragedy in Lac-Mégantic. It is just one example of how deregulation can affect the public. I believe it is relevant because the issue of workers' safety is part of that domino effect.

The federal government is failing to provide leadership when it gives *carte blanche* to the oil and rail industries. Consequently, those industries will abandon their employees, the workers.

With that in mind, as legislators, it falls to us to ensure that regulations allow people to work in the safest environment possible. Will we ever ensure that 100% of people are protected and that there will be no workplace accidents? Of course not. There is always a potential for risk.

Still, that argument is not enough to convince us, as legislators, to abdicate our responsibilities. That is why we can be proud of the work done by various levels of government with respect to Bill C-5. This excellent example also proves to the government that it is a good idea to sit down with provincial governments from time to time to get results like the one before us today.

That being said, despite the good work that seems to have gone into this bill, it is important to note that there are still some shortcomings. The most significant of these is the absence of the well-known recommendation 29 from the Wells report, a recommendation that speaks to a situation that arises frequently with this government.

This recommendation sought to create an independent organization responsible for workplace safety. Every time anyone recommends setting up an independent organization to evaluate safety or anything else, the government seems to get nervous. We know how it treated the parliamentary budget officer, an independent officer of Parliament who had a job to do in Canadians' best interest. There are other examples too. I remember a bill on military police introduced about a year ago.

● (1235)

Even in that case, the government was not ready to include an independent ombudsman in the bill, a person who would have the power to conduct independent evaluations on behalf of the people. After all, as politicians, we are not always in a good position. Even within these institutions, and particularly within a company, people are not always equipped to make decisions that are not influenced by their own biases. That is why it is important to pay attention to this recommendation.

We would sure like to ask the government member why our recommendation was not included in the bill. Unfortunately, I do not think that we will get an answer unless a Conservative member finally decides to participate in the debate. Since returning to the House and since the Speech from the Throne marked the end of prorogation a few weeks ago, we have heard very little or nothing at all from government members about quite a few bills, including this one.

When the time comes to do our job as MPs, deal with such issues and speak to the shortcomings of a bill, even if we support it, we are unable to ask questions and to have a healthy debate. In the end, we are forced to point out flaws of a bill to government members who, in this case, remain silent.

The bill is at second reading stage. However, when we are in committee, I hope that we will hear more from government members and the parliamentary secretary who are on the committee. Our concerns might finally be addressed. Even though this is a step in the right direction, we would like to know why the government did not choose to follow through and implement all the recommendations in order to have a much tougher bill with respect to workers' rights.

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When it comes to the rights, health and safety of workers, we cannot take half measures. However, we will not reject this half measure, as it does represent a step in the right direction. Nevertheless, the NDP believes that we must implement all of the recommendations. We firmly believe in this philosophy, and we will put it in place when we form the government. If a recommendation is found to be lacking, we will at least rise in the House, out of respect for workers, and explain the government's viewpoint, or why some recommendations were set aside.

In conclusion, I would like to use my last two minutes to expand on a point that I made in my speech. This issue primarily affects my colleagues from the Atlantic provinces, but when it comes to the people of Chambly—Borduas, legislators have the mandate to protect not just oil company workers but also the people who work for any of the big businesses that we welcome into our community. That is my first concern about this bill.

These companies have a business to run and it is good for the economy to welcome them into our communities. However, in my opinion, as the MP for Chambly—Borduas, if these companies are going to set up shop in our communities, they must be good corporate citizens and respect the legislators' intent to implement regulations so that they understand that our constituents are the ones working for them and who make it possible for them to do their job and make a profit. It is a symbiotic relationship, a two-way street. In that respect, I do not think that we are asking for much.

We hope that they will agree to this type of proposal and that they will play an active role in it. We often hear what labour federations have to say on this subject, but it is important that the companies play an active role in the health and safety of their workers, who are the Canadians that I have the honour of representing.

• (1240)

It is extremely important.

I am now prepared to take questions from my colleagues.

• (1245)

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, Bill C-5 is called the offshore safety act. It amends the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act. Both of these accords require a serious overhaul in relation to their promotion of offshore petroleum development. I do not know whether the official opposition has had a chance to get a legal analysis of this.

Overall I am supportive of the bill, but the part that troubles me is that it seems to be creating new duties on employees. According to proposed section 205.026, "Every employee at a workplace...shall take all reasonable measures to protect their own health and safety..." That is certainly appropriate, but does it create a legal hurdle to an eventual court case? For instance, if we were to have a tragic replay of a helicopter crash, which I hope we never will, would the employees' conduct and execution of due diligence in protecting their own health stand as an obstacle to their pursuing a remedy?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. In these situations, we are really thinking about workers' compensation.

I am not a lawyer—that may be an answer we often hear in the House—but I know that we have conducted an analysis and that we have considered that question. For example, the hon. member for St. John's East has done a lot of work on this file.

When a bill seeks to make things easier for workers, the main thing is that they be given better tools. The legal processes that are in place will perhaps pose certain challenges, but once again, our priority is the health and safety of workers. In this regard, we are comfortable with the content of this bill, as long as the shortcomings that I mentioned in my speech and those that will certainly be raised in committee are taken into account. For now, this bill is a step in the right direction.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank and congratulate my colleague for his excellent speech.

Bill C-5 is an example of the positive things that can happen when the federal government decides to work with the provincial governments. We do not see that enough from the Conservative government.

I would like to hear my colleague from Chambly—Borduas talk a bit more about what the Conservatives could learn from the kind of co-operation they were capable of with the New Democratic Government of Nova Scotia and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I think that this is one of the most important points, especially since we know that, too often, this government fails to work with the provinces to achieve what is right for the public, whom all levels of government are supposed to represent.

In this rare instance, the federal government may have finally walked the talk when it comes to federal-provincial relations. Too often, the government says that it will consult the provinces but that does not happen.

The official opposition must also acknowledge the positives, and this is certainly one of those cases. We hope to see it again in the future. I do not want to get off topic, but I could mention the Minister of Infrastructure's silence on the Champlain Bridge and his unwillingness to work with the Government of Quebec. This is an example of a situation in which public safety is being jeopardized by a lack of communication. The Conservatives could learn from their own negotiations and their own bills. That is the case here, and I am concerned about my constituents.

Government Orders

• (1250)

[English]

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be rising today to speak to the bill before us, Bill C-5. It has a very long name, which I will not repeat.

Members will have heard my caucus colleagues who rose before me to affirm their support for this bill at second reading. I rise to affirm mine as well. However, like my colleagues, I do so not without reservation and not without the promise to do better when we get the opportunity in 2015.

Let me first deal with the positive. Bill C-5 represents the culmination of over 12 years of negotiations between the federal government and the provincial governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. It addresses a longstanding gap in legislation, one that has existed since 1992, related to occupational health and safety in the Atlantic offshore oil industry, by placing into the Atlantic accord's authorities the principles relating to occupational health and safety. In doing so, this bill effectively takes current occupational health and safety practices in that industry and codifies them in the form of legislation to be administered by provincial regulatory agencies.

The bill does a number of important things, but first and foremost it outlines the duties of occupational health and safety officers, and provides these officers with enforcement powers, warrant provisions, and inspection and investigation and other measures, in dangerous circumstances.

I mention that, notwithstanding my colleague's commentary earlier in this debate about the apparent conflict between those provisions and the budget implementation bill. It provides employees with the right to refuse to perform an activity that they have reasonable cause to believe is unsafe and affords the employees protection from reprisal for reporting unsafe conditions. This is the keystone to any occupational health and safety legislation. Further, the bill authorizes the relevant federal ministers to develop necessary regulations for both offshore work and the transit to and from that work.

All of what this bill would accomplish the NDP has called for in all relevant jurisdictions for many years. This bill stands for the benefits of a collaborative governance model, one that the government has not put into practice before, but one that sees the federal government and provincial governments working together to solve real problems and make meaningful change.

The bill leaves certain important work undone. The bill does not provide for either an independent stand-alone safety regulator or an autonomous safety division within the regulating petroleum boards.

The recommendation for an independent stand-alone safety regulator was made by the Hon. Robert Wells, as we heard this morning, as the result of his inquiry into the crash of the Sikorsky S-92A helicopter in March 2009, about 30 nautical miles from St. John's. That crash had but one survivor; there were 17 people who died.

Of this proposal, the Hon. Robert Wells wrote:

I believe that the recommendation which follows this explanatory note will be the most important in this entire report.

In making this recommendation, Wells looked to other jurisdictions and found that independent and stand-alone safety regulators were in place in Norway, the United Kingdom, and Australia, with a similar concept being developed, at the time, in the United States for offshore oil production in the Gulf of Mexico.

Wells wrote:

The oversight role which I am recommending would not conflict with the roles of other regulators, but it would when necessary enhance other regulatory measures. [...] Worldwide, the thinking and practices of safety have developed and changed greatly in the past quarter-century. In the C-NL offshore [Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador offshore oil industry], it is time for a new and comprehensive approach to offshore safety regulation.

• (1255)

He also suggested that should an independent safety regulator not be considered feasible, an alternative along these lines should be implemented: a separate, autonomous safety division of the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board with a separate budget and separate leadership, an organizational structure designed to deal only with safety matters, and a mandate and the ability to engage expert advisers to assist in its regulatory tasks; and an advisory board comprising mature and experienced persons who are fully representative of the community and who are not connected to the oil industry.

My deep concern about the omission of action on either the recommendation for an independent, stand-alone safety regulator or its proposed alternative is not informed by my knowledge of the offshore oil industry or of the particular hazards to health and safety related to the work or workplaces of that industry. Rather, it is from a number of years representing workers and workers as supervisors, as broadly understood and defined under occupational health and safety legislation, in an industry with its own particular hazards, the electricity industry.

For those of us who do or have done this kind of work, there is a single principle that governs and motivates what we do, say, think, and propose. That principle is prevention. It is taking all opportunities to ensure that tragedies do not happen, and when they have happened, to prevent them from transpiring again.

The work is always about identifying hazards and risks and removing the hazards, or if removal is not possible, mitigating the risks posed by those hazards. The reason for that approach, that principle, is simple. We talk about workplace or occupational health and safety, but what we are really talking about when we talk about workers are moms, dads, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters. We cannot lose sight of that essential truth, because when understood in these terms, when it is understood that what we are doing is ensuring that mom or dad, son or daughter go home from work alive, then the value of prevention becomes, I dare say, obvious.

That responsibility for getting moms, dads, brothers, and sisters home every night falls on all of those in the workplace, most certainly. Occupational health and safety is a shared responsibility. Workers must care for each other, and part of doing so is sharing their knowledge and expertise with all parties in the workplace.

Government Orders

Fundamentally, this is an ethical issue. From knowledge of hazards and risks and knowledge of how to remove or mitigate those hazards and risks flows a duty, a legal duty, yes, but more fundamentally, an ethical duty, to save others from harm. That duty also falls on us here in the House and in all legislatures across this country at least as if not more heavily than it does on anyone or anything else, because we are uniquely privileged to have the power to respond.

That is indeed what this process is about in the House today: the bill and our ability to debate it, identify its shortcomings, and amend and improve it. In all of this is found our ability to do so much to ensure that moms, dads, brothers, and sisters make it home from work.

While we may all embrace the principle of the supremacy of Parliament, that does not obviate or in fact diminish in any way the onus on those who reject the very strong and clear recommendation put forward by the hon. Robert Wells to provide reasons for ignoring or rejecting that recommendation.

Therefore, we will send the bill forward, because in a sense, we have an obligation to. However, there is a question that remains outstanding, unanswered, which is why leave out that important recommendation? The onus to answer that question in a clear and compelling way, the onus to reject convincingly the arguments put forward by Justice Wells in his report, continues to rest on the shoulders of the government, at least until it becomes moot because a better government comes along to put in place that independent, stand-alone safety regulator that will make workers safer, because a mom, a dad, a son, or a daughter is more likely to come home from work because of its existence.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Near the end of his speech he mentioned that the debate gives members a chance to identify shortcomings in the bill. I also mentioned that in my speech.

We have been debating this bill for several weeks and we have tried to bring up some issues. Just because we support the bill does not automatically mean that it is perfect. We have questions, but we cannot get answers from the Conservatives. I think that is unfortunate. I wonder what my colleague thinks about that. I imagine that he agrees with me, but I would like to hear his thoughts.

● (1300)

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I suppose, two and a half years into my mandate to represent the people of Beaches—East York in this House, I should be hardened to the government's negligence in these matters. However, I am still surprised by its failure, and perhaps lack of courage, to stand in the House and respond to a very simple question. Why leave out the recommendation by Justice Wells, the recommendation he described as so important? In fact, it is the most important recommendation that flowed from his inquiry into that tragic crash. It is a simple question.

The debate in the House seems to have come down to a very narrow focus, and the focus seems to be how we can do better. Why

can we not improve the bill? What, in fact, is the government's issue with implementing that important recommendation of Mr. Wells? I would most certainly welcome the opportunity to listen to any member on the government side who answered that question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his fine speech. He mentioned that an NDP government would have taken a different tack in the negotiations on Bill C-5, and he also talked about how an NDP government would have worked with its provincial partners.

I would like to let my colleague say a little more about how an NDP government would work on improving the well-being of Canadians from coast to coast, and more specifically when it comes to protecting the rights of workers on those coasts.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that there has been a legislative void on this issue since 1992. Some amendments to the Atlantic accords triggered the absence of legislation dealing directly with health and safety provisions for the Atlantic offshore oil industry. Knowing that, there flows a responsibility on our behalf, on all those who sat in this House from 1992 onwards, to fill that gap and respond to it in the interests of the workers who work in that industry and put their lives at risk every day they go to work.

We have seen that the negotiations that started in 2001 were indeed triggered by another tragic event offshore, another helicopter crash. Again, the inquiry that seems to be the subject of most of the debate, and certainly of our commentary here, which Hon. Justice Wells undertook, was also triggered by the death of 17 people in a helicopter accident.

I do not think we can ever forget our responsibility in this House to ensure that Canadians are safe in their workplaces, safe at home, and safe in the public, and I would like to think that we in the NDP would have responded immediately, in a collaborative fashion, with other jurisdictions, to fill that legislative gap many years ago.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to join my colleagues in supporting Bill C-5 at second reading. Before beginning, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the extraordinary member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

The bill before us today is important. It is the result of negotiations that have gone on for a long time now, for more than 12 years in fact, between the governments of Canada, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

This bill seeks to remedy long-standing issues in existing legislation relating to health and safety standards in offshore areas, with regard to the oil and gas sector.

If passed, Bill C-5 will enshrine safety practices in legislation, and it will establish a framework that clarifies the individual and collective roles of the federal government, the provincial governments, regulatory agencies, operators, employers, suppliers and workers.

Government Orders

There are three key principles that underlie Bill C-5. First, the legislation relating to workplace health and safety must protect workers in offshore areas as well as workers on land. In addition, workers have the right to know, to participate, to refuse, to be protected from reprisal and to receive adequate protection. Finally, it is necessary to support an occupational health and safety culture that emphasizes shared responsibility in the workplace.

The NDP is proud to support Bill C-5, which will make it possible to establish a stronger system for the protection of workers, which the NDP has been demanding for a very long time now. Clearly, in our view, the bill still does not go far enough, but it is a step in the right direction just the same. That is why we are going to support it. We hope we will be able to work with our colleagues from all parties to improve the bill and ensure that in offshore areas the workers in the gas and oil sector will enjoy adequate workplace health and safety protection.

Quite frankly, I find it rather refreshing that the Conservatives are introducing a bill that provides greater protection for workers' rights. This is surprising. We are not used to seeing the government take this kind of approach—quite the opposite.

Indeed, since winning a majority, the Conservatives have introduced a growing number of measures to erode protections for workers and undermine their rights, which is very unfortunate. This represents a small change in direction. However, we should certainly not forget the various measures the government has taken to effectively undermine the protection regimes in place for our workers in various sectors.

I am particularly thinking of Bill C-377, an underhanded and mean-spirited bill designed to cripple Canadian unions by creating a massive bureaucracy they have to comply with, under the phony pretext of increasing the transparency of organizations. However, everyone knows full well that the Conservatives' real objective in introducing such a bill is to undermine the unions' ability to appropriately represent their members and defend their rights.

We know that the members opposite may find this concept difficult to understand, because in fact, none of them are participating in today's debate. We are talking about protecting workers and implementing very important measures to protect the people who work in the oil and gas industry—which the Conservatives care deeply about. However, they do not even bother to rise, to represent their constituents and defend the rights of workers.

However, they have no qualms whatsoever about introducing a growing number of measures to undermine the rights of workers in various industries. To be honest, this makes no sense at all.

I can mention another measure that attacked workers' rights, namely the special legislation passed by the Conservatives during the Canada Post lockout in June 2011. This legislation forced the employees back to work, obviously under worse conditions, while reducing their pensions and their protections, which were in fact acquired rights. The Conservatives gave themselves the power to gut certain measures that had been negotiated between the employer and employees. The Conservatives, however, clearly decided to circumvent all that.

●(1305)

This also brings to mind the recently tabled Bill C-4, which ironically weakens workers' health and safety protections. It also allows the minister to decide, unilaterally in a totally arbitrary way, which public services to designate essential, thus limiting the actions workers will be able to undertake to defend their rights or demand better working conditions.

Finally, who could forget how the Conservatives have gut the employment insurance system? They are leading a direct attack against seasonal workers all across the country. The Conservatives are not only failing Quebec and the eastern provinces: every part of the country will feel the impact of the employment insurance reform.

In my riding, Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, not a day goes by without someone phoning or visiting our office because they are adversely affected by the EI reform, a reform the Conservatives pushed through without consulting the provinces, the territories or labour organizations.

All these examples illustrate the Conservatives' general attitude. Luckily, there is a tiny glimmer of hope now, since Bill C-5 would provide some workers with additional protections. Let us seize this ray of hope.

The NDP will support this bill. I must say again, though, how disappointed I am that the Conservatives are not taking part in the debate on Bill C-5. It may be that they have forgotten how debates work, or that they have no idea how to defend workers' rights, since they have never done it before. Why start now? Even though the Conservatives are introducing a bill about workers' rights, they are so close to big corporate bosses that they can no longer rise in the House and defend workers' rights, even when they should be standing up for their constituents.

NDP members will keep up the good work, doing their best to stand up for Canadians, including those the Conservatives should be standing up for. Today's debate is important. It is a shame so few government members are actually taking part in the debate.

Let us get back to Bill C-5. As I said earlier, this bill will improve the lives of offshore workers in some ways. However, it does have some shortcomings, the most significant of which is the fact that the government refused to create an independent, stand-alone safety regulator for the offshore zone. The governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador have repeatedly called for this, but the Conservative government refused at every stage of the 12 years of negotiations.

Government Orders

In his June 2010 report, the hon. Robert Wells made several recommendations, including recommendation 29, which he believed to be the most important one in the report. The recommendation called for the creation of a new, independent and stand-alone organization to regulate safety issues in the offshore. This organization would have to be distinct and independent from all other bodies regulating offshore activities and would be solely responsible for regulating safety issues. Similar organizations exist in Norway, the United Kingdom and Australia. The United States is also considering setting up this type of body in the Gulf of Mexico. The Conservatives, however, have refused to even consider the idea. That is not how an NDP government would have handled things. We think it is important to create that kind of body. We will work toward that, which means that we will continue to pressure the government to create that kind of body, and we will continue to support our provincial partners as they work toward that goal, which is very important.

Various accidents and tragedies have occurred on our coasts, some of them fatal. Several of my colleagues have talked about that in the House, including my colleague from St. John's East. Despite everything, despite the Wells report and despite the fact that people from across the country have repeatedly asked the government for this, the government will not budge. Such an organization is not included in the bill and will not be created.

• (1310)

I think that is a shame because there are some measures in Bill C-5, measures that protect worker health and safety, that the NDP can support. We will be happy to do so.

• (1315)

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I found my colleague's comparison of Conservative policies quite interesting. Since 2011, the Conservatives have shown real contempt for workers' rights. I would like her to elaborate on that. Perhaps the Conservatives are doing some soul-searching and waking up to the fact that the safety and rights of workers are fundamental in a country like ours.

Could my colleague elaborate on that aspect of the bill, as well as on the Conservatives' lack of goodwill?

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

I would like to believe that the Conservatives have had a revelation, a eureka moment. Then they would understand that it is important to protect our workers. Unfortunately, if we look at Bill C-4, which I spoke about and which was introduced just before Bill C-5, and if we consider all of the measures that have been implemented by the Conservatives since they won a majority, I have a hard time believing that is the case.

I am not overly optimistic that this government will protect workers in sectors outside the gas and oil industries. Since the start of the Conservative mandate, workers in the federal public service in particular have become this government's scapegoats for absolutely everything. Measure after measure is being adopted to eliminate positions, reduce the quality of working conditions and so on, all because it is easy to do.

I would really like to see the Conservatives bring in more measures to improve working conditions for workers in all sectors, but that is not what we are accustomed to under this government. Unfortunately, I am afraid that this is just a one-off. However, I will give them the benefit of the doubt. We can only hope that things will improve and that the Conservatives will start listening to the workers in various sectors, the people they represent in their ridings. It will be up to the Conservatives to prove that they really have the best interests of Canadian workers at heart.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member finds it as surprising as I do that when the Conservatives put forward an important piece of legislation such as this and we raise concerns about it, they fail to put up speakers on the bill or participate in the questioning or respond in any way to the very important questions that we have raised in this debate. Instead they just sit silent. I wonder what her reflections are on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my hon. colleague for that important question, because it gives me the opportunity to emphasize how troubling it is that no Conservative members are taking part in this debate.

We were elected to come to this House, defend the interests of the people we represent, engage in dialogue and introduce bills, as well as to try to improve the content of those bills through debate and discussion. However, this government prefers to rest on its laurels and simply not participate. Frankly, this attitude is appalling. It is unworthy of the mandate we have been given and unworthy of voters' confidence.

It would be nice if even one Conservative member would rise to take part in the debate for a change. Then at least one member would be taking their responsibilities seriously and fulfilling their duty as an MP, which might make that person deserving of their constituents' trust.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think it is very important to point out today that, although I have had countless opportunities to debate issues in the House of Commons, unfortunately, I have rarely had the occasion to congratulate the Conservatives. As I rise today to speak to Bill C-5, I would like to tell them that, even though we support this bill, we are not completely happy with it. There are still improvements to be made.

I would like to point out that, all too often, the Conservatives complicate things when they could be drafting bills that are in the best interests of Canadians. I am thinking, for example, of Bill C-5. This bill was drafted in consultation with stakeholders and the Atlantic provinces, and even after 12 years of talks—which is quite a long time—it does not take into account the most fundamental recommendations contained in the report.

For that reason, I would like to ask the Conservatives why they are trying to pass a bill that does not go all the way and why they are always passing bills that are full of holes and leaving the courts and Canadians with unclear legislation.

Government Orders

What is wrong with this government is that its members are not capable of taking their responsibilities seriously. Things have reached the point where—as my colleague from British Columbia just mentioned—they are not even debating their own bills. That is completely ridiculous. The government introduces bills and then refuses to stand up for them and respond to Canadians' concerns.

That is what is wrong with this government. I am sorry to say so because I greatly appreciate my colleagues on the other side of the House. This bill could have been a wonderful bill had the Conservatives taken into consideration the main recommendations of the report. All of the experts and groups who were consulted said so. The bill is good but it could have been even better had the government really listened to their requests and simply acted on their recommendations.

Unfortunately, I do not think that we will ever know why the government did not do so. It is too bad that, day after day, this government refuses to debate its bill and improve it in order to give Canadians the best legislation and the best protection possible.

That being said, I would like to address the positive aspects in the bill, because I think it is important to do so. We know the Conservatives' past history in terms of workers' rights and in terms of work in general. I hope this shows that they are now taking Canadian workers seriously and that they are coming to their defence.

In my view, enshrining health and safety provisions for Canadians in legislation is very important because it provides clear guidance for employees, employers and provincial regulatory agencies. It should be mentioned that the step we are taking is a very important one. Basically, all the agencies and all the provinces agree that this is a sound piece of legislation. On the other hand, there is still room for improvement in the bill's content, and I will come back to this point a little bit later in my speech.

• (1320)

As I mentioned, the bill addresses shortcomings. It was in 2001 that the government began negotiations with the provinces, and this bill is therefore the culmination of 12 years of effort.

The government is there to listen to the provinces and not necessarily to play the devil's advocate all the time. Unfortunately, even when it is playing the devil's advocate, it is not even able to put forward a bill that implements the recommendations that it said it wanted to implement. That is too bad.

For instance, in 1992, it was decided that health and safety matters would be removed from the legislation. This made things rather hazy. The provinces had to move ahead in different ways without a set of legislative guidelines for enforcing health and safety principles.

We know how complicated things can be in the Atlantic provinces because of offshore oil and gas development. We know, for instance, that BP is beginning new exploration off the coast of the Atlantic provinces. We are moving toward more oil and gas development. This is the perfect time to pass clear-cut regulations to protect people who may even be risking their lives on offshore oil rigs. This is really important.

I would really like to congratulate the government for finally recognizing the rights of these workers. They have the same right to protection as all other Canadians.

I know that the Conservatives have policies on union rights that are quite regressive. We have seen it with Canada Post. We have seen it with Air Canada and Aveos, with the Air Canada Public Participation Act.

I think it is important to note that, perhaps today, the government has done a little bit of soul-searching and has come to the conclusion that it is there to protect workers, not private organizations.

As I said, the bill describes the duties of operators, employers and employees. This is important. While occupational health and safety regulations must admittedly be put in place for the benefit of employers, employees must also have benchmarks for guidance and a clear framework to know exactly where they stand. For example, while an occupational health and safety culture must be instilled in both employees and employers, employees must also be protected.

I want to focus on one very important provision. Bill C-5 gives employees the right to refuse to perform a task that constitutes a danger to themselves. Of course, the bill also makes it clear that employees must have reasonable cause to believe that performing the task would constitute a danger to themselves. I believe this is important. The provisions benefit employers as well as employees.

Another very crucial provision protects employees that report unsafe conditions from reprisals. This might help to prevent major disasters, like the one that occurred in the Gulf of Mexico.

It is important, in my view, to establish an occupational health and safety regime. The government must focus on doing this not only for the safety of Canadians, but also to prevent disasters and to safeguard all Canadians from problems of this nature.

Since my time is running out, I would like to turn to recommendation 29. As I mentioned, the government conducted negotiations and held talks with the provinces for 12 years, but it disregarded the most important recommendation, one on which all provincial organizations and the provinces wanted the government to show some leadership. That recommendation called for the creation of an independent safety regulator.

It is very important to note that a number of countries have already established this type of independent body. As my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier stated earlier, these countries include Norway, the United Kingdom and Australia. The United States is considering the possibility of establishing one such body.

If the government really wants to show that it is willing to take action, it must go all the way and meet all of the provinces' demands.

• (1325)

In my estimation, this is important. If the government really wants to demonstrate its willingness to take action, it must follow through and meet all of the demands made by the provinces.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her very cogent speech on this topic. I would just like to reflect again on the failure of the Conservatives to respond to any of the concerns that she raised in her speech during the time available to them during this question period.

I will give her another chance to reiterate some of her major concerns and see if we can get any of the Conservatives to stand up and take part in this debate.

• (1330)

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned it in my speech. I have been here all morning listening to my colleagues speak and extend a hand to the Conservative government, asking it to work together with us, as should be the case in Parliament, so that Canadians can be safer and the best possible occupational health and safety legislation can be adopted.

Unfortunately, not one of my colleagues opposite, not a single Conservative member, has been willing to take up our offer to work together and demonstrate this government's good will. Where the rights of workers are concerned, this government is, regrettably, cultivating the negative image it has across the country.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do have a question, and I look forward to the Minister of National Defence's comments on this legislation after we have finished. He is the former Minister of Justice. He can come back and join in the debate. We will be happy to have him.

However, I was wondering whether the member had any comments on or was surprised by the length of time it has taken this legislation to come forward. I am reading an article here that was written by legal counsel from the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board. It is dated 2003, and it talks about how the negotiations are almost concluded.

Why does the member think it has taken at least two Liberal governments and three Conservative governments to get to the point, 10 or 12 years later, where we finally have legislation? Why was this issue so low on the priority list of these governments?

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, I will gladly answer my colleague's question. I know how important this bill is to his constituents and fellow citizens.

Two things are apparent. As I have said repeatedly, this government is not serious about the importance of protecting workers and ensuring the health and safety of their workplace.

It is also clear that the government leans more toward protecting oil companies or is inclined to side with them. Indeed, it seems to favour the interests of private corporations over those of Canadians.

Also apparent, unfortunately, is just how long the government has taken to negotiate. Even more unfortunate, however, is that after 12 years, this government has rejected the most important recommendations. To cap everything off, the government is

disregarding the report's recommendations, contrary to what it said it would do.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time I have stood in the House to speak about the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board. Since being elected in May 2011, I have spoken about the C-NLOPB too many times to count. I have spoken about the problems and shortcomings of the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board many times, including patronage appointments.

The highest-profile appointment that comes to mind was the one-time campaign manager of Peter Penashue, the former Conservative MP for Labrador who served as minister of intergovernmental affairs in his short stint in federal politics. That campaign manager was no more qualified to serve on the board of the C-NLOPB than he was to run Penashue's fraudulent election campaign, which is why he is no longer on the board of the C-NLOPB.

For another thing, I cannot say how many times I have made reference to the 2009 crash of Cougar flight 491 that killed 17 offshore workers. The public's confidence in the C-NLOPB has been shaken. There is no doubt about that. Therefore, it is a welcome change to stand in the House today to support a bill that is actually focused on the health and safety of offshore workers.

It is about time. It is well past due. It is an important victory for the labour movement in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Nova Scotia, as well as for provincial New Democrats in both provinces, who have been fighting for this for a dog's age. They have been advocating for a legislated offshore safety regime for about a dozen years.

I stand in support of Bill C-5, an act to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act. The bill itself amends the Atlantic accord to place health and occupational safety regimes into legislation. The bill clarifies the individual and shared roles and responsibilities of the federal government, the provincial governments, regulators, operators, employers, suppliers, and employees.

Bill C-5 is based on three basic principles. The first is that offshore occupational health and safety laws must provide offshore workers with the same protection as onshore workers. The second principle is that the legislation protects and enshrines the rights of offshore workers. The third principle supports an occupational health and safety culture that recognizes the shared responsibilities in the workplace.

The bill authorizes both levels of government, federal and provincial, to work together to develop regulations for offshore health and safety. The bill also requires Transport Canada to develop occupational health and safety regulations for offshore workers in transit, such as when they are travelling to and from marine installations, rigs, and gravity-based structures, for example. There are only two ways to get offshore, in case it is not obvious. One is by air, meaning by Cougar helicopter or rescue helicopter, and the other is by offshore supply boat.

Let me be clear: Bill C-5 is positive news. It is good news. It is welcome. However, the bill does not go far enough. I have to stand again today to talk about the federal Conservatives and their failure to put the health and safety of offshore workers front and centre. Before all else, the health and safety of our people must be paramount, but that is not the case.

I referred earlier to the 2009 crash of Cougar flight 491 about 30 nautical miles from St. John's. Seventeen people died. There was one survivor. It was an incredible tragedy, yet another in a string of tragedies for maritime people such as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It was felt in every nook and cranny of Newfoundland and Labrador and around the country.

Justice Robert Wells conducted an inquiry into the Cougar crash. In his words, the most important recommendation of the entire report is recommendation number 29.

● (1335)

That recommendation called for the creation of an independent and stand-alone regulator to oversee safety in the offshore oil industry. Where is the independent safety regulator? It has been three years. The government of Newfoundland and Labrador supports it. Where does the Conservative government stand? Why has it failed to act on the most important recommendation of the Wells inquiry report?

Let me quote from that Wells report. It states:

...the Safety Regulator should be separate and independent from all other components of offshore regulation and should stand alone, with safety being its only regulatory task... Independent and stand-alone safety regulators are now in place in Norway, the United Kingdom, and Australia, and the same concept is... being developed in the United States for the Gulf of Mexico.

We will remember the Gulf of Mexico and the *Deepwater Horizon*. The rig caught on fire and almost a dozen workers were killed. There were billions of dollars in damages and cleanup costs.

Is the health and safety of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and Canadians not as important as the health and safety of Norwegians, Australians, Americans and the people of the United Kingdom? Of course, it is.

In his inquiry report, Justice Wells wrote that the oversight rules he was recommending would not conflict with the roles of other regulators, but would, when necessary, enhance other regulatory measures. In the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador offshore, Justice Wells said that "it is time for a new", and I underline "new", "and more comprehensive approach to offshore safety regulation". What Bill C-5 fails to do is to create that independent safety regulator.

Government Orders

Earlier this month, Transport Canada released proposed safety regulations for offshore helicopter operations. They were announced about a week and a half ago. The new regulations would prohibit the operation of offshore flights when weather or water conditions would make ditching in the water unsafe. Under the new rules, crew members would also be required to wear water immersion survival suits and operators would have to carry an emergency underwater breathing apparatus for each passenger aboard the flight.

As part of that news, the federal Minister of Transport issued a news release, in which she stated:

Our government is committed to strengthening aviation safety for all Canadians. We have worked closely with the aviation community to develop these new regulations, which will improve the safety of offshore helicopter operations for both passengers and crew.

After that news release was issued and the story broke, I had telephone calls from offshore workers and their families. They were upset. Why were they upset? They were irate because these proposed new regulations are not new regulations. Lana Payne, the Atlantic director for Unifor, which represents workers on the Terra Nova FPSO and the Hibernia oil platform, pointed out that those recommendations were already implemented in Newfoundland and Labrador. The C-NLOPB was responsible for implementing those measures in the aftermath of the Cougar crash. Lana Payne stated:

Nothing in this statement from the minister is going to change one iota in terms of improving safety in the offshore, because most of it has been implemented.

The offshore workers who contacted me were furious. "Why is this a news story?", they asked. "What is the news in this story? What makes this news? There is nothing new here". They were absolutely right.

What is also missing from the current regulations, another shortcoming, is the requirement for helicopters to have a 30-minute run-dry capability. In other words, helicopters should have the capability to stay in the air for 30 minutes after their gearboxes run dry of oil. Please God that never happens, but we know it has happened in the past.

● (1340)

That recommendation was made ages ago; it was two or three years ago. What has become of that recommendation? Nothing has become of that recommendation.

We support the bill at second reading. It is a win for offshore workers. It is a long-fought win for the New Democratic parties in both Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, and the bill looks good on the industry.

However, if the Conservatives think that offshore workers, their unions, their families, or even the provincial governments are satisfied, they are horribly mistaken. This is but one step in the right direction. Another huge step would take place once there is word that the federal government will finally act on an independent safety regulator.

Government Orders

What keeps me positive is the fact that our offshore workers, their unions, and their families do not miss a trick with the current Conservative government. New Democrats will not stop. We will not relent until the safety of our workers is paramount above all else. They deserve no less.

• (1345)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl for his very eloquent speech in the House. He has been one of the foremost advocates on offshore rights for workers, to make sure that those who work in the offshore industry are subject to real safety precautions. I thank him for his work in the House of Commons in this regard. He has made a real difference.

The member identified that the Conservatives, in their reckless, irresponsible, foolhardy way, are refusing to put in place an independent safety regulator. It makes no sense when countries like Norway, Australia, and the United Kingdom, all with good sense and responsible choices, have put in place an independent safety regulator.

Why are the Conservatives being so irresponsible, foolhardy, and reckless with the safety of offshore oil workers?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, but I do not have an answer.

The provincial Progressive Conservative government led by Kathy Dunderdale in Newfoundland and Labrador is on side and on record as supporting the creation of an independent safety regulator. As I said in my speech, it was the most important recommendation of the Wells inquiry report into the 2009 crash of Cougar flight 491. The provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador is behind this, but the federal Conservative government is not.

We do not have an answer. The current government has been asked that question many times, but we are awaiting an answer. It may be that one of the many Conservative MPs in the House sitting across from me today will get up and answer that question.

Why have they failed to act?

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for St. John's South—Mount Pearl for his excellent and passionate speech today.

I want to build on what has been said about the lack of an independent regulatory body.

The member pointed out that Justice Wells made that the centrepiece of his report. It was the most important recommendation that there be such an independent body. He pointed out that Norway has created one called the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority; Australia and the British have done the same thing.

Is it because the Conservatives cannot find a patronage appointment to fill that particular job? The member pointed out that the Progressive Conservative government of Newfoundland and Labrador is on side. Why is the federal Conservative government not? Can it not find one to put there?

As a person who is knowledgeable about that province, what does the member think would be the reason for this gap?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I understand his question in terms of being tongue-in-cheek, if it were not so serious.

When Peter Penashue was in this House as the Conservative member for Labrador, one of the first appointments of the government was to appoint his former campaign manager to the board of the C-NLOPB. That campaign manager had no idea whatsoever about the offshore oil industry. That appointment did not stand, in the same way that Mr. Penashue's time in this House of Commons did not last either. Too often we have had examples where patronage appointments have been put on regulators like the C-NLOPB, and it does not do the industry or the people justice.

The bottom line with the C-NLOPB is that we have a regulatory body that looks after industry regulation, safety, and the environment. That is too much for one regulatory body to look after.

We have been preaching. We have been pushing Justice Wells' recommendation for the independent safety regulator, and nothing has happened.

Again, let me put this question to the Conservative government, to all the Conservatives on the opposite side of this House today. Why do they not follow through on the Wells inquiry recommendation for an independent safety regulator?

• (1350)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a parallelism between the failure to have an independent safety regulator and the decision by the current administration to remove the independent environmental assessment from the same area of public policy, the offshore petroleum boards.

The offshore petroleum boards used to be covered by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and there used to be expertise within that body to conduct environmental reviews. That has now been ended, through previous omnibus budget bills. Now we have a reduced, diminished, and weakened EA process that is entirely up to the Newfoundland and Nova Scotia offshore petroleum boards.

By bringing in this much-delayed legislation for offshore worker protection, we have the same thing: the offshore petroleum boards are their own safety regulators.

I wonder if my hon. friend thinks there is something to this analysis, that there is a thematic effort to reduce regulatory efforts in protecting both workers and the environment in our offshore?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I think there is an effort by the current Conservative government to get out of the business of regulatory regime, period. If it were up to the government, industry would regulate itself in every way that could be imagined.

We are here to ensure that does not happen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my honourable colleague.

Government Orders

[English]

I would like the member to tell us what he thinks about the search and rescue centre at Quebec being shut down by the current government, knowing that it is the only bilingual centre in North America, not just in Canada but in North America.

I think it tells us a lot about the silence of the Conservatives over there and about the fact that all these centres that take care of the security of people were shut down.

I would like to hear a bit more about that because I know the St. John's centre was also shut down.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that rescue sub-centres in Quebec and my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl have both been closed.

There is an argument to be made for keeping both open. In Quebec, obviously, there is a unique language, the language of Quebecers. In Newfoundland and Labrador, there is the language of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, which is also our own unique dialect. There is an argument to be made for the fact that with our unique dialect in Newfoundland and Labrador, if the sub-centre is moved to Halifax, these mainlanders, even though they are Maritimers, may not understand the unique language of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

On this side of the House we have fought to keep both rescue sub-centres open. However, talking to the Conservatives is obviously like speaking to a wall, especially today with none of the Conservatives getting up to speak about such an important issue.

Another thing I want to mention is the emergency response times for our military's Cormorant helicopters. I am not sure if the people watching this debate today understand, but we have two sets of response times for emergencies in our offshore. Monday to Friday during working hours, nine to five, the wheels-up response time for our Cormorant helicopters is 30 minutes. It takes 30 minutes for them to get off the ground, but outside of nine to five, during evenings, weekends and on holidays, the wheels-up response time for our search and rescue helicopters is up to two hours.

In every respect, when it comes to the health and safety of our offshore workers, the Conservative government misses the boat. It does not have a clue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Resuming debate.

● (1355)

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion, will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The Chief Government Whip, on a point of order.

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I request that the vote be deferred to the end of government orders on Tuesday, November 26, 2013.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Accordingly, the recorded division will be deferred until tomorrow at the end of government orders.

* * *

DRUG-FREE PRISONS ACT

The House resumed from November 22 consideration of the motion that Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Newton—North Delta will have about two to three minutes to start off, and then we will switch over. I will indicate when the time is right.

The member for Newton—North Delta.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to the bill today, but before I do that, I will take a moment to acknowledge that it is the international day to end violence against women. It behooves each and every one of us in the House to reflect on that for a moment and think about the seriousness of this issue, which has an impact on our communities right across this country and right around the world. We always have to remind ourselves that there is a lot of work we could be doing in this area.

I will also take this opportunity to acknowledge the work done by my good friend, the member of Parliament for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, on this file. He is a parliamentarian for whom I have the utmost respect because he does his work on the Hill really well, does excellent work on the file, and from conversations I have had with people from his riding, I also know he is an amazing worker in his riding as well. On this particular file, not just on this legislation but other things that come before the committee on the issue of public safety, he is such a good researcher and spokesperson for us.

I am really struck by the title of the bill. It is a laudable title. I do not think there is anyone on either side of the House who would disagree with the slogan. However, we have a slogan that is a title for a piece of legislation, and that should cause us some concern: drug-free prisons act.

Statements by Members

All of us want to have drug-free prisons. We also want to have drug-free communities. We also want to make sure we get rid of homelessness. I can think of so many issues I could put under this kind of bill. It is like talking about having a universal child care policy. Just saying we should have one does not make it happen; we actually have to take action.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Newton—North Delta will have 17 minutes remaining for her remarks when the House next takes up debate on the question.

We will go now to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

STÉPHANIE PELLETIER

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I am honoured to share the news that one of my constituents was selected as the winner of the prestigious 2013 Governor General's Literary Awards in the fiction category.

Stéphanie Pelletier, a proud resident of the La Mitis RCM, received this honour for her first collection of short stories entitled, *Quand les guêpes se taisent*, which was published by Leméac. Ms. Pelletier is very involved in our region, as an artistic director, development officer, director, host and slam poet, and her writing shows just how much artists and creators contribute to developing the vitality of a region like ours.

Our part of the country, with its sites, landscapes and people, nurtures creativity and is in turn enriched by this artistic diversity. I sincerely want to commend her for her commitment to the literary world and her perseverance as a writer. She is a fabulous ambassador for our region, and this honour is a testament to the value and importance of hard work.

Bravo, Stéphanie.

* * *

[*English*]

LUNG CANCER AWARENESS

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the month of November is almost over and I rise today in the House to remind us that November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month.

Last week, I met with representatives from Lung Cancer Canada and was astonished by how many Canadians are affected by this disease. Despite that lung cancer is the nation's number one cancer killer, the attention paid to it is scarce because of its stigma, and sadly, its low survival rate.

Many are unaware of how many women are impacted by it. Statistics show that lung cancer kills more women than any other type of cancer. Women are 1.5 times more likely than men to

develop the disease. With the proper screening available today, many deaths could be prevented, saving thousands of Canadian lives.

I would like to take this time to thank and congratulate Lung Cancer Canada and especially Dr. Natasha Leighl for their great work and dedication.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LAVAL UNIVERSITY'S ROUGE ET OR FOOTBALL TEAM

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, Laval University's Rouge et Or defeated the Calgary Dinos 25-14 to win the 49th Vanier Cup.

This was the team's eighth Canadian university football championship and its third win after four straight years of playing for the Vanier Cup, another Canadian university football record for Laval University.

A total of 18,543 fans braved the cold and damp conditions—I can tell you about that—to support their team in a game where the Dinos, led by Andrew Buckley, played their best.

However, that was not enough to stop running backs Pascal Lochard, winner of the Ted Morris Memorial Trophy as the game's most valuable player, and Maxime Boutin.

What a great showing by the team's offence, which set a new record with 449 rushing yards.

Congratulations to the Rouge et Or for this outstanding performance, which reminds us that the greatest victories are achieved by united teams where everyone works together for the win.

The Rouge et Or, a great tradition.

* * *

[*English*]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and day one of 16 days of activism against gender violence in Canada.

Our government knows that, sadly, violence remains a daily reality for women and girls. That is why we are taking action in communities across the country. For example, we have launched a national action plan to combat human trafficking, invested \$25 million over five years to address the high number of missing and murdered aboriginal women, funded innovative projects engaging men and boys in addressing violence against women and girls, and recently tabled legislation to address cyberbullying.

Through the Public Health Agency of Canada, our government also supports a range of programs for building healthier relationships, addressing violence in the home, and increasing resilience and self-esteem.

Today and throughout the rest of the year, let us all take a stand against violence.

BREAST CANCER SCREENING

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask the government to support the growing number of Canadians who are requesting new benchmarks in mammography screening. Breast cancer remains the most common cancer diagnosis of women over 20 in Canada. The Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation reported that early detection of breast cancer through mammography screening has helped decrease the number of deaths since 1986.

Dr. Martin Yaffe at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto recommends that the screening age in Canada should be moved from age 50 to 40. Several provinces have heeded those findings and have committed to taking this proactive step.

Today, I encourage the federal government to work with all of the provinces, territories, and stakeholders to ensure the age recommendations for breast cancer screening in all jurisdictions are based on the best possible evidence. Early detection means early treatment and lives saved.

* * *

• (1405)

[Translation]

LAVAL UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL TEAM

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I want to congratulate the Canadian university football champions, Laval University's Rouge et Or, who triumphed on their home field this past Saturday, winning the 49th Vanier Cup 25 to 14 over the Calgary Dinos. This was a record eighth national title for the Rouge et Or in the 18 years of the program's history. What is more, Glen Constantin's team had a perfect season with no losses and, on Saturday, won its 65th consecutive game at Laval University's PEPS Stadium in front of 18,000 spectators.

I would also like to congratulate running back Pascal Lochar, who was named the Ted Morris Memorial Trophy winner as the game's most valuable player for his winning touchdown in the last quarter.

In closing, the Rouge and Or are preparing for their next victory and are proud to represent the first French-language university in North America, Laval University.

* * *

[English]

BANGLADESH

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in April 2013, a building collapsed in Savar, Bangladesh. Over 1,100 workers died. Another 2,500 were injured, mostly women.

It was the deadliest, but neither the first nor the last, such tragedy in Bangladesh's garment industry. From the rubble of Rana Plaza, a worker made this plea, "Save us, brother. I beg you, brother. I want to live...It's so painful here...I have two little children".

Canada has not answered that plea. It is time we did, because in the words of J.S. Woodsworth, "What we desire for ourselves we

Statements by Members

wish for all. To this end may we take our share in the world's work and the world's struggles".

Before us is an opportunity for Canada and Bangladesh to go forward side by side to realize the desires that we have in common: peace and political stability, economic growth and jobs, jobs that pay enough to support our families, jobs that are safe enough to allow us to return home to them each night.

* * *

THE PHILIPPINES

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month Typhoon Haiyan devastated the Philippines, killing thousands and leaving the country devastated.

As always, Canadians across the country have opened their hearts and wallets to help those affected in the Philippines in the time of need.

I have had the opportunity to attend several fundraisers, both in my riding and throughout the GTA, and the generosity of Canadians is nothing short of remarkable.

I have had many constituents ask me how they can help. I encourage them to make a donation to organizations like the Red Cross and World Vision, which are doing outstanding work on the ground in the Philippines.

For every dollar donated by individual Canadians, our government will match that donation dollar for dollar. This is in addition to the \$20 million our government has already committed in aid, along with our brave men and women in uniform who are already on the ground helping in the affected areas.

The Philippines needs our help. I encourage every Canadian to continue to open their hearts and wallets and donate generously.

* * *

GREY CUP

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the 101st Grey Cup champions, the Saskatchewan Roughriders.

In last night's championship game at Mosaic Stadium, the sellout crowd of 45,000 watched the Riders defeat the Hamilton Tiger-Cats by a score of 45 to 23.

By plane, train, and automobile, CFL fans travelled to Regina to experience the Rider Nation. Fans said that they were to be there, knocking and rocking, and boy did they prove it.

Across the nation, Canadians witnessed why Saskatchewan is the heartland of Canadian football. Twelve local boys are Roughrider players. Regina's own Chris Getzlaf was named the game's Most Valuable Canadian. Game MVP Kory Sheets ran for a record 197 yards and had two touchdowns. Enough cannot be said about the leadership of Rider quarterback Darian Durant, who dedicated this Grey Cup win to his 85-year-old grandmother.

Last night, Rider fans celebrated not only across Saskatchewan but across the country.

Statements by Members

Congratulations to the Hamilton Tiger-Cats football club on its valiant effort, and a special thanks to all the organizers and volunteers who made the 101st Grey Cup a resounding success.

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● (1410)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Our former leader, Jack Layton, was one of the founding activists behind the White Ribbon Campaign to end violence against women.

As a child, I saw my mother thrown across the room by a partner and had classmates who later married abusive partners. We must work together with organizations like Dr. Roz's Healing Place in my riding to change attitudes and foster healthy and equal relationships so no woman or child need ever live in fear again.

[Translation]

Today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Our former leader, Jack Layton, was one of the founding activists behind the White Ribbon Campaign to put an end to violence against women.

When I was a child, I saw my mother's partner throw her across the room. Some of my school friends were also mistreated by a partner. We have to change attitudes so that, one day, no woman or child will have to live in fear.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been 13 long days since the Liberal Party reminded Canadians that they just do not trust them with their own hard-earned money. On Remembrance Day, no less, the Liberals slammed veterans by saying that giving money to veterans was like hanging a case of beer in front of a drunk. They go and spend it on booze and addiction.

Veterans are scratching their heads. When will the Liberal leader apologize and retract his member's comments, or is that now official Liberal policy? I call upon the Liberal leader to stop dithering and do what is right. Our veterans deserve no less.

* * *

GREY CUP

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today on behalf of the New Democratic Party, except for three of our members, who are extremely proud of the fact that the Saskatchewan Roughriders won the 101st Grey Cup, their fourth victory. As a 10-year-old boy at Empire Stadium in Vancouver, I witnessed personally the defeat of the Ottawa Rough Riders by Ron Lancaster, Ed McQuarters, and George Reed. It was a fabulous game, and that was their first Grey Cup.

Yesterday, in the comfort of my own home, along with my friends and whatever else we had with us, we witnessed Saskatchewan yet

again win the Grey Cup, the 101st, to start of a new century of football.

I want to personally say for my colleagues from Hamilton, sorry, but next year is their year. Mark my words, the Hamilton Tiger-Cats will win the Grey Cup.

However, that said, for the people of Saskatchewan and to the town of Regina, I say what a great football atmosphere, what a great football town. Our personal congratulations go from the leader of the NDP to everybody in Saskatchewan for a tremendous victory. God love the Riders.

* * *

IRAN

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while our government appreciates the efforts of the P5+1 in reaching a deal with the Iranian regime over its nuclear program, we should evaluate it by its implementation, not just by its signing. We should also remember that this recent development was only possible after a concerted global effort at sanctioning the Iranian regime.

Since 2010, our government has imposed six rounds of sanctions against the Iranian regime, and it is clear that they are working. We have long believed that the Iranian regime must never be allowed to obtain nuclear weapons capability. Not only would this pose a threat to Canada and our allies, but it would jeopardize global efforts at ending the proliferation of these horrible weapons.

That is why Canada's sanctions will remain in full force until real and concrete efforts are taken by the Iranian regime to abandon its nuclear ambitions and allow unfettered access to all its nuclear facilities. Our government will continue to hold Iran to account.

* * *

SEALING INDUSTRY

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian seal hunt is a sustainable, humane, and well-regulated industry that has supported a unique way of life for thousands of years. The history of the seal hunt goes back over 4,000 years, and it is an important part of Inuit culture.

Canada's seal hunt has the highest of standards of practice for any hunt in the world, yet the European Union has placed a discriminatory ban against seal products. Our government will continue to fight for the Canadian seal hunt in whatever arena possible. We are proud to protect a traditional, sustainable, and historic way of life for Canadian sealers across the great country.

•(1415)

[Translation]

LABOUR-SPONSORED FUNDS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-4 will eliminate the tax credit for labour-sponsored venture capital funds. The Conservative government recognized that small and medium-sized businesses in Canada do not have enough venture capital to start up and bring their ideas and products to the market.

What solution did the Conservatives come up with? Strangely, they want to eliminate a tax credit that has been very effective in sustaining venture capital funds. This change makes no sense and it will hurt all Canadians, and Quebeckers in particular, as they represent 90% of the Canadians who use this tax credit and often put the shares directly into their retirement savings plans.

It is high time that the government reconsidered its ill-advised decision in light of the proposal supported by Canada's Venture Capital and Private Equity Association.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems not a week goes by without more of the truth slipping out about what really happened in the PMO-Senate scandal. Despite the claims of the Prime Minister, Canadians know that Nigel Wright did not act alone.

Yesterday Jason MacDonald, the Prime Minister's own director of communications, described "the cover-up that we now know took place". MacDonald even admitted that criminal activity occurred. He said "The RCMP makes very clear...who it is they believe may have been involved in what ultimately amounts to criminal activity".

The PMO is accusing the PMO of criminal activity at the highest levels of the Prime Minister's Office.

While Mike Duffy and Nigel Wright are no longer employed by the Conservatives, the remaining staff and senators named in the RCMP documents still have their taxpayer-funded jobs. It is time for the Prime Minister to stop weaving his web of stories. It is time for the Conservatives to tell Canadians the truth.

* * *

UKRAINE

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past Thursday, the Ukrainian government suspended the ongoing negotiations over a trade and political agreement with the European Union. In reaction to this, thousands of Ukrainians took to the streets this weekend, not only to express their dissatisfaction but their bitter disappointment as well.

Our Conservative government is deeply concerned by this decision. These agreements with the EU presented an opportunity for the Ukrainian government to bring about greater economic prosperity for the people of Ukraine.

Oral Questions

It was a missed opportunity to strengthen and reaffirm the values of freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and balanced justice. The Ukrainian government must continue to make efforts to strengthen its democratic institutions. An active and legitimate opposition is crucial to a vibrant and effective democracy.

Our Conservative government will continue to stand with the people of Ukraine in their pursuit of their many shared values, which would have been enshrined in this agreement. We will stand with the Ukrainian people in their aspirations for a strong democracy, for hope, and for their future.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the weekend the Prime Minister's most recent director of communications admitted that a "cover-up" had indeed taken place in the Prime Minister's own office. He said this "...ultimately amounts to criminal activity".

Does the Prime Minister agree with his newest director of communications? Does the Prime Minister agree that there was a criminal cover-up organized out of his own office?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, let me just take an opportunity to congratulate my Saskatchewan Roughriders for winning the Grey Cup. Until my home town of Stouffville has a team, I will be a vociferous Saskatchewan Roughrider fan.

I of course reject completely what the Leader of the Opposition has said. It is quite clear in the documents that have been deposited by the RCMP that this is an investigation into the actions of Nigel Wright and Senator Duffy.

•(1420)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, actually the quotes were from the newest director of communications of the Prime Minister. That was who was being quoted.

[Translation]

We are at the point where even the Prime Minister's director of communications is admitting that criminal activity was orchestrated within the PMO.

Will the Prime Minister fire everyone involved in this cover-up?

[English]

Will the Prime Minister fire anyone working for him who has been involved in this cover-up?

Oral Questions

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, what these documents show is that the actions of Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright are the focus of this investigation. At the same time, the documents show that the Prime Minister had no knowledge of what was taking place. As the Prime Minister has said, had he known, he would have put a stop to it.

What is also contained in the documents is the level of co-operation and assistance the Prime Minister's Office provided as soon as he found out. I would contrast that to the Leader of the Opposition, who thought waiting 17 years to tell about an alleged bribe was a good way to go. This Prime Minister shows leadership; the Leader of the Opposition tries to cover it up.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us look at what those documents actually say. On page 17 of the RCMP documents, Nigel Wright confirms that on February 22, Irving Gerstein agreed that the Conservative Fund would "...pay the \$32,000 plus interest" to cover Mike Duffy's expenses. On page 18 of the RCMP documents, Nigel Wright also confirms that Mr. Gerstein tried to stop the audit of Mike Duffy's expenses.

The Prime Minister says that all of this was wrong and that he would never have approved any of it. If that is true, then why has the Prime Minister not removed Mr. Gerstein from the Conservative caucus?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have just said, the RCMP make it quite clear that the product of this investigation is Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright. Senator Duffy accepted expenses that he did not incur. Nigel Wright repaid those expenses. That of course was inappropriate, and that is what the RCMP at this point are investigating.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Prime Minister admitted that he did say to Nigel Wright, "we are good to go". However, now the Prime Minister has the nerve to claim that he simply meant that Mike Duffy could go ahead and pay back his own expenses.

Why would the Prime Minister's chief of staff need the Prime Minister's go-ahead for Mike Duffy to pay back his own expenses with his own money?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, the standard that we expect on this side is that Senator Duffy would repay those expenses that he did not incur.

We see through the documents that on February 7, Senator Duffy tried to justify those expenses. On February 11, he tried to justify those expenses. On February 12, he tried to justify those expenses. On February 13, Senator Duffy tried to justify those expenses. On February 19, he tried to justify those expenses. On February 20, he tried to justify those expenses. On February 21, he tried to justify those expenses. Senator Duffy constantly tried to justify his expenses.

Finally, we were told that he was going to repay those. We subsequently learned that was not true. He still has not paid back a penny of those inappropriate expenses.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Let me get this straight, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister's latest story is that on February 22, he gave the go-ahead for Nigel Wright to order Mike Duffy to repay his own expenses, but back in June, the Prime Minister told this House that he had already given that order on February 13.

Why would Nigel Wright have to get approval on February 22 for something the Prime Minister claims he had already ordered nine days earlier?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is because on February 19, 20, and 21 Senator Duffy was still trying to justify these inappropriate expenses. Senator Duffy had no intention of repaying those inappropriate expenses, but I am sure the Leader of the Opposition has read the documents that quite clearly state that the Prime Minister wanted these inappropriate expenses repaid, that the taxpayer should not be saddled with a debt that the senator had incurred for these expenses that he accepted and did not incur.

Again, I contrast that with the Leader of the Opposition who, for 17 years, hid the fact that he got a bribe that he says he did not accept.

• (1425)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is yet another contradiction from the Prime Minister's Office on the Wright-Duffy affair.

The PMO spokesperson claimed on the weekend, "...the Prime Minister was not always presented with the facts that we now know".

Last Friday, the Prime Minister was asked whether anyone, other than Wright and Duffy, hid anything from him, and he said categorically, "No".

No matter how hard they try, The Conservatives just cannot keep their stories straight. How long will the Prime Minister persist with this internal cover-up?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the documents quite clearly indicate that the Prime Minister had no knowledge of this. As he has said on a number of occasions, had he known, he would have put an immediate stop to it.

At the same time, what these documents show is that the Prime Minister acted immediately within his office to ensure that they provided assistance to the RCMP and that all relevant information would be passed over to the RCMP.

That is in great contrast to the Liberals, with respect. Of course the hon. member is sitting next to somebody who may or may not have told about the income trust fiasco in advance. We have no lessons to learn on integrity from the Liberal Party.

Oral Questions

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, RCMP court records make it perfectly clear that the PMO was negotiating in February with Mike Duffy's lawyer to arrive at a five-point scheme to have the Conservative Party "keep him whole on the repayment" and pay his legal fees.

Nigel Wright is explicit in indicating that he wanted to speak with the Prime Minister about these points, and less than an hour later he writes, "We are good to go from the PM".

In light of the damning evidence, how can the Prime Minister possibly continue to claim he was not in the loop?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just responded to the Leader of the Opposition, we know that on February 7, 11, 12, 13, 19, 20, and as late as February 21, Senator Duffy was resisting repaying these expenses. In fact, he was trying to justify those expenses.

We also know that on February 13, when he approached the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister told him he had to repay the inappropriate expenses. That is clear throughout this document.

It is also very clear that the Prime Minister ordered his office to assist immediately, and that he did not know. Had he known, he would have put an immediate stop to it.

[Translation]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP has filed hundreds of emails documenting every step in the cover-up in the Prime Minister's Office. That is clear.

To date, the government has not produced any documentation to support its version of the facts, which keeps changing. Canadians do not believe the Conservatives, who have lost all credibility.

When will the government share every document in its possession so that Canadians can finally learn the truth?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary and as the RCMP stated, I believe, on page 21 of the report, the Prime Minister immediately ordered his office staff to participate and assist the RCMP and provide whatever documentation they had.

A great number of documents and emails were turned over to the RCMP. We know that staff in the Prime Minister's Office have provided waivers so that the RCMP could do a full investigation on every single point.

The Prime Minister has been very clear. We would participate and we would assist and help the RCMP, but what is also clear is that the Prime Minister did not know. Had he known, he would have put an immediate stop to it.

[Translation]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the director of communications in the Prime Minister's Office said that Nigel Wright was involved in criminal activity and that he had misled the Prime Minister.

Does the Prime Minister believe that his chief of staff lied to him more than once?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, the RCMP documents themselves are alleging that there was a breach of trust that was undertaken by Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright. That is right in the documents. That is why the Prime Minister ordered his office to participate and assist the RCMP and provide any information that was required. That is the type of leadership that Canadians would expect of their prime minister.

Also, it quite clearly states, and Nigel Wright states, in fact, that he not bring the Prime Minister into his confidence with respect to this decision. Ultimately, had the Prime Minister known, he would have in no way endorsed such a scheme. He would have put an end to it.

• (1430)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, speaking of the Prime Minister, if we are to believe him, then there was unethical and potentially illegal activity in his office. Not only was he kept in the dark, but his top aides actually lied to the Prime Minister.

How many times exactly does the Prime Minister believe that Nigel Wright lied to him?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said, of course he expected more from his staff. That is why Nigel Wright is no longer a member of the Prime Minister's staff.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister admitted to speaking with Mike Duffy in February and the Prime Minister claims that he instructed Nigel Wright to get Mike Duffy to repay, or else.

I have a simple question. What threats were the "or else"?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said on a number of occasions, on February 13, the Prime Minister was very clear to Senator Duffy to repay those expenses because that is what Canadians expect. If he did not repay those expenses, he could not expect to continue to have the support of this caucus.

I guess the "or else" would be that he would have to go sit in the NDP or the Liberal caucuses, because quite clearly they will accept any standard over there. On this side, we accept the standard that puts the Canadian taxpayer first, unlike those who always fight for the status quo.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question asked what threat was made, and all we get is more farce and another non-answer.

On Thursday, the Prime Minister told the media that only Nigel Wright and Mike Duffy did something wrong. Does the Prime Minister really believe that none of the other staff in his office who covered up the truth and facilitated this payment were also at fault?

Oral Questions

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear in the RCMP documents that the focus of the investigation is the actions of Nigel Wright and Senator Duffy.

Nigel Wright repaid Senator Duffy's inappropriate expenses. That was not appropriate. He is prepared to accept the consequences of that decision. At the same time, it was very inappropriate for Senator Duffy to have accepted expenses that he did not incur.

On this side of the House, we are always very clear to put the Canadian taxpayer first. We will let those on the other side stand up for these three disgraced senators and, of course, disgraced former Liberal senator Mac Harb.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for over six months the Prime Minister maintained that only Mike Duffy and Nigel Wright were involved. He said there was no legal arrangement between them, and the Prime Minister insisted that no one else in his office was aware of this payoff and cover-up.

How could the Prime Minister repeatedly make these claims when so many of his staffers and party officials were aware that they were false?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has addressed that. He addressed that, in fact, over the summer.

Nigel Wright, in earlier documents, outlines who he brought into his confidence on this matter. The RCMP, I think on page 72, outlines the fact that the Prime Minister did not have knowledge of what was happening in his office. Had he known, of course, he would have put an immediate stop to it.

At the same time, it shows the leadership of this Prime Minister to immediately go back to his office and insist that his office work with and assist the RCMP in getting to the bottom of this. Contrast that to the Leader of the Opposition, who for 17 years did not think the fact that he was offered a bribe was important.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is ridiculous.

At first, the Prime Minister said that Nigel Wright did the honourable thing in order to save taxpayers money, then he said that he resigned and was dismissed—I am still trying to figure that out—and finally that he acted alone with 12 of his colleagues. All the while, the Prime Minister knew nothing, saw nothing and heard nothing.

The RCMP then informed us that the Prime Minister did know about it and gave the go-ahead for the scheme.

How can he continue to claim that was deceived? Why did he not try to discover the truth?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was clear to Senator Duffy: “Repay those expenses”.

I do agree. It is ridiculous that the Leader of the Opposition would wait 17 years to tell the police about a bribe he was offered. When all of this started coming out in Quebec, he did not actually reach out to the Quebec police. He waited for them to come to him. It is unbelievable.

That is not the standard of leadership Canadians expect. They expect the standard of leadership this Prime Minister showed. As soon as he found out, he went to his office and insisted that they work with the RCMP. Again, contrast that to the Leader of the Opposition, who for 17 years was not sure if he got a bribe or not.

I guess my question is, do you regret—

• (1435)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Gatineau.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our leader refused bribery. That leader covers up everything. It is unbelievable.

[*Translation*]

At some point in this affair, the Prime Minister learned that his own party planned to repay Mike Duffy. It was up to Wright and Gerstein to take care of it. However, the bill ballooned from \$32,000 to \$90,000 and Gerstein decided that he would not pay. They would like us to believe that no one thought that the Prime Minister would have liked an update. If Wright lied and Gerstein lied, why treat them differently?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talks about covering things up. Talk about covering things up; it was the Leader of the Opposition who said that he never reached out to police, because he had no proof a bribe was actually being offered to him. He had no proof that that big brown envelope that was stuffed had money in it. He never looked in it to see what was there. Once the investigation started, he said, “I was contacted”. It was not that he contacted them; “I was contacted.”

My question is, does the Leader of the Opposition regret not telling the truth 17 years ago?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives can continue to play the same broken record, but the Prime Minister and his parliamentary secretary lost what little credibility they had left in this scandal a long time ago.

After the \$32,000 payment did not go ahead, Senator Gerstein made a deal with Wright to pay him \$60,000 of the \$90,000 that he gave to Duffy. Was this payment for services rendered? When was the Prime Minister informed of this deal?

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the documents make it quite clear that it is Senator Duffy and Nigel Wright who are the products of the investigation. It also shows quite clearly that the Prime Minister had no knowledge of what was going on, and had he known, he would have put a stop to it.

Then again I ask the Leader of the Opposition, is it normal to get a big brown envelope, or was the fact that you were a Liberal then? Is that what made it normal?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would point out to the parliamentary secretary and other members of this House that all comments are to be directed to the Chair, to the Speaker, not to other members.

The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, even though the scandal did not make headlines until May 15, the Prime Minister's lawyers had been working on a legal agreement among Duffy, Wright and Gerstein for weeks—months, actually.

Why did the Prime Minister not speak publicly about that agreement until May 15?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister found out about this on May 15. The moment he found out about this, he went back to his office and insisted that they assist the RCMP in uncovering what had happened here. I contrast that, of course, to the Leader of the Opposition, who, for 17 years, sat quietly, did not mention a thing.

He gets a big brown envelope. I am not sure what he thought was in the big brown envelope, maybe Scotch mints or something like that. Then again, I guess as a Liberal, big brown envelopes are something he would expect.

[Translation]

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Prime Minister stated that, other than Nigel Wright, nobody in his office kept anything about the agreement with Mike Duffy from him. However, thanks to the RCMP, we know that three of his long-time staffers knew about everything from the very beginning.

Is the Prime Minister also aware of the criminal acts of his entourage, or did he simply decide not to ask about their activities?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of former NDP Liberals, I guess that is another NDP member who was embarrassed by the fact that her former leader had waited 17 years, judging by the fact that the disgrace and the trouble that 17-year delay caused the people of Quebec she decided to go to the Liberal Party.

What is very clear in this confrontation is that the Prime Minister had no knowledge of what was going on. Had he known, he would have put an immediate stop to it. That is the standard of leadership I think Canadians expect, and that is what they get from this Prime Minister day in and day out.

• (1440)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's story keeps changing. We know that three of the senior employees were part of the Conservative fraud squad and were involved in hatching the plan between his office and Mike Duffy.

On Friday, the Prime Minister said nobody from his office, other than Nigel Wright, hid anything from him. This makes no sense. Either his staff did tell him about these criminal acts, or he is saying his whole entourage lied to him. Which is it?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when she talks about a fraud squad, she must be talking about the member for York West. She must be talking about the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, or perhaps the member for Malpeque, or perhaps the member for Vancouver Centre, four members who, of course, have either broken Canada Elections' laws or have actually taken advantage of their expense accounts. She might be talking about the member for Kings—Hants, who sent an email in the days leading up to the income trust scandal that said, "Don't worry, you'll be very happy soon. We'll be very happy soon".

What did the Liberal, Mr. Goodale, say? He seemed very uneasy, very uneasy.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Again, the parliamentary secretary knows not to address members of the House by their names rather than by their ridings.

The hon. member for Labrador.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe I am talking about the former Conservative member, Peter Penashue, because Labradorians did not believe him, and today, Canadians do not believe the Prime Minister.

Most of the Conservative fraud squad are still being paid by taxpayers. Some have even been promoted.

Does the government believe it is acceptable for someone to transport money used to corrupt a parliamentarian, fully knowing he is taking part in an illegal act? If not, why does David van Hemmen still work for the government?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, she is sitting in a caucus where, I do not know, three-quarters of them have been convicted of some type of fraud, whether it is the Elections Canada Act or robocalls. The real fraud squad is sitting in the Liberal Party. They are still getting paid as members of Parliament.

Perhaps she could unleash those Liberal fraud squad members in helping us find that \$40 million that we are still looking for.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have one very simple question for the Prime Minister. It could, however, be a little more complicated for his parliamentary secretary who, for all his faults, cannot be accused of knowing anything at all about the Senate expense scandal.

Before May 15, 2013, did the Prime Minister talk to Senators Gerstein, Stewart Olsen or LeBreton about Senate expenses?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I feared, the question was a little too difficult for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. After all, he is one of the only Conservatives not named in the RCMP documents.

Let us keep things simple for the parliamentary secretary. After May 15, did the Prime Minister talk to Irving Gerstein about repayment of Mike Duffy's expenses?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is a very complicated question. I will answer in French this time: no.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the RCMP, we learned that as early as February 2, Ray Novak was being copied on emails about the cover-up in the Prime Minister's Office regarding the Duffy scandal. Mr. Novak has since been promoted to chief of staff for the Prime Minister.

What did Ray Novak tell the Prime Minister about what was going down? Otherwise, how would the Prime Minister be able to have any trust that he is telling him the truth now?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is very clear, in the exact same documents the member references, is that on February 13, the Prime Minister told Senator Duffy to repay his inappropriate expenses. We know that Senator Duffy resisted that constantly. We also know that Senator Duffy has not paid a cent back of those inappropriate expenses at this point.

We also see that the Prime Minister, when he found out on May 15, went to his office and insisted that his office work with and assist the RCMP. That is the type of leadership one would expect from a prime minister, in contrast to the Leader of the Opposition, who, for 17 years, did not think it was important to talk about a bribe that he got but that he says he did not accept.

• (1445)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Oh, our poor hapless Prime Minister, being defended with such hokum.

Mr. Speaker, Canadians remember that on May 15, the Prime Minister said he had complete support for this illegal scheme. They also know that the Prime Minister told the House that there was "no legal agreement between [Mike Duffy and Nigel Wright]". Surely

the Prime Minister would have known that his own lawyer, Benjamin Perrin, was up to his neck in this. Are we to believe that the Prime Minister did not know what his own lawyer was doing?

Through all of May, all of June, all of September, and all of October the Prime Minister continued to mislead the House. Why has he not come clean on the involvement of his staff?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the poor NDP could not find an appropriate NDP person to lead the party, so they went and found a corrupt Liberal. That is the real story here: an NDP leader who waited 17 years to talk about corruption in the province of Quebec.

I will contrast that to this Prime Minister, who immediately, upon finding out, went to his office and insisted that they assist with the investigation. That is a very clear contrast between the two: one who covers things up, and the other one who looks for it and makes sure that his office assists.

* * *

SEALING INDUSTRY

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic and northern seal harvest is humane, sustainable, and a well-regulated activity that provides an important source of food and income for coastal and Inuit communities. Of course, the NDP and the Liberals do not share this view. They represent the views of radical left-wing special interest groups who want to see an end to the seal hunt.

Today, the WTO upheld the European ban against Canadian seal products. Will the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans update the House on the government's response?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hard-working member for Miramichi for her question.

Our government is firmly committed to defending sealing businesses and the coastal and northern communities that depend on the harvest of seals. Therefore, today I am announcing that Canada will appeal the WTO ruling that allows the European ban to continue. The ruling upholds a practice that is unfair and discriminatory toward Canada.

We call on the Liberals and the NDP to support the government's decision to appeal this unfair and incorrect ruling.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this weekend we welcomed significant progress in negotiations around Iran's nuclear program. British Foreign Secretary William Hague said the deal was a vindication of diplomacy, good for the region, good for our allies, good for the world. New Democrats agree.

We have a historic opportunity in front of us to build on this and move this region toward greater peace, stability, and security. Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs agree to work with our allies to make diplomacy work?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think all Canadians want to see a diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear program.

We are deeply concerned about nuclear proliferation. For 40 years, we have seen significant efforts to meet with success to reduce the number of countries with nuclear weapons. This would, of course, see many more.

We will support any reasonable measure that actually sees Iran take concrete steps back from its nuclear program. Regrettably, we do not have a lot of confidence or a lot of trust in the regime in Tehran.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, these kinds of answers are not surprising. After all, this is the same minister who said that the Iranian election was effectively meaningless.

No matter how much the Conservatives denigrate diplomacy, it is diplomacy that has taken us in the right direction.

Will the minister commit to working with our allies to ensure that this tentative agreement turns into a permanent solution to the crisis?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talked about the elections in Iran and about Canada's policy. We had concerns about those elections because the first decision that was made with respect to eligibility was that women were not allowed to contest the presidency. No election where women are not allowed to present themselves as candidates will be supported by this party and this government.

* * *

• (1450)

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two years after having to declare a state of emergency in Attawapiskat, the community is once again struggling with a major crisis. A serious fire recently forced the evacuation of more than 70 people from Attawapiskat, since it could take more than a month and a half to replace the trailers they were using as homes. That is unacceptable.

Will the minister commit to immediately providing adequate funding for housing so that no one has to live in these conditions?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are of course concerned about the health and safety of the residents of the Attawapiskat First Nation who experienced this tragedy last week. We are currently working with the band council, and the regional office is on site to ensure that these people are safe and that they will be able to return home as soon as possible.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, four homes for more than 80 people left homeless is no solution. For five years people in Attawapiskat have been living in construction

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trailers. This is about more than just fixing the fire damage. These were supposed to be a temporary emergency response.

Like too many first nation communities, Attawapiskat needs a long-term housing plan. Will the government agree to work with the community of Attawapiskat so that no one has to move back into a temporary trailer?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is ready to continue working with the first nation in order to ensure that the people who were affected by this fire on the reserve can return home safely as soon as possible. We are committed to continue working with the first nation and the different stakeholders to help these people.

* * *

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Inter-governmental Affairs promised to release his business plan for replacing the Champlain Bridge by the end of the year, which is just around the corner.

I want to give the minister and the government an opportunity to assure the House that they will keep the minister's promise and release the business plan in 2013, by the end of December.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, user safety is a priority, which is why we have started major renovations to ensure the current bridge is safe until a new bridge opens. We have invested \$380 million in that work. We will take all the necessary measures to deliver a new bridge as quickly as possible.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has won yet another Fossil of the Year award. A Washington think tank rates Canada dead last in terms of developed nations. There is more. The Government of Canada has beat out Kazakhstan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia to finish 55 out of 58 in the national ranking. The trophy case is full.

Can the minister tell us how any of these unwelcome recognitions will help Canada secure Keystone XL, and can she do it without blaming someone else?

Oral Questions

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has taken a leadership role in international climate change efforts. Canadians should be proud to know that leadership is being recognized on the world stage. In fact, while I was in Warsaw, I heard from representatives from Mexico, China, and Colombia, who all praise Canada for its environmental record. They did this because they know we have taken significant actions to protect the Canadian environment. We have done this without creating a massive \$20-billion carbon tax that would increase the cost of everything.

* * *

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to explain something to the government. This morning, it took up to an hour and 45 minutes to get across the Champlain Bridge. That is an hour and 45 minutes of lost productivity for everyone.

We are in this situation because successive governments have failed to plan for and invest in our infrastructure. We have an old bridge that is falling apart and the construction of the new bridge is not far enough along because the people who are responsible for these things did not do their job.

Why should we trust that they are doing their job now?

● (1455)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to investments in the Champlain Bridge, I would like to remind my colleague that, in 2009, 2010 and 2011, his party voted against allocating the funding necessary to repair this bridge.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary will need a super beam because his argument does not hold up. This shows a lack of leadership.

The Conservatives do not have a plan B in case the Champlain Bridge needs to be completely shut down before 2021, whether it be for a short or extended period of time. The Government of Quebec cannot confirm whether the bridge will hold up until it is replaced eight years from now.

Can the Conservatives explain how it is that, on their watch, lanes have to be closed on the bridge just to ensure that it does not collapse?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reassure my colleague.

We are going to do what it takes to make this bridge safe as quickly as possible.

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, violence against women and girls ruins lives, destroys families, and takes a big toll on the economy. My mother saw this and founded one of the first women's shelters in Alberta.

Today, we mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the beginning of 16 days of activism against gender violence. Will the Minister of Status of Women please update the House on what our government is doing to address this critical issue?

Hon. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the member for Calgary Centre for her outstanding work on the committee for the status of women.

Today marks the beginning of the 16 days of activism of ending violence against women and girls, a priority for our government. Since 2007, we have nearly doubled our investment in community-based projects to end violence against women and girls. Recently, I announced a national call for proposals for community-based projects focused on cyber and sexual violence.

I call on all parliamentarians and all Canadians to show their support: wear a ribbon, support a project. By working together, we can reach our goal of eliminating violence against women and girls across the country and in communities everywhere.

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SEALING INDUSTRY

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the World Trade Organization did indeed uphold the ban on seal products, one that flies in the face of what is fair trade. Here in the Liberal Party, yes, we do support this appeal.

Terry Audla is an Inuit leader, and he said:

They're basing it on public morals and, when you do that, then you're in danger of all the other industries being banned.... I mean, who's to say what's more cruel?...

Who draws the line?

As we speak, they are killing seals off the coast of Sweden, an EU country.

My question for the Minister of International Trade is quite simply this. When will he lift the veil of the inhumane animal harvesting practices in Europe? Get tough. Go toe to toe with them.

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that this government has committed to appeal the decision of the World Trade Organization. He should also know that both Canada and the European Union have made it very clear that this issue is quite separate from the negotiations of the free trade agreement between Canada and the European Union.

Oral Questions

This EU ban on virtually all Canadian seal products is clearly inconsistent with the EU's international trade obligations. This Conservative government is firmly committed to defending the legitimate, economic activities of Canadians. That includes Canada's sealing industry and the coastal and northern communities that depend on the seal harvest.

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[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are not satisfied with the success of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the most popular museum in Canada, and have decided to rename it the Canadian Museum of History.

We have now learned that the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers will fund an exhibit celebrating Canada's 150th anniversary. The association is already trying to indoctrinate schoolchildren. Now, with the Conservatives' help, museums will be turned into real propaganda machines.

Is the mission of our museums now to promote the oil lobby?

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last thing the Canadian museum of history is going to become is a propaganda machine. It is our history. It is who we are. It is our culture. It is about everything that we are as Canadians.

Instead of opposing Bill C-7 and trying to find every reason to say why this is not a great country, since 1867, they should stand up and support the museum of history and stand up and support Canadian history.

* * *

● (1500)

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking action to ensure that our streets and our communities are safe.

That is why we have passed many bills to keep criminals in their place, behind bars. Recently, there have been cases where people have been deemed not criminally responsible and where public safety was not the main factor in the decision-making process.

Can the Minister of Public Safety tell the House how we protect Canadians?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank my colleague from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry for everything he has done to make our streets safer.

Unlike the Liberal leader, our government is not afraid to introduce minimum sentences to protect the most vulnerable and to deal with pedophiles.

In the case of people who are deemed not criminally responsible, if they are a threat to society, we will ensure that they are deemed high-risk and are behind bars in order to protect honest people, families and victims.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Worldwide, one woman in three will be a victim of violence.

The Conservatives could take tangible steps to show that they take this calamity seriously. They could announce a public inquiry into the cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women, and they could fund abortions for war rape victims.

Will the minister commit to doing this?

[English]

Hon. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier today, this is the beginning of the 16 days of activism to end violence against women and girls. I want to commend all the parliamentarians this morning who participated in the excellent event with the YWCA, supporting shelters and ensuring we are moving forward on that file.

Just as I mentioned, we put forward a call for proposals on cyber and sexual violence. We are focused on community-based projects. In fact, we have had over 600 projects since 2007 to look at eliminating violence against women and girls. I encourage the New Democrats to support these programs. They never have in the past and I encourage them to do so now.

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[Translation]

SEALING INDUSTRY

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning the World Trade Organization recognized that the European ban on seal products violates international trade rules, but found that it was justifiable on ethical grounds.

This is clearly a political decision, as the seal hunt, far from being cruel and unnecessary, is conducted responsibly and sustainably by the people of our communities.

In addition to the legal challenge it announced earlier, when will the federal government launch an effective diplomatic offensive to show the European Union the truth about the seal hunt?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we certainly are very concerned about this decision. That is why we are appealing the decision. The WTO has found that the European Union's ban is unfair and discriminatory and violates international trade obligations. That is why we will be appealing.

Routine Proceedings

Canadians can rest assured that Canada has the highest standard of any seal hunt in the world. We remain steadfast in our commitment to fight for our sealing businesses, and to help preserve our rural coastal communities. Many of our rural coastal communities have relied on this seal hunt as a way of life for decades.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in the case of Ms. Djemai, who was threatened with removal in spite of her poor health, Justice Roy, a Federal Court judge, in his decision to stay her removal, stated and I quote:

...it is clear that the assurance of support...is based only on emails exchanged...but those emails do not support the statements made by the CIC physician.

Since the issue here is the survival of a human being, will the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration dismiss Dr. Patrick Thériault, the negligent CIC physician, and review the way his department operates?

• (1505)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to point out that Canada is a welcoming land and that our wealth is built on the 250,000 newcomers who become part of our Canadian society every year.

Moreover, those who enter the country illegally are entitled to medical care during their stay. When the time comes for them to return, we ensure that medical care is available in their home countries. In addition, if necessary, when they have to be accompanied to return to their country, they have medical care.

Canada is a welcoming country and we will continue looking after our immigrants, while respecting our taxpayers.

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[English]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, Cons. Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I recently had an opportunity to attend a meeting of the tri-counties manufacturing association. This association represents a number of very important manufacturing employers in eastern Ontario, including the great riding of Peterborough.

Recently the Minister of State for economic development for southern Ontario has had the opportunity to meet with these very important employers. I know he is working hard on advanced manufacturing and a new initiative. Could he update the House on how he is making out and provide some direction to these employers?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, budget 2013 did in fact have significant support for an advanced manufacturing fund. While the NDP is not in support of such a fund, I want to thank the member for his support and for his support in organizing consultations. I can tell the member that I have consulted from Ottawa to Windsor, from Sarnia to St. Catharines, from

Pickering to Peterborough, and all of that information is being put to hard work. I can assure the member that in the next few days I will be happy to announce the new advanced manufacturing fund.

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PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of a parliamentary delegation from Ukraine, led by His Excellency Volodymyr Rybak, Chairman of the Parliament of Ukraine.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I table documents, I think I should announce for the benefit of those in the House that the Saskatchewan Roughriders won the Grey Cup yesterday, the mighty green and white, the pride of the Prairies, Canada's favourite team, and I could go on.

Pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 39 petitions.

The Deputy Speaker: We appreciate the assistance of the parliamentary secretary in giving us that vital information that I am sure most of us had missed.

Introduction of government bills, the hon. Minister of Justice.

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NOT CRIMINALLY RESPONSIBLE REFORM ACT

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the National Defence Act (mental disorder).

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the special order made previously by our outstanding House leader, I want to inform the House that this Bill C-14 is in the same form as Bill C-54, which was in the previous session at the time of prorogation.

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

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that the bill is in the same form as Bill C-54 was at the time of prorogation of the 1st session of the 41st Parliament.

Accordingly, pursuant to the order made Monday, October 21, 2013, the bill is deemed adopted at all stages and passed by the House.

(Bill read the second time, considered in committee, reported, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

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● (1510)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development entitled “Bill C-9, An Act respecting the election and term of office of chiefs and councillors of certain First Nations and the composition of council of those First Nations”.

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

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

In accordance with its order of reference on Thursday, November 7, 2013, the committee has considered votes 1b and 5b under Veterans Affairs in the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2014, and reports the same.

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PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present two petitions to the House today signed by citizens from in and around my riding of Beaches—East York in Toronto.

The first petition calls upon the Government of Canada to restore protection of the Don River, including its east and west branches; guarantee the continued right to navigation, including canoes and kayaks, on all of Canada's lakes and rivers; restore the environmental assessment process for proposed development, projects on and near previously protected bodies of water; and to commit to meaningful public consultation prior to approval of any project.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls upon the Government of Canada to host a conference of provincial and territorial agriculture ministers to come up with a Canada-wide strategy on local food, and to require the Department of Public Works and Government Services Canada to develop a policy for purchasing locally grown food for all federal institutions.

MINING INDUSTRY

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from constituents in Hillsburgh and Erin, in Ontario, who call for the creation of a legislative ombudsman mechanism for responsible mining.

Routine Proceedings

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I stand on behalf of many Canadians who are petitioning the government to start an inquiry, overdue for 14 months, into the misleading robocalls and other voter fraud tactics during the 2011 federal election and to take the necessary measures to put a stop to the erosion of Canadian democracy. Fair elections are the foundation of democracy and compromising the integrity of Canadian elections is a crime. Canadians want the government to stand up and protect their votes and electoral process.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am getting petitions from all across the country on prostitution and sex trafficking. The petitioners acknowledge that internationally the median age of entry into prostitution is 12 to 14 years of age and that 92% of prostitutes would leave prostitution if they could. The demand for commercial sex with women and children is a root cause for prostitution and trafficking for sexual purposes, and child prostitution and violence against women have increased in countries.

Therefore, the petitioners request that Parliament amend the Criminal Code to decriminalize the selling of sexual services, criminalize the purchasing of sexual services, and provide support to those who want to leave prostitution. In this week, with the issue of violence against women, I think it is very timely to bring these petitions into our House of Commons.

● (1515)

[Translation]

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table two petitions from a group of volunteers in my riding. This group works with Development and Peace, an organization that carries out important projects and initiatives throughout the world.

The two petitions prepared by people working with Development and Peace, many of whom are from the Memramcook area, object to the government's merger of the Canadian International Development Agency with Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada. These volunteers hope that international development officers will remember that reducing poverty in the world is of primary importance, as set out in the act.

Government Orders

MINING INDUSTRY

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I received a few days ago from the group of volunteers in my riding pertains to implementing the legal mechanism of an ombudsman to examine Canadian companies' activities abroad, particularly in the mining sector and other resource sectors. These citizens are calling on the government to bring in an ombudsman as quickly as possible in order to increase corporate social responsibility.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to present two petitions. The first is primarily signed by residents of one smaller part of my riding, the very active community of Salt Spring Island. They have asked me to present to the House today a petition calling for the reduction of greenhouse gases, as had been included in a piece of legislation sponsored by my colleague the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, and which was tragically killed by the Senate without a single day of hearings. That is the real Senate scandal.

Meanwhile, the petitioners ask that the House consider immediately putting in place a 25% reduction of greenhouse gases below 1990 levels by the year 2020. That would make us almost catch up with the European Union.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the second petition comes primarily from residents of Vancouver and calls for a permanent legislated ban on supertankers loaded with either crude or their likely cargo, bitumen mixed with diluent, along the coast of British Columbia. We want to keep the coast clean.

* * *

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 Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

DRUG-FREE PRISONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise to speak in support of this bill. As I said before question period, I really want to stress that the title of the bill really does stick in my throat, the drug-free prisons act. There is very little in the legislation that would actually make our prisons drug free.

We really have to stretch it to see how the government came up with such a heading for legislation. The only thing I can think of is that it appeals to the Conservative base and it is one of those grandiose announcements that the government can make without really taking any concrete steps to make anything happen.

The bill would codify into legislation a current practice of the Parole Board. It is because of this that we support it. All the bill would do is add a provision to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to make it clear that the Parole Board may use positive results from urine tests or refusals to take urine tests for drugs when making its decisions of parole eligibility.

It is always good to codify things and put them into legislation. As the board was already doing this, and we know board members take many things into consideration, it is really good to have this here. However, let us not kid ourselves. The bill would do very little, if anything, to make our prisons drug free.

I would like to talk about this. Often members from the other side will use all kinds of hyperbole to deflect. Let me stress that the NDP is very firm in its support for any measures that will make our prisons safe. That is what it is all about for us. On the other hand, the Conservative government, which purports to do the work, has ignored recommendations from corrections staff and the Correctional Investigator that would decrease violence, gang activity and drug use in our prisons.

Once again, we go back to the point of the title of the bill. Is it just pandering to the base or is it real action? I will point out some of the issues here.

One of the key things to remember is that we are talking about addiction. We know, and research shows us, that this is a health issue. As a health issue, it needs treatment and resources.

At the very time the government is cutting rehabilitation programs and the funding to tackle the addictions issue, it puts forward a bill called the drug-free prisons act. It often reminds me of when I was teaching. I do not think there was a teacher or parent who did not want to have drug-free schools. We all want that today, but just our wishing it and saying that phrase does not make it happen.

When we look at drug addictions, whether they are in schools or prisons, we have to pay attention to a sound body of research, specialists and front line service providers who know that this is a serious issue and that it needs a multi-pronged approach. Just saying “thou shalt not do drugs” does not make people stop doing drugs. It takes rehabilitation programs, community support programs, treatment centres, counselling and I could go on, but I will not.

Government Orders

What we want to look at is how over the last year, the Correctional Service of Canada has admitted that \$122 million of Conservative spending on interdiction tools and technology to stop drugs from entering prisons since 2008 has not led to any reduction in drug use in prisons.

•(1520)

We are talking about real data and real evidence. We know the government has an allergy to listening to front line service providers, specialists and scientists and also to paying any attention to researchers. However, what we have is very clear. Spending \$122 million led to net zero results.

We know, from a public safety committee study that was done in 2012, that drug-free prisons are unlikely to be achieved in the world. Yet, the government insists on continuing to use that slogan to put forward suggestions that will not lead to drug-free prisons. At this stage, the goal is unrealistic. Although laudable, and we should have lofty goals, the role of the legislators is not to have those lofty goals in legislation, but to put forward concrete resolutions and suggestions that will help.

I want to acknowledge at this stage the work done by my colleague from Surrey North. He sat on the committee that examined this whole issue. It came up with 14 recommendations, and I do not see any of them reflected in the legislation that has been put forward. This once again lends credence to the fact that even when the Conservatives have committees at which they call witnesses, the majority of whom are usually the government's, and experts who tell them how they can work toward having fewer drugs in prisons, the Conservatives would rather not take any of those steps. Instead they use the slogans in the House to pander and make it look as if they are doing something when they are not doing too much.

Also, it is absolutely asinine, a word I do not use lightly, to keep spending money on something that does not work. We have evidence that it does not work just to keep focusing on detection or prevention of entry of drugs into the prisons. Of course we should work on that, but if that is the only game in town, the only tool they are giving front line service providers, then they are failing them very much. Instead, the government has a pretty miserable track record when it comes to public safety.

By the way, if putting people in prisons were going to solve problems, we should pay attention to what happened in the United States where it has packed prisons. It cannot keep up with building prisons. However, has that decreased crime or drug abuse? No.

The public safety adopted by the government has led to more prisoners with addictions and mental illness in our prison system, without the needed supports to tackle those issues, which we know we have to tackle in the framework of health.

I have also noticed that CSC has had its budget cut by 10%. CSC has had \$295 million cut from its budget. Here is another one that is going to absolutely shock members because when we hear the rhetoric from my colleagues across the way, one would think that they were the bee's knees when it comes to fighting crime and taking a handle on what is going on in our detention centres. However, under the government's watch, the budget for fighting substance

abuse, for which we know there need to be monies allocated, went down by \$2 million.

•(1525)

When we think about it, out of the total budget, what prisons spend on substance abuse are \$11 million. At the same time that the government is going on about having drug-free prisons, its only solution to is to codify something that the Parole Board already does, while it has reduced the budget from \$11 million to \$9 million. That is a huge percentage when we think about it. We are not talking about a small reduction. This is the same government that in 2007 removed harm reduction because it did not matter. For the Conservatives, it is not about actually tackling public safety or safety in our prisons, it is all about the sound bites, what sounds good, what will appeal to their base and what makes them look as if they are doing something when they are actually not doing anything on this file, or next to nothing.

As the budget is being cut for substance abuse programs, we also know that there is a very high percentage of prisoners waiting for services. This is going to shock members because it shocked me. Many of them wait for so long that they cannot even be released or go on parole because they have not had the necessary treatment and support they need to fight their addictions. When they finish their time, they go back into society without having had any effective treatment for substance abuse or how to deal with mental health issues that we hear so much about. How is that all about public safety?

Then they become repeat offenders and the government uses the words "repeat offenders" almost like dirty words. However, in very many ways the government is creating repeat offenders because we have a penal system that is based on a rehabilitation system. We believe that with counselling and support rehabilitation is possible, not for everyone but the vast majority. Where rehabilitation is possible, we should be investing in it because in the long term it will save Canadians money. Instead, the government does not provide support for prisoners to take control of their substance abuse, to receive the health care support they need, the prevention, counselling, et cetera, while they are in prison. They are released and, lo and behold, the Conservatives get to stand at other press conferences to talk about all the repeat offenders, all the drug addicts, all the people who have mental health issues, while they themselves are responsible for the release of many prisoners who have not received the rehabilitation they need.

This should be a major concern to us because, as we know, last year Canada recorded the largest prison population ever in federal prisons. This shocked me as well. There were 15,097 prisoners. We have heard a lot about double-bunking and the lack of space in some of our prisons. This is at the same time the government has introduced mandatory minimum sentences and, once again, has taken the flexibility away from judges, who can make rulings based on the full context and what has gone on. Due to minimum sentencing, experts are imagining and projecting that our prison population will increase by huge numbers.

Government Orders

• (1530)

At the same time, with very little invested in harm reduction and with people double-bunking, it does not take a rocket scientist to recognize that if prisoners are double-bunked, there is going to be a little more physical contact, and that is actually going to increase the violence.

We are hearing huge safety concerns from our corrections officers. We also know that as the budget is reduced and the population is increased, there will be a greater number of people who finish their sentences without receiving any of the supports that are absolutely critical to their rehabilitation and their reintegration into our communities. Once again, the government is actually not worrying about public safety but is putting public safety in jeopardy with such irresponsible actions.

I would really urge the government to, first, call this bill what it is. It is certainly not a drug-free prisons act. Making pronouncements does not make it so.

Second, I would urge the government to take a look at the study that was done by the government, take a look at the recommendations that the study put forward, and then bring forward policy and legislation that will actually ensure our communities are safe.

• (1535)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her speech and her kind words to me.

The NDP has a very solid team working on the public safety committee. One of our great frustrations is the tendency of the government to go back to propaganda, as the member described.

One of the things missing in the discussion about drug-free prisons, and it is something the member touched on in her speech, is the fact that addictions are a health problem. When we look at Bill C-2, which deals with safe injection sites, we see that it is also a bill that is being sent to the public safety committee rather than the health committee.

Could the member say a few words about the Conservatives' tendency to rely on moral condemnation and interdiction instead of treating these problems as health problems?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, as a counsellor who was involved in dealing with young students with addiction problems and who watched what it did to the families, and as someone who was involved in dealing with children whose parents had substance abuse problems and who watched the impact it had on the young people, I do not think there is anybody out there who does not realize that drug addiction and substance abuse are health issues.

We have to have a multi-pronged approach. It has to include proper supports. It has to include counselling as well as front-line service from our health care system.

Just making huge pronouncements is not going to fix the problem. I would love to make an announcement that Canada is going to be a drug-free zone. I would love to make that pronouncement. However, that pronouncement is not going to make it happen.

In that same way, this bill should have some substance and actually take a look at treatment.

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the speech and did not hear a whole lot about the actual contents of this bill.

I hear the opposition members from the NDP talking about how we should be spending more on drug rehabilitation and getting prisoners into programs. I just want to remind them that 2% to 5% of the total budget of Correctional Service of Canada is actually spent on core correctional programs, and that includes programs that deal with drug and illegal substance abuse.

I hear the NDP members talking about how they want a needle exchange program in prisons and how they want to enable prisoners to continue doing those types of drugs, such as heroin and so on. However, if we are trying to treat them for addiction and we are enabling them by providing them with needles so that they can use illegal substances, I do not understand how that is actually dealing with the problem. On this side of the House, we are actually tackling the problem with a three-pronged approach.

I am wondering if the hon. member could comment on the fact that we are spending money on rehabilitation and drug addiction programs within the Correctional Service, and why their party actually supports the use of needles within prisons.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I am not often left speechless, but when I hear statements like that one about the NDP supporting needle exchanges for prisons, I am speechless, and I would say that the member across the way knows that is not true.

Let me go on to what the member across the way did say.

A measly 2.7% of the budget is actually spent on corrections, including substance abuse, in all of the rehabilitation budget, and that budget, as I said in my speech, if the member across the way was listening, has actually gone down, while the number of prisoners has gone up. We have gone down from \$11 million to \$9 million, yet now we have a greater number of prisoners. The number of prisoners going in with substance abuse issues and mental health issues has increased, yet that budget is going down. This will not solve the problem.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the comment that just came from the other side from the parliamentary secretary about facilitating drug abuse goes back again to another bill before us, which is Bill C-2, on safe injection sites. The Conservatives seem to confuse harm reduction with their own slogans. Harm reduction actually works to get people off drugs, whereas their slogans do nothing to get people off drugs.

Could the hon. member comment on the fact that the Conservatives have actually removed harm reduction from the goals of our drug treatment programs?

• (1540)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I am flabbergasted that a government would actually remove harm reduction in dealing with substance abuse.

Government Orders

I stress again that if the government is serious about public safety and serious about tackling the drug problems in our prisons, there is a way to do it. It was studied at committee. There are experts who have told the committee how it can be done, but cutting the budget is not how to do it.

The committee made recommendations. None of those have been implemented here. The only thing the bill does is codify a practice that the Parole Board already uses. There is nothing in here that will actually lead to reduction of drug usage in our prisons.

Ms. Roxanne James: Mr. Speaker, just going back to the 2% to 5% that is spent within the Correctional Service of Canada, that is actually about \$150 million on average per year. That is not small change, as the NDP would like Canadians to believe. That is actually a lot of money.

I have to ask the question again. If someone continues to do illegal drugs, regardless of whether they are inside or outside of prison, we have to be able to take action against that activity. If rehabilitation and other methods used within the Correctional Service of Canada do not work to help people get off drugs, and people are still smuggling those illegal drugs into the prison system, I would like to know what the member thinks should be done about that particular issue.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, we have laws, and when people use illegal drugs, those laws kick in.

Once again the member across the way seems to fail in comprehending a very fundamental point. The point is that if we want to tackle substance abuse by prisoners, we have to use a multi-pronged approach. Cutting the budget and reducing the services available for correction, whether it is in substance abuse or otherwise, will not solve that problem.

Once again, just saying, “Stop doing drugs” will not do it. This is a health issue, and it is the same government that is releasing prisoners, after they have finished their terms, into our communities without ensuring that they have had the rehabilitation they need so we do not have repeat offenders and the taxpayer does not keep paying over and over again.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was struck by the comments the member for Newton—North Delta made about the single aspect that is entailed in the bill.

What does that make her think about the current government? Is the government, after seven years in power, so completely out of ideas that it takes up the time of Parliament and the discussion of such an important part of the federal government's responsibility—that is, dealing with the criminal justice institution—by simply codifying one practice that is already in place? Does this show that the government is completely out of ideas and is simply just putting forward slogans to appeal to some part of the Canadian population?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely nothing in the drug-free prisons act that would do that. This is a slogan to appeal to the masses.

I am surprised that we have not had more debate in this House today on a number of bills. However, I do want to express appreciation to the member for being the first member from the other side to get up to ask questions today. I am hoping she will take back

to her caucus that we need to invest in rehabilitation and correction and not reduce the money at the same time that the number of prisoners is increasing.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for giving me the chance to speak to Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act or, to use the much more grandiose title chosen by the Conservatives, the Drug-Free Prisons Act. I will come back to it in a moment.

First, I would like to say that, when it comes to justice, crime or prison, I always think about the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and about the 12 days to end violence against women campaign. I always feel somewhat sad as I talk about this year after year because it clearly means that we are not progressing as quickly as we might hope on this issue.

Those who are here in our beautiful nation's capital may be interested to know that I have agreed to sponsor a Théâtre Parminou play, entitled *Coup de foudre*, along with two women's shelters, Unies-Vers-Femmes and Centre Actu-Elle. The play will take place tomorrow in the Desjardins room of Polyvalente Hormisdas-Gamelin, which is located at 580 Maclaren Street East in Buckingham. The play is very important in raising awareness of violence against women. I extend an invitation to anyone who has the opportunity to attend to do so.

We have to move forward on this issue so that we do not have to keep calling attention to it year after year. We know that every year these 12 days culminate with the end of the campaign, the commemoration of the massacre at the Polytechnique, on December 6. This is always a very sad time.

First, I rise to address Bill C-12 and to pay tribute to my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, including the public safety critic, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, for their exceptional work. It is not always easy to stand up to this government.

I see it at the meetings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, as the justice critic. When you dare question certain provisions, you get it all thrown back in your face, as if you sided with criminals, or inmates in this case, and you had a lot of nerve to question any of the provisions.

Government Orders

However, I was listening to the questions members asked my colleague from Newton—North Delta after her speech, which I really liked, and I was saying to myself that something was missing from the Conservative side, since the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca had clearly stated that we were going to support this bill at second reading. We really have to put an end to the hostilities until we have finished with Bill C-12 and do what we have been asked to do, which is pass it at second reading and send it to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security to see if it is flawless or if it needs to be improved and amended. It is the committee that will have to do that.

Earlier, I spoke about its grandiose title. The Conservatives are often criticized for having bumper sticker policy, or legislation based on prominent news stories. That is their specialty. The Conservatives think that you do not always have to have good public policies. Instead you should have something that is “in your face”, something that attracts the attention of their voter base, preferably, sometimes something that brings prejudices into play.

When I see a title like the one given to Bill C-12, the Drug-Free Prisons Act, I want to be sure right from the start that I have really understood the words that it uses. According to this title, the bill is not trying to improve anything, but to completely eradicate drugs from prisons. I told myself that this bill must be really good and that its approach must be extraordinary, so I read it.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety roundly criticized my colleagues for not talking about the bill and asked them to go and read it.

I really can talk about this bill.

● (1550)

Clause 1 announces that this bill will make our prisons drug free. How wonderful. Then we see the title of the act: “Corrections and Conditional Release Act”.

Clause 2 states:

2. The *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* is amended by adding the following after section 123:

I take this to mean that this is how we are going to make our prisons drug free, so I start reading, anxious to see what is going to happen and how we will manage to make prisons drug free, since drugs are one of the biggest problems. The bill states:

123.1 If an offender has been granted parole under section 122 or 123 but has not yet been released and the offender fails or refuses to provide a urine sample when demanded to provide one under section 54, or provides under that section a urine sample for which the result of the urinalysis is positive, as that term is defined in the regulations, then the Service shall inform the Board of the failure or refusal or the test result.

They want to make prisons drug free, but someone who has taken drugs or is taking drugs could refuse to take a urine test that would prove whether they are on drugs or not. The 308 Members of Parliament in this House, including the Speaker, all agree with making prisons drug free, but that is easier said than done.

I will continue. Clause 3 states:

3. Section 124 of the Act is amended by adding the following after subsection (3):

(3.1) If the Board is informed of the matters under section 123.1 [which I just read, about when someone who fails or refuses to provide a urine sample] and the

offender has still not yet been released, the Board shall cancel the parole if [a big “if” right in the middle of the clause], in its opinion, based on the information received under that section, the criteria set out in paragraphs 102(a) and (b) are no longer met.

I wondered what section 102 of the act was about, so I looked it up:

102. The Board or a provincial parole board may grant parole to an offender if, in its opinion,

(a) the offender will not, by reoffending, present an undue risk to society before the expiration according to law of the sentence the offender is serving; and

(b) the release of the offender will contribute to the protection of society by facilitating the reintegration of the offender into society as a law-abiding citizen.

Up until now, our Conservative friends have not touched that. This means that they believe that someone can be rehabilitated inside, that we can free the evil criminals one day and reintegrate them into society, “if, in its opinion...the offender will not, by reoffending, present an undue risk to society before the expiration... of the sentence...”

Take, for example, someone who was given a prison sentence of two years less a day and is released earlier. He behaved well, there is no reason to believe he will reoffend before the expiration of his sentence, he presents no undue risk to society, and his release will contribute to protecting society. This is important: releasing a prisoner can be a way of helping society. It can help by facilitating the reintegration of the offender into society as a law-abiding citizen. Those are the basic concepts involved in granting release.

All the bill does is say the following:

4. Subsection 133(3) of the Act is replaced by the following:

(3) The releasing authority may impose [I repeat “may impose”] any conditions on the parole, statutory release or unescorted temporary absence of an offender that it considers reasonable and necessary in order to protect society and to facilitate the offender’s successful reintegration into society. For greater certainty, the conditions may include any condition regarding the offender’s use of drugs or alcohol, including in cases when that use has been identified as a risk factor in the offender’s criminal behaviour.

Then it is a question of when the bill will come into effect.

● (1555)

That is the Conservatives’ glorious, incredible Drug-Free Prisons Act. At least, that is what it would seem to anyone who reads it. I had planned an interview with someone who told me they were anxious to hear our thoughts on what it means to have drug-free prisons. The interview will be quite short. This bill has what I would describe as an overly inflated title. Every time the Conservatives introduce a bill, I picture the Michelin man in my head.

[English]

It is so inflated.

[Translation]

So much so that ultimately, it is no longer believable. Then the Conservatives ask us such ridiculous questions that we have to wonder if they are mocking us. Probably not. Seriously, we have often been accused of not reading things, but now we have proved the opposite, because I have read the bill from cover to cover. So then everyone has read Bill C-12. If they had not before, well they have now.

I sometimes have the impression that the members opposite read from nicely prepared notes. They accuse us of not reading material, but in truth, they are the ones who are not reading. It is incredible. They rise and try to have us believe that they will succeed in making prisons drug free.

Since I felt like reading today, I would like to read to you an amazing article written by justice reporter Sean Fine. It appeared in this morning's edition of the *Globe and Mail*.

This article is dated November 25, 2013. I will read it in its entirety because in my view, it is right on the mark. It focuses on the real problems that the Conservatives are not even addressing, not the kind of thing you can put on bumper stickers to give people the impression that the Conservatives are solving all of society's problems. If it cannot be summed up in a short phrase, such as "Death to so and so" or "We are the good guys and they are the bad guys", then the Conservatives will not make the issue into a major public policy.

Here is what Sean Fine had to say this morning in the *Globe and Mail*:

[English]

Canada's ombudsman for federal inmates says prisons have become more crowded, violent and worse at rehabilitation under the Conservative government, despite a budget increase of 40 per cent in the past five years.

In a speech heavily critical of the Conservative government's tough-on-crime policies, Howard Sapers criticized "mass incarceration," "arbitrary and abusive conditions of detention," and the victims' rights agenda that Justice Minister Peter MacKay has placed at the centre of his program.

The idea that "punishment with no apparent limits is justified stands many of the principles underlying our democracy and our criminal-justice system on their head," Mr. Sapers told 150 people at a Toronto church on Sunday.

Between March, 2003, and March, 2013, the number of federal prisoners—a federal sentence is one of two years or more—rose by 2,100, or 16.5 per cent, even as crime rates declined sharply. The overall corrections budget is now \$2.6-billion a year, but even though 2,700 new cells have been or are about to be added to the system, more than 20 per cent of inmates are double-bunked—two in a cell designed for one.

Mr. Sapers, whose mandate is to report to Parliament on individual and systemic concerns of offenders, said the government has been clear about its agenda and he hopes his comments "reflect a fair analysis of the impact of that agenda on the mandate of my office."

He warned that many of the explosive conditions that fuelled a deadly riot at the Kingston Penitentiary in 1971, riots that led the government to establish the ombudsman's office as a watchdog over prison conditions, are still in play. "As penitentiaries become more crowded, they also become more dangerous and unpredictable places." Violent incidents and the use of restraints, pepper spray and segregation have risen, he said.

The government responded by stressing the importance of victims' rights.

We all agree with that.

"We make no apologies for standing up for victims' rights, and ensuring their voices are heard in our Justice system," Paloma Aguilar, [the Minister of Justice's] press secretary, said in an e-mail.

In parentheses for me, what the hell does that answer have in relation to what Mr. Sapers was describing? Absolutely zero.

● (1600)

[Translation]

This is precisely the type of response the Conservatives always give when they have absolutely nothing to say. For example, if I ask them what colour the sky is and they do not have an answer, they will say that they are standing up for victims of crime.

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We are all in agreement. We all support victims. However, we need to take steps to ensure that there will not be any more victims of crime. We need actions and laws in place so that we can say to the public that their safety is our priority, not merely a concept. It is not enough to say that we have locked someone away in prison and that is the end of it. The offender would remain locked up for a long time and when he is released, anything might happen.

[English]

Jean-Christophe de Le Rue, spokesman for Public Safety Minister...said being tough on crime has produced positive results.

[Translation]

Another brilliant answer.

With all due respect, I must say that the answers we hear from both these people bring to mind an expression we often hear from the two-, three-, five- or seven-year-old kids from my area: it is not related. It is not related to the question or issue that was raised.

[English]

"Being tough on crime has produced positive results."

[Translation]

I do not know. As we have already seen in another context, statistics show that crime rate is going down.

Can anyone claim, like the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness like to do, that these lower numbers are a result of the tough on crime agenda? I believe that a few years from now, we will suddenly wake up and realize our prisons are a nightmare. Indeed, the situation there is already a nightmare.

Instead of pursuing photo ops across the country, the minister should go to courtrooms and speak with his former colleagues—crown prosecutors, defence attorneys and judges—and ask them about the impact of these wonderful, mammoth bills focused on crime and public safety. He should ask them about the impact these bills have in the field. Alberta and Quebec are complaining loud and clear about a lack of judges. There is a very basic problem.

[English]

However, the government responds, "We make no apologies for standing up for victims' rights". I hope so; we all do. However, that does not make our penitentiary system more secure.

[Translation]

Measures like this one do not make correctional workers safer. A fancy bill title is not enough to make prisons drug free or create a better system for everyone. Who would believe such a thing?

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[English]

Mr. Sapers listed several Conservative initiatives that he said have undermined the idea that prisoners can be rehabilitated — from tougher sentencing rules such as new mandatory minimums and an end to automatic early release for serious repeat criminals, to tough-on-inmate policies. These include charging more for making telephone calls, increasing room and board charges, eliminating incentive pay for work in prison industries and reducing access to prison libraries.

[Translation]

I do not have enough time to cover all of the details, so I encourage everyone to read what Mr. Sapers wrote. He is more informed than I about what is going on in penitentiaries and in terms of public safety.

[English]

He is Canada's ombudsman for federal inmates.

[Translation]

Under the circumstances, some might wonder why we care about prisoners.

• (1605)

[English]

First of all, they are human beings.

[Translation]

I do not think that Canada has chosen to believe that a human being is no longer a human being. I would suggest they talk to their backbench colleagues, who are always making all kinds of statements about what a human being is.

I think it is important to treat people as humans even while they are being punished for what they have done. The government should not try to convince the public that a bill just a couple of clauses long will eradicate drugs from prisons. They should not take us for fools.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in the speech by my colleague, the justice critic for the official opposition. I just want to read a section of the current Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which has the principles that guide the provincial parole boards in achieving the purpose of conditional release. This is important. They are as follows:

...parole boards take into consideration all relevant...information, including the stated reasons...of the sentencing judge, the nature and gravity of the offence, the degree of responsibility of the offender, information from the trial or sentencing process and information obtained from victims, offenders and other components of the criminal justice system, including assessments provided by correctional authorities;

First, does the member agree with this as a statement of principles, and if so, would the provisions of the bill actually be included in "assessments...by correctional authorities" that might be made available to the system, to the parole board in making this? Is the bill really necessary?

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the provisions my colleague read.

Here are my thoughts on the non-essential nature of this bill. According to the information my colleague mentioned, it is still up to the boards to take into account the additional factor of refusing to

provide a urine sample or failing the test. Even if the person does not pass the test, Bill C-12 does not say that he or she would lose parole because the other factors could be enough.

Perhaps the board will find that the person needs a program. Statistics show that most crimes are committed by people who already have serious drug use problems. That is why eliminating prison programs that can help people stop using that crap leaves them ill-equipped to deal with their addiction after they leave prison.

Still, for reasons like those my colleague listed, the board may decide to let that person go because the board and provincial boards can authorize parole if they believe that the likelihood the offender will commit another crime before the sentence is up does not present an unacceptable risk to society and that parole will help protect society.

[English]

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. French is not my first language. I just want further clarification. The member used the word "merde", which is a profanity in French. Hopefully, my colleague could clarify that for me.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, the dictionary does not list it as a profanity. People can even use it in the theatre. Anyone can say "merde". There are other ways of saying it that could be interpreted otherwise, but as far as I am aware, it is not a prohibited word.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair will review *Hansard*, and if there is any cause to return to the House on this matter we will do so.

Secondly, the time had expired for the answer from the member.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Québec.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's speech and I think she raised a very important point regarding this very conservative vision of public safety. I recognize this vision when the Conservatives say they are tough on crime, for example.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on what the Minister of Public Safety said last December, before he was in that role, regarding the mass shooting that had taken place in the United States. He said that it happened at a very bad time.

I wonder what my hon. colleague thinks of that, because I found that comment utterly appalling. It probably explains why we are in this situation and it explains the Conservatives' current policies.

Government Orders

•(1610)

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I would say that sometimes people speak before they think, although I always try to think carefully about the words I use. Sometimes I am shocked at some of the expressions people use.

Mass shootings are always at the wrong time. There is no good time for a mass shooting. That was a poor choice of words.

I would also encourage my colleagues to look at how he described these kinds of problems when he introduced the new bill on people found not criminally responsible. If someone is found not criminally responsible, it suggests that that individual has some serious, severe problems. The government does not deny that in Bill C-14; the government is simply giving it some framework. We are talking about individuals who have serious, severe mental health issues.

I encourage everyone, including my colleague from Québec, to look up the expression that was used. I do not wish to misquote, so I encourage her to look it up. However, I was shocked myself, because the word choice suggested that being found not criminally responsible was almost a fallacy and something completely disconnected from reality, when in fact, it stems from a very serious mental health condition.

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Gatineau for something she raised today, and that is the bumper sticker approach to titling bills. I think it is quite appropriate and it is something we will hear again now that she has brought that into our discourse here.

Maybe the member can say why the Conservatives seem to think we can solve drug problems with moral condemnation and with interdiction. They spent more than \$100 million on interdiction measures in the prisons without any impact at all on the rate of drug use. Therefore, where does that leave us with this kind of bumper sticker slogan and huge expenditures on interdiction without getting any results?

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I would say that is what I find most troubling about the Conservatives' bills. They give the impression that they are going to make prisons drug free and they say that they will make the streets safer, but all they are really doing is adopting bumper sticker measures. We can almost assume that they will do nothing else. That is the irony I was trying to get across.

I agree that we should support the bill. However, what I am saying is that they should not lead us to believe that it will make prisons drug free. Let us be serious. When people read the three small paragraphs, they will not believe that a scourge that the government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to eliminate from prisons will vanish. It will continue to be a problem. It is one of the major problems. People are not fools.

However, if the government really believes that it will make prisons drug free, we have a serious public safety issue because the government will not do anything else.

That worries me and I am telling the people of Gatineau to be careful, because this government does not really care about making

our streets and communities safer. Another example is what they did with the gun registry. Every police force told the government not to abolish it, but it did not listen. However, it will have the police parade around for bills that suit its purposes.

It is always a little worrisome when they try to lead people on. My parents always told me that things are never as simple as they seem. I am more bothered by the use of words like “drug-free” than the one I just used when I said that being in drug hell is rather crappy.

•(1615)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Ahuntsic, Aboriginal Affairs.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-12, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

It is something like the bumper sticker approach the previous member talked about. The title of the bill, the drug-free prisons act, is really little more than a rhetorical statement when one examines the content of the bill itself. I will get to that.

First I want to say, after listening to today's question period and the antics of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, that it is quite a contradiction. When we, here in this House, are constantly dealing with so-called tough-on-crime bills, we are actually looking across the aisle at a Conservative government that has to be the most crooked and corrupt government this country has ever seen. There is no question about it. The parliamentary secretary gets up and fires attacks at others, with no basis for those comments. The ones who are heckling over there at the moment stand to support the parliament secretary in those kinds of antics. That is wrong.

I will say it again. This is the most crooked and corrupt government this country has ever seen. Bribes coming out of the Prime Minister's Office—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

The Chair would ask the hon. member for Malpeque to have regard to language that he knows is not parliamentary. He is a veteran in this place. I would encourage him to get on with the matter at hand, the business that is before the House.

The hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I will get on with the business at hand and get to the bill. However, I will say this about what went on here today. If the Speaker is accusing me of using unparliamentary language and unparliamentary antics, then I would ask the Speaker to go back and look at what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister was saying in this House.

I am one of the individuals he attacked. I would tell the parliamentary secretary to say it out there. That is why I am on my feet on this point. I will leave it at that, but this has to stop, these kinds of antics by this parliamentary secretary in attacking individuals and smearing their names, with no basis in fact.

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I will get back to Bill C-12. As I said, the title of the bill, drug-free prisons act, is little more than a rhetorical statement when one examines the contents of the bill itself.

In his 2011-2012 annual report, the Correctional Investigator made the following observation with respect to the prevalence of drugs within our federal prisons:

A “zero-tolerance” stance to drugs in prisons, while perhaps serving as an effective deterrent posted at the entry point of a penitentiary, simply does not accord with the facts of crime and addiction in Canada or elsewhere in the world.

That quote is on page 17 of his report.

Bill C-12 targets individual offenders by imposing requirements for the provision of urine tests subsequent to having obtained parole, statutory release, or an unescorted temporary absence.

This legislation makes no reference to, nor in any respect addresses, the problem of offenders with drug and alcohol addiction problems or in any manner addresses the access and prevalence of drugs within federal institutions.

Currently, under the act, when staff or authorities have grounds to suspect a violation by an offender with respect to drug use while on parole, work release, temporary absences, or statutory release, they can order a urinalysis test. These tests are conducted to ensure that the conditions upon which release was granted are respected and adhered to. Within institutions, such tests can be ordered on a random and collective basis if individuals are, again, on reasonable grounds, suspected of the use of illegal drugs.

Bill C-12 does little to contribute to what the Office of the Correctional Investigator called for in his most recent annual report:

... a comprehensive and integrated drug strategy should include a balance of measures—prevention, treatment, harm reduction and interdiction.

That was in the annual report, 2011-2012, page 17.

While the Liberal Party is supportive of initiatives that will enhance a drug-free prison environment, the issue is with respect to the methods adopted to achieve this objective.

Bill C-12 is taking an exclusively punitive course of action that targets individual offenders who have been granted parole and those being granted statutory release or an unescorted temporary absence. The requirement is that prior to release, the offender, having been approved for release in the case of parole, must provide a urine sample, and in the case of statutory release or an unescorted temporary absence, could be so required.

There is nothing in this legislation related to what appears to be a wider systematic problem of drugs within federal institutions, their prevalence, and their access. Certainly there is nothing in this bill, and I believe other speakers have brought this point up as well, that talks about the cost of these decisions. Will it mean more time in prison? Will it mean more expense? The government always fails in these justice bills to bring in the cost factor along with the bill so that we can see a cost-benefit analysis.

• (1620)

In any event, we know that the Conservatives' whole approach to law and order is punishment, punishment, punishment. Bill C-12 is a measure that at best can be said to address the symptoms of a serious

Correctional Service problem without contributing anything of substance to resolving the problem.

I will move away from the bill for a moment and talk about an institution in the private sector, in Guelph, called the Stonehenge Therapeutic Community. It is one of Canada's longest-serving substance abuse treatment programs, with separate facilities for men and women with chronic or acute substance abuse issues. It provides a full spectrum of addiction treatment programs to clients and their families as well as to those involved in provincial and federal corrections. Its services range from what it calls “Let's Grow Together Day” to support groups for pregnant and parenting women in the community, to the long-term residential programs it offers men and women from across Ontario and throughout the country. It has become a benchmark in addiction treatment and prevention, empowering clients with the skills to choose a healthy lifestyle and to thrive within their communities. It is a well-run institution, with quite a history, that has done well with drug abuse and substance problems.

The government's proposed drug-free prisons act really does nothing along those lines. It does nothing in terms of building a strategy to effectively deal with the problem.

The objective of government policy should be to ensure that offenders, when in the process of assessing parole or other forms of release, are less likely to have been exposed to the use of contraband drugs within the institutions. Bill C-12 in no respect aims to address this issue. In fairness to the Correctional Service, and even in fairness to the minister, preventing drugs in prison is not an easy endeavour.

I would suggest that if one were to walk into a prison, pull out a wallet, and take out five twenty dollar bills—I say five, but you, Mr. Speaker, would probably have twenty in yours—as long as they were not brand new, and put it through the machine that tests for drug residue, one would find that a good number of the bills would, in fact, have drug residue on them. It is unbelievable.

I have been in those institutions. I have talked to inmates and Correctional Service workers. In fairness to the government, it is not an easy endeavour to prevent drugs from entering prisons. That is why it is much more important to try to address the issue in a holistic sense.

This legislation would target those who have been granted parole, statutory release, or an unescorted temporary absence. What has to be considered is that a great proportion of the people in federal prison have serious substance abuse problems. They had them before they went in, and sometimes their substance abuse within the institution, sad to say, even with everything that is done, gets worse.

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•(1625)

According to the 2011-2012 annual report of the Correctional Investigator, “Almost two-thirds of federal offenders”, keeping in mind that the current population is approximately 15,000, which means an estimated 10,000 offenders are involved, “report being under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicants when they committed the offence that led to their incarceration”.

What is more disturbing is that on page 15 of that report, it states that “A very high percentage of the offender population that abuses drugs is also concurrently struggling with mental illness”.

According to evidence provided to the public safety committee by the Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada, “Upon admission, 80% of offenders have a serious substance abuse problem”. He went on to inform the committee that “anywhere up to 90% of a standing prison population would have a lifetime problem of substance misuse or dependence” and “This dependency does not magically disappear when they arrive at our gates”, meaning at the prison gates.

I quote those statistics because it speaks to the seriousness of the problem. Just presenting a drug-free prison bill to the House is not going to solve the problem in any way. It is much bigger than that.

Because the minister may go out there and say, “Look what I've done”, the government cannot take a bumper sticker approach stating that the minister has said that we will have drug-free prisons. The reality is far from that. How does one invoke a strategy about drugs in prisons, one that will work with offenders to get them off drugs and substances, get them back into society and contributing to it in a positive way to the economy of the country and to raising families, rather than costing over \$100,000 a year? The government should be looking at that.

The issue of drug prevalence and use within federal institutions is a complex problem. The Correctional Investigator has acknowledged that the presence of intoxicants and contraband substances is difficult to measure and monitor. While a number of seizures under the interdiction initiatives of the Correctional Service of Canada has increased, there is no way of yet determining if “the service is on top of the problem or simply scratching the surface”.

I will give the minister credit for this. In August, the Minister of Public Safety announced a five-year, \$120-million investment into CSC's anti-drug strategy. The investment contained the following four components: expansion of drug detector dog teams, hiring of new security intelligence officers, new detection equipment, and more stringent search standards. According to the Correctional Investigator, the results of these measures, although done with good intent and a heck of a lot stronger intent than this bill, appear mixed and somewhat distorted.

For example, while there has been an increase in the amount of drugs seized, the scope of the problem is difficult to determine. With respect to the results of the random urinalysis tests administered, there has been a decline within institutions. However, after correcting for the removal of prescription drugs, the rate of positive random urinalysis tests has remained relatively unchanged over the past decade, despite increased interdiction efforts. Don Head, Commissioner of Correctional Service of Canada, confirmed this

conclusion in testimony before the public safety committee in December 2011.

•(1630)

Correctional Service of Canada's current anti-drug strategy, according to the Correctional Investigator, lacks three key elements. I do not see any of these three key elements in this bill, but let us name them. What does the Correctional Investigator claim are the three key elements to deal with an anti-drug strategy within prison? What are they?

First is an integrated link between interdiction and prevention, treatment and harm reduction. Second is a comprehensive public reporting mechanism. Third is a well-defined evaluation, review, and performance plan to measure the effectiveness of investments.

None of that is happening in this bill. What might have been of value prior to Bill C-12 is that these elements would have been addressed by CSC to determine the efficacy of the programs currently in place and upon which Bill C-12 is building.

In my view, it does not bode well that CSC's substance abuse programming budget fell from \$11 million in 2008-09 to \$9 million in 2010-11. The way to deal with this problem is not by taking money from the very programs that are in effect to deal with the problem itself.

Bill C-12, without the appropriate in-facility measures and assistance, is merely a punitive measure. It may prevent some people from getting out, it will add costs to the system and still, in effect, it will really do nothing about the drug problem at the end of the day.

We will be recommending that the legislation be approved at second reading for further study before committee. I believe there is a lot the government has to answer for in terms of what it has not done to really deal effectively with the drug problems in our prisons.

•(1635)

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate some of the comments from the member opposite. I choose to overlook his collective memory failure regarding the previous government having some failures, scandals in leadership, and colleagues who had not paid back their fees and so on.

The member was a former attorney general, and he made some comments about being in prisons and caring about prisoners. As the chair of the fisheries committee, he was a pretty good oyster shucker and he did a great job in that assignment, so I want to give him a little slack in that regard.

I appreciate the member has mentioned that it is not an easy problem to eradicate. It has been around. It is in other countries as well. I had an interesting conversation about this with one of his former cabinet colleagues standing in line at an airport one day. I said, “When they go into prison as an addict, I would hope that we could at least bring them out of prison free of that problem”. The response from that cabinet colleague was, “Oh, no, we have to give them drugs in prison. That is where most of them get on drugs”.

Does the member agree with his former cabinet colleague?

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Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I do not know who the cabinet colleague was, but that is not necessarily the case. All governments have tried to deal with this problem in some fashion. The difficulty I am seeing with the current government is that in the main it seems to believe punishment will solve the problem.

The Correctional Investigator, dealing with drug issues, has some decent recommendations the government should be looking at, like the three points that I read, and I will not go through them again.

In direct answer to the hon. member's question, the fact is, yes, there are drugs in prisons no matter how hard Correctional Service of Canada folks try to deal with them. How do they get in? Sometimes we find out and sometimes we do not. I expect there are cases in this day and age, as there was in our time when I was solicitor general, when some people go into prison and get pressured into getting into drugs who were never on them before. That should not happen, but it does.

Let us look at the reality. Let us look at the evidence, and not just dream that punishment will solve the problem, because we need a full-fledged strategy, both inside and outside prisons to deal with the drug problem our country has.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, the member for Malpeque is proving to be a great addition to the public safety committee and I respect his expertise on this.

Has he any comment on the fact that the government spent more than \$100 million over two years trying to improve interdiction programs and that the head of Correctional Service of Canada, at the end of that two-year period, said there was no effect on the rate of drug use in prisons after spending more than is spent on drug treatment programs on interdiction?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, what the head of CSC, Don Head, said before committee was, in fact, true. There were \$120 million and they really have not had the intended impact. That was what the government and the committee needed to look at. Why did that not have an impact? Are there other things that we should be doing?

This is crazy. Does the government think that just doing urine tests on people being released is going to solve the problem? Come on, this is a much bigger issue than this bumper sticker legislation that the NDP talked about earlier. It is a huge issue. It cannot be dealt with through urine tests. It will require a strategy in order to deal effectively with the problem. The answer should be rehabilitation, how to get these people off drugs and keep them off drugs so they can contribute to society again.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, and I would like to ask him a question.

While reading the bill, I realized that it would simply enshrine the current practice in law.

Inmates must submit to a urine test when they arrive in jail or are allowed an unescorted temporary absence. The same types of tests are done when inmates from some minimum-security prisons go to

work or come back from work, when an inmate is granted parole or a statutory release, and during a supervised release in the community.

The bill provides no concrete way to keep drugs from entering the prison system or keep inmates from using drugs, or to help them recover from a drug addiction. It simply confirms what is already in place.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, basically, my colleague is right in her analysis. Yes, drug tests can take place now, but this bill, if I am reading it correctly, mandates the requirement on certain offenders, as they go out on release or other measures, that those urine tests take place. It is a little more compulsory.

The thinking behind the minister in this legislation is, “Just because I’m going to get a urine test, then I’m not going to be on drugs”. It is a much bigger problem than that. The minister is dreaming in Technicolor if he thinks the bill will have any real impact on drugs in prisons. We need a much greater strategy than the government is proposing. We should keep in mind that it is already cutting back on the ways to deal with offenders in prisons with drug addiction problems, to get them off in the first place so they stay off.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech, particularly for his reference to the Stonehenge Therapeutic Community. I had the opportunity to pay a visit to the Stonehenge Therapeutic Community in Guelph about three weeks ago.

The House can imagine my surprise when I was met at the front door of this alcohol and correctional treatment facility by the Chief of Police for the City of Guelph, who happens to be the chairman of the board. There are people in the law enforcement community who get that being tough on crime and having a holistic approach are not one.

Even in our province of Prince Edward Island, as recently as last week, there was a very spirited debate in the legislature on the subject of addictions. One MLA talked very passionately about the Portage program in New Brunswick for youth dealing with addiction, as something that is of great import to those who are struggling. We see in our province the closure by the government of the Addictions Research Centre, a facility that could and should contribute to a more holistic approach.

We have heard Bob Rae say that if the only tool we have in our toolbox is a sledgehammer, everything starts to look like a rock.

This is more in the nature of a comment than a question. I certainly appreciate the perspective of the member as the former solicitor general of Canada, with respect to the differences in approach between the governing party, and the more holistic approach that we would prefer.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Charlottetown for the question, especially for his overview of the Stonehenge Therapeutic Community which he visited.

The short answer is that being greeted by the police chief of the community at that kind of an institution where he is also the chairman of the board shows that the real strategy should not just be hard on crime but smart on crime. That is what that kind of holistic strategy requires. It is one where we work with people to solve their problems and not just exercise punishment.

I am pleased that the member had the opportunity to see the facility.

• (1645)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how exciting.
[*Translation*]

At the outset, I would like to mention that I will be sharing my time with my friend and colleague, the wonderful member for Laval—Les Îles.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, I like the phrase “bumper sticker justice” that my colleague from Gatineau came up with. That is exactly what we have here. I will support the bill because it does clarify an existing practice of the Parole Board, but it is such a narrow bill that it is hard to wrap one's head around it.

I have two concerns with it, and first is the title. We have been talking about the “bumper sticker” title. The bill is not going to make our prisons drug free. I think there has to be some kind of procedural way to prevent having bills named in a way that is clearly not in line with what the bill actually does. I would look to you, Mr. Speaker, for an answer on that.

It is an extremely misleading name for the bill. As my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca pointed out earlier, the title is there for political reasons rather than for sound policy.

The second problem I have with the bill is that it has profoundly little impact in the scheme of things. While it does formalize existing practices, it is not actually going to do anything about drugs or addictions in the prison system. It is not exactly a revolutionary idea that we are dealing with here; it is standard practice. Do I think that prisons will be drug free once the bill is passed? No. Do I think we are going to see a reduction in drug use? No. Do I think we are going to see safer prisons or reduced crime? No.

I am not alone in thinking this. First of all, when we look at zero-tolerance drug policy, we have heard my colleagues say this is an aspirational policy rather than an effective policy response to improved prison safety. If we look at the annual report of the Correctional Investigator for 2011-2012, the report said, “Harm reduction measures within a public health and treatment orientation offer a far more promising, cost-effective and sustainable approach to reducing subsequent crime and victimization”.

The bill does nothing to deal with drugs in prisons in real terms and it also does not deal with the myriad of other problems we have in the prison system, such as overcrowding or the fact that we are not engaging in real, substantive rehabilitation anymore.

The Conservative tough-on-crime agenda is not working. It is not tough on crime; it is pretty stupid on crime. If we are going to seriously tackle crime in our communities and safety in prisons, we

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need to leave behind this outdated tough-on-crime mantra and mentality. We need to look at smart justice and abandoning that old way of thinking, which is about applying simplistic solutions to really complex issues. It has not brought us very far.

We have heard in the House that since 2008 the Conservative government has spent \$122 million on tools to try to stop drugs from entering the Canadian prison system. Members have heard it before, but it is worth pointing out again: this is vastly more money than exists for addiction and treatment services, and I would look to my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca. I think it is at around half. It is incredible that we are spending that much more money than we are spending on addiction and treatment services.

That \$122 million is a lot of money, and it also sounds impressive, so we have to ask ourselves whether it is working. Is it actually doing anything? I do not think so. I think this continues the failed approach to justice.

We are seeing our prison population grow by about 5% a year. By March 2014, the Correctional Investigator estimates that with new legislation there will be over 18,600 inmates in our prisons. This is the highest number in Canadian history. It is unbelievable that we keep adding to the number of people we are putting in prison, when at the same time, looking at Statistics Canada numbers, in 2012 we reported the lowest crime rate in our country since 1972.

• (1650)

The former minister of public safety said that unreported crime was increasing. How do we know that? It is unreported. That is ridiculous. The crime rate and the severity of crime have been falling since 1991, but the number of people incarcerated—I am not talking about people charged or going through diversion programs, but incarcerated—and the length of incarceration are increasing with mandatory minimum sentencing and other government initiatives.

More people in our prisons obviously leads to increased double-bunking, which frankly leads to increased violence and increased gang activity. I know I would be angry if I were double-bunked. In addition, the majority of these people who are incarcerated suffer from mental illness and addiction. To add to that, we have lists of at least several thousand people who are waiting in line for addiction treatment rather than receiving it. We have had cuts to funding for support and treatment programs. It is backward logic.

We need to start looking at a smart justice approach on how we deal with these issues. Putting more people in prison while overcrowding them and cutting funding for harm reduction programs does not make any sense. These measures are damaging for rehabilitating people who have been incarcerated.

An article in *The Kingston Whig-Standard* in 2012, entitled “Sentenced to suffering”, said, “Addiction to drugs or alcohol, a history of physical or sexual abuse and previous attempts to harm themselves often follow inmates through the doors of a penitentiary”.

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Why would we not act on those issues? Why would we not have a bill that does something to deal with these issues versus bumper sticker justice, saying that we are keeping drugs out of prisons when in fact we are not? The reality of the situation is that we can lock people up, but we cannot close the doors on these social issues that will inevitably affect individuals during the time they are incarcerated and afterward if they do not get the treatment and support they need.

The focus is on punishment and not on rehabilitation, which is overall more costly. When we do not focus on rehabilitation, it is also more dangerous for our communities. The key has to be rehabilitation. However, punishment is a much more splashy title than rehabilitation. It helps the Conservatives with their fundraising, and that is really what this is all about, is it not? Why else would they take a practice that is already happening, turn it into a bill that has nothing else in it, and wrap it up in a fuzzy title called “drug-free prisons act” when it will not actually lead to drug-free prisons?

Not one person on the other side could stand up in the House with a straight face and say that the bill would lead to drug-free prisons. That could be why we have seen such total and utter silence from the other side of the House. They are not standing up to defend the bill, to speak to it, to talk about whether it is good or bad. They are silent because they cannot stand up and say that this will lead to drug-free prisons, or even stand up and say that this will lead to slightly less drugs in prisons. It is enshrining a practice that already exists.

It is about scaring Canadians because I think fear is a powerful tool for keeping citizens in line. They are trying to scare us into Conservative submission. They are trying to scare us into donating to their fundraising campaigns.

We saw the same thing with Bill C-2, a bill limiting supervised injection sites. It flies in the face of a recent Supreme Court of Canada case. On that same day we saw a website launch saying “keep heroin out of our backyards”, showing an empty street and a needle and scary black and white photography.

It is not a call to action. It is not a call for the community to come together and solve the problem of intravenous drug use. It is to raise money. That is what this Bill C-12 is all about. That is why we have bumper sticker justice these days. It is a fundraising campaign.

• (1655)

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the member commented that no one has stood up on this side of the House and spoken on the issue with any conviction, or thought or concern. When I was listening to the hon. member, I thought she was auditioning for a soap box opera. She was becoming theatrical in her approach on that.

As a former officer, I do have significant experience. I have five prisons right in my area, and I have been in every one of them. I wonder how much time the hon. member across has spent interviewing inmates in the cells and talking to victims personally. I do not know.

There was a statement from the member for Surrey North, who said, “Given the very high rate of HIV and other diseases...would it be beneficial to have these needles available to them [all prisoners]”? Does the member agree with that statement?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I am not afraid to talk about things like a needle exchange program in prisons. I am not afraid to talk about harm reduction models. I am not afraid to talk about these issues at all. However, the member opposite knows that is not our party's position.

If he has spent so much time in the prison system, then he will know that people in the prison system are disproportionately aboriginal Canadians. He will know that the numbers disproportionately have African Canadians in prisons, people with mental illness, people with addictions. It is poor people who are in prisons.

He will also know that his and his party's approach to crime control disproportionately impacts Canada's most marginalized citizens. That is not what we need to be doing.

We need to rehabilitate. We need to have the programs to actually prevent these crimes from happening in the future.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Is the crime rate going down?

Ms. Megan Leslie: I just got heckled about whether the crime rate is going down. Yes, so why are we putting more people in prison? It makes no sense.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I do think there is another reason beyond Conservative Party fundraising, and that is that we have seen a trend in legislation under the current administration where the shorter the legislation, the greater the public relations spin that accompanies it. Massive bills, like the 440-page bills that change 70 different laws, are slipped under the radar without a press release.

This one claiming to be a drug-free prisons act would bring, as she said, a currently normal practice into high relief with an overblown title. I suggest it is both for current fundraising and for future election purposes. A very short bill with one change to one subsection of the Criminal Code was called “protecting seniors from abuse act”. It did nothing of the kind.

If our goal is drug-free prisons, this would not get us there. I ask my hon. colleague to suggest what we might want to do if we were serious about drug-free prisons.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague's preamble in its entirety. We have a cyberbullying bill that talks about cable bundling. Somehow, I do not think Rogers is really wrapped in the revenge porn scene.

What do I think is the actual solution?

I had wanted to talk about the Smart Justice Network of Canada but, unfortunately, I ran out of time. It is really working in a movement that is a new way of addressing criminal justice issues that solves the problems of crime rather than simply punishing criminals. It tries to address the profound connections of crime to mental health, addiction, employment, education, housing, and social inclusion. Advocates through Smart Justice Network emphasize dealing with crime to shift the focus on a strong component of treatment, training, and reintegration support, which would reduce the risk of reoffending without harmful and costly interventions.

The Smart Justice Network is growing. It has folks in Ottawa, people in Halifax whom I have met with, people in Vancouver. It is starting to grow and really spread its message around Canada and work with people who have expertise in this area, people who have been working in the criminal justice system for decades, to talk about needing a fundamental shift away from this crime and punishment model toward a system that would, in the long term, reduce crime. It is the only way to do it, as far as I can see.

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill C-12, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, or the drug-free prisons act.

The bill would add to the act a provision confirming that, when deciding whether someone is eligible for parole, the parole board may take into account the fact that the offender tested positive in a urinalysis or refused to provide a urine sample for a drug test. The new provision would give clear legal validity to a practice that we support and is already in place.

Bill C-12's title is misleading. Indeed, apart from giving legal validity to urine tests, it does not offer any real strategy to make prisons drug free. Rather than providing a concrete solution, for example by investing in inmate rehabilitation, Bill C-12 simply enshrines in law what is already the current practice.

The NDP has always supported measures aimed at making prisons safer. However, it is a shame to see that, in this bill as in so many other government bills, the Conservatives keep ignoring recommendations. In this specific case, they are ignoring recommendations from corrections staff and the Correctional Investigator that would really help curb violence, gang activity and drug use in the prison system.

The fact is that the Conservatives are making prisons less safe, since they keep reducing investments in key corrections programs like drug addiction treatment, as well as increasing double-bunking, which leads to more prison violence.

Our role as parliamentarians is to worry about the safety of our communities first, by promoting the reintegration of offenders and preparing them to become part of the community again by helping them become free from drugs and taking preventive measures to reduce the risk of recidivism.

None of this is included in Bill C-12, and in my opinion this is a serious shortcoming. To be clear, the stakeholders agree that this bill will have virtually no impact on drug use in prison.

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Like so many other government bills, Bill C-12 is just a dog and pony show that plays well to the Conservative base, but offers no actual solution to the problems caused by drugs and gangs in prisons.

However, we must give credit where credit is due. The Conservatives are excellent illusionists. They would make Criss Angel and David Copperfield green with envy. In today's episode, entitled Bill C-12, they are still trying to hide the emptiness of their bills by giving them misleading titles that play well to diehard Conservatives. However, behind this legislation there is a complete vacuum that only worsens the problems they want to address.

In this case, Bill C-12 misses another important problem. Indeed, the Conservatives' misguided approach to public safety, which we also saw with Bill C-2, will significantly increase the collateral harm from addiction, instead of reducing it, as the bill claims to do.

Any government with the least bit of sense, vision and compassion would invest, through Bill C-12, in programs providing support to offenders with drug problems.

This may be hard to believe, but under this government, the budget allocated to the Correctional Service of Canada to be used for basic correctional programs, such as drug treatment, was reduced, while some treatment centres for inmates with mental health disorders were even closed.

The ideological inconsistencies that guide the course of this government are frightening. As an example of such an inconsistency, note that the government passed legislation imposing mandatory minimums, while at the same time it closed numerous prisons.

● (1705)

That leads to the very controversial and dubious policy of double-bunking, which inevitably results in a substantial increase in the number of violent incidents and puts prisoners' lives in danger. It also put the lives of the prison staff in danger.

If the government really wants to address the issue of drug addiction in prison, instead of making a lot of noise and getting terrible results, it must allow Correctional Service of Canada to develop an intake assessment process that would allow CSC to correctly determine how many prisoners have addiction issues and offer adequate programs to offenders in need who want to get off drugs. Otherwise, without addiction treatment, education and an appropriate reintegration process on their release, prisoners run a high risk of returning to a life of crime and victimizing other individuals when they get out of prison.

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Clearly, the term “prevention” is not part of the Conservatives' vocabulary. That is too bad. The government claims to be tough on crime, but the best way to reduce crime in society is through prevention and awareness, not wishful thinking.

Despite all the bill's flaws or, rather, its lack of content and solutions and its very limited scope, the NDP will support Bill C-12. The NDP is committed to supporting cost-effective measures that are designed to punish criminals and improve prison safety.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of this government, which governs from an ideological standpoint instead of relying on facts and reality. As we can see with this bill and Bill C-2, where the government did not even bother to have someone try to explain their indefensible legislation, we need to move towards a corrections system that offers effective rehabilitation programs such as addiction treatment and support programs so that it is easier to reintegrate prisoners into society upon their release. That is the only way to lower the recidivism rate and really address the issue of repeat offenders.

Even the Correctional Investigator has said—in not one report, but multiple ones—that it could have some unintended consequences on the correctional system if simplistic and narrow solutions are used to address the very complex problem of drug addiction in prison. He suggests taking meaningful action, such as conducting an initial assessment of detainees when they are integrated into correctional programs, in order to curb their drug addiction problem and give them better access to detox programs, which would help reduce drug consumption and gang activity in prison.

Those are the kinds of proactive prevention measures the NDP believes are necessary to truly fix the problem of drug addiction in our prisons.

In conclusion, we will support Bill C-12, since it essentially reinforces the legal significance of a practice that already exists in our prisons. However, we believe that Bill C-12 lacks teeth and substance. We believe that this kind of bill must include solutions to prevent drug addiction and treat drug addicts in our prisons if we truly want to help detainees reintegrate into society and not just find an easy way to please voters.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. He mentioned that this bill did not do enough, that it did not produce a lot of results and that we could not expect miracles.

Could my colleague talk about how we could do better with a much more proactive approach to address the problems that this bill claims to solve?

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Louis-Hébert for his very good question.

It is quite simple. It would be really effective to start by listening to the people on the ground. For years, correctional officers have recommended all kinds of ways to get violence and drugs out of our prisons. As usual, however, the Conservatives have done as they pleased. The government sees no need to listen to experts.

●(1710)

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech and welcome him to the public safety committee, where I know he is going to make some very important contributions.

I want to go back to something the member for Prince Edward—Hastings raised a few moments ago when he talked about some magic realism connection between the Conservatives tough-on-crime policies and the falling crime rate. I would point out, of course, that the crime rate has been falling for 40 years without the benefit of the Conservative measures.

Then the Conservatives always leap to unreported crime and say the rate is falling because unreported crime is going up. In fact Statistics Canada conducts the general social survey every five years, when it asks Canadians about victimization, and gives us a picture of unreported crime. There is absolutely no evidence that unreported crime is rising.

What we have here is a case of the Conservatives trying to take credit for a social trend with their policies, which have had absolutely no impact in lowering the crime rate. What we do know is that the number of people in prison has been going up despite that declining crime rate, and that the budget for corrections is being cut.

I would like to ask the member how he thinks the Conservatives can square this circle. How can we provide more addiction treatment in prisons when the Conservatives are cutting the budget? Right now the total budget for programming is only 2.7% of the expenditures of the corrections department.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. Now that I have joined my colleague on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, I will do my best.

The Conservatives believe in magical thinking. They think that everything will work itself out without any new money. I have no idea where that magical thinking comes from, but I know that it does not work. If the government wants to do something in connection with public safety or anything else, but does not give people the means to eliminate drugs and violence in prisons, it will not happen on its own. The government needs to provide real help. I do not know where the money will come from. Maybe the Conservatives want to privatize prisons, for all I know.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to have an opportunity to speak on Bill C-12, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. That is the official name of it. Of course, the Conservatives, in their usual way, have called it something else that does not relate to it at all. This act may be cited as the drug-free prisons act.

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As I will explain shortly, there is nothing in the act that contributes to or is about drug-free prisons at all. However, that is the Conservatives' way of using legislation as some sort of public relations gesture. Some have suggested that it is fundraising. Someone else has called it, quite rightly, "bumper sticker" legislation. It really has nothing to do with the bill at all.

I was just listening to my colleague, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, and I want to say what a great job he is doing as the official opposition critic for public safety. He brings his intelligence and his good sense. I will not say common sense because it is not that common, certainly around here. He brings his good sense, experience and articulateness, as well as his great commitment to social justice to this file. This is something that requires all of those things, because it is easy to have slogans.

The Conservatives like slogans. They like using them for fundraising. They like keeping things very short, and in some cases, they think it is meaningful to their supporters or the people who they would like to be their supporters. However, when we look just slightly below the surface, and we do not have to look very far, we find out that these slogans and sloganeering are really just a sham.

This is true of Bill C-12 as well, when we start with the act being the drug-free prisons act and then find out what it is really about. The Corrections and Conditional Release Act is about how we run our prisons, and in this particular case, how people are granted parole.

There are only two or three provisions in this act. In fact, there are five clauses, one of which is the one with the short title, which is clearly irrelevant to the rest of the act. Clause 2 would basically allow an offender to be granted parole. I am talking about someone who has been granted parole but has not yet been released. The clause would give the parole board the right to consider the results of a urine sample or the fact that someone has refused to grant a urine sample. It says that this could be taken into consideration. It would be reported to the parole board and it could be taken into consideration. If the drug urinalysis is positive, it would be reported to the board. That is number one. If a urine drug sample is positive, it would be reported to the board.

The second would allow the parole board, if it was going to grant parole, to either cancel it or impose conditions on it. That makes up the next two sections. The big "if" here is provided that the board is of the opinion that the parolee or prospective parolee no longer meets the conditions of the criteria set out for parole.

Those conditions are relatively straightforward. They would apply to all parolees or potential parolees. They are no different in this case. They would ask, based on the results of the urinalysis, if the opinion of the parole board is that the offender would not, by reoffending, present an undue risk to society before the expiration of the sentence that he or she is serving, and that the release of the offender would contribute to the protection of society by facilitating the reintegration of the offender as a law-abiding citizen.

These are the general principles of parole anyway. This is why parole is granted, and it is very important. Parole is granted, first of all, if there will not be an undue risk to society, and second, if the release will contribute to the protection of society by facilitating the reintegration of the offender into society.

●(1715)

These are basic principles of parole. We are not changing those. The Conservatives appear to support those and they are not changing the legislation. All they are saying is that if the results of the urinalysis cancel out those matters, then the person will not be granted parole.

I do not know what that has to do with the notion of drug-free prisons. In fact, it has nothing whatsoever to do with the notion of drug-free prisons. What we are doing here, as previous speakers have noted, is something the parole board already takes into consideration. It already takes into consideration the results of a urinalysis or the refusal. There is some question as to whether it is appropriate for them to do it, and this would clarify it. It is already being done and this would clarify this power.

We support it. We are here to support it, and I think every speaker from this side of the House, certainly in our party, has stated that we support the principle of the bill to clarify the right of corrections officers to do this and for a parole board to take it into consideration.

What we do not support is the notion that somehow or another this would deal with the problem of drugs in prison. What we do not support is the current government's general attitude toward corrections and what it is doing to our prison system and how, in fact, it is making things worse for prisoners, for the society and for victims or potential victims of crime. The Conservatives talk a lot about victims, that they are on the side of victims and the other side is not.

Victims of crime, yesterday, today and tomorrow, are falling victim to people who commit crimes for whatever reasons. If the criminals are caught and imprisoned and if they are subject to rehabilitation while in prison, they are less likely to commit crimes in the future. One of the biggest problems of criminal activity in this country has to do with drug addiction. The percentage of prisoners who are addicted to drugs is remarkably high. I think the number is 69% for women and 45% for men. Am I quoting those correctly? I read the numbers earlier today. Sixty-nine per cent of women in prisons are addicted to drugs, and 45% of men.

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What do we do to make our streets safer? We try to ensure that when these people are federal prisoners, and are in jail for two years or more, they have some program available to them so that when they are released they have a chance of no longer being addicted or of being on the road to recovery. If I were running the prisons, my number one priority for the protection of society would be to ensure that as many people as possible who go out of prison after their sentences are drug free and on the road to recovery. If I could do that, I could say to people in society that they would be safer because these people would have access to a rehabilitation program in prison and a better chance of not being a harm to society.

We have been steadfast as a party in our support for measures to make prisons safer, yet we have the Conservatives ignoring all the recommendations. That in fact makes prisons less safe, not only for correctional staff but for prisoners and for those in society who are going to be subjected to these individuals when they get out, if they are not better off.

We have measures that have been proposed by the correctional investigator who is a watchdog on behalf of the public and by Corrections Staff who have encounters with the prisoners day in and day out. They have made recommendations that would decrease violence, gang activity and drug use in our prisons, yet we do not see the government acting on these recommendations. We do not even see the Conservatives acting on recommendations that they themselves have made.

• (1720)

The public safety committee did a study in 2010 and produced a report. Their report, and I say their report, because the majority were Conservatives on that committee, was titled “Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Addiction in the Federal Correctional System”.

These are the two main problems among prisoners: drug addiction and mental health problems. There were 14 recommendations from that committee, from the majority, which sits on the other side, the Government of Canada.

The Conservatives have had three years to come up with legislation or to do things to implement those recommendations. Not one appears in the bill before us, and not one has been implemented by the Conservative government. How serious are they when it comes to being committed to solving the problems of mental health and drug and alcohol addictions in our correctional system? The answer: not at all.

Instead, the Conservatives are focused on some sort of public relations campaign. They are calling something that basically clarifies an existing practice something else and are carrying out a campaign that claims that they are solving problems by reducing the crime rate.

Well, as my colleague for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca pointed out, the crime rate has been going down for 40 years. Yet in 2012, the highest number of persons incarcerated in Canada was achieved. It was the highest number ever in Canada. The all-time high was in July 2012, with 15,000 inmates in federal prisons.

What is the government's response to the lowering crime rate and the highest level of incarceration? It has done two things. The Conservatives have brought in a whole bunch of legislation that

would actually increase the number of prisoners. In fact, the Correctional Investigator says that by March 2014, there is going to be an increase of persons in our prisons to over 18,000. Between 2012 and 2014, there will be a 20% increase in the number of federal prisoners from the all-time high of 2012, as the crime rate is going down. What are we achieving here?

By the way, we are also taking \$295 million out of the Correctional Service budget. We have less money, 20% less, on top of the highest rate of incarceration ever in our history and a crime rate that has been going down for 40 years. We have a situation where prisons are getting overcrowded, and there is no money left for programming.

The Correctional Service of Canada devotes approximately 2% to 2.7% of its total operating budget on core correctional programs. That includes substance abuse programs. That means that funding for addictions treatment in prison is even less as a result of this \$295 million decrease in its budget over two years. No wonder they are being criticized by anyone who has knowledge of the circumstances and the situation, such as the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Let us look at somebody who should be seen as objective, the Correctional Investigator, who has been working on this for many years and is an expert in the area. He has been in our prisons, has talked to people in the programs, and has talked to all the stakeholders. He has issued reports about what goes in our prisons and the problems that have occurred as a result of the policies of the Conservative government. Mr. Howard Sapers, the Correctional Investigator, has listed several Conservative initiatives that he says have undermined the idea that prisoners can be rehabilitated.

The rehabilitation of prisoners is done for two reasons. Obviously, it is the humanitarian thing to do. People can end up in prison for all kinds of reasons, and rehabilitation gives them an opportunity to come out the other end less likely to offend and hopefully, able to contribute to society and to have an opportunity to overcome some of their difficulties, such as addictions, psychological problems, or whatever issue they may have. Hopefully they may learn something that would help them make a living when they are outside so that they can become contributing members of society.

• (1725)

The other reason is that we do not want people getting out of prisons angry, frustrated, with chips on their shoulders, more determined than ever to see themselves as separated from and outside of society. Instead, we want them to be able to contribute to society. We do not want people going out with a propensity to commit crimes, because we will create more victims.

The people on the other side of the House who claim to be in favour of supporting victims should realize that one of the best ways to support victims is to make sure that people who come out of prison have actually rehabilitated so they will not inflict harm on other members of society.

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What we have instead is tougher sentencing rules, an end to automatic early release for serious repeat criminals and tough-on-inmate policies, as he calls them. These include charging for telephone calls, increasing room and board charges, eliminating incentive pay for work in prison industries, reducing access to prison libraries. What is gained by that? Do we want to make people who go to prison into hardened criminals, living in unsafe conditions, double-bunking, overcrowding, subject to gang violence, unable to learn by not having access to a library, unable to use the telephone to talk to their relatives and keep in touch with their loved ones so that they have some connection to outside society?

He said:

...making prisons more austere, more crowded, more unsafe and ultimately less effective.... We seem to be abandoning...individualized responses in favour of retribution and reprisal.

That is what the Correctional Investigator says, and he is saying that because it is less effective as a prison in terms of rehabilitating people.

My colleague from Halifax mentioned the issue of the prison population. Mr. Sapers said that the entire increase in our prison population over the last little while has been made up of aboriginals and members of visible minorities. Aboriginals now make up 23% of federal prisoners, though they are just 4% of Canadians. They are overrepresented in prisons by five and a half times their population. Something is wrong with this picture. Where are the programs that are available for these individuals?

The problem is that only about 12% of prisoners have access to these broad rehabilitation programs. There are wait lists of 35% of prisoners, waiting to get into programs. Their sentence is over before they get a chance to get any access to rehabilitation, and we have this revolving door phenomenon. The other side would call them repeat offenders. Yes, they are repeat offenders, and why? Because they do not get rehabilitated and they do not get access to programs while they are there.

We have a situation that Howard Sapers sums up this way:

You cannot reasonably claim to have a just society with incarceration rates like these. And most troubling, the growth in the custody population appears to be policy, not crime, driven. After all, crime rates are down while incarceration rates grow.

We have a serious problem in our prisons. We are making it tougher on inmates, and some people like that. They have committed crimes. They deserve to be treated harshly. There are a few out there who do. However, if we scratch the surface, we say that these are human beings who deserve to go to jail because they are sentenced for a crime, and the old saying is, "You do the crime, you've got to be prepared to do the time", so they do the time, but what happens then? Do they go out better off and less likely to commit a crime, or do they come out a hardened criminal and more likely?

If we want to protect society, we have to ensure that criminals are rehabilitated. We have to ensure that people in prisons have access to programs, including drug rehabilitation programs. We do that by paying attention to these issues, by listening to people who know what is going on and having a better prison system, not by having phony bills that are called drug-free prisons when they are really just implementing something that is accomplished already in our Parole Board.

● (1730)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of questions for my hon. colleague.

First, my colleague, the opposition critic for the environment, gave a speech earlier today on this matter and spoke about the \$122 million that we have invested as a government to increase the capacity to monitor and detect drugs in prison. She asked if this is working, said she did not think so, and then pointed to prison population growth. I would like to give my colleague an opportunity to clarify those comments in terms of acknowledging that actual detection of drugs in the prison system is an important part of deterrence and if he thinks this money was a positive thing.

My second question is a little more esoteric. We have heard a lot about perpetrators. I agree that we have to look at our crime system in a very holistic way, but I did not hear anything about victims' rights. I would like to give him an opportunity to talk about some of the items that he brought up within the context of respecting the fact that we also have to look at victims' rights and protections through the penal system and if we can, as he said, square that circle.

I am also wondering if I could beg his indulgence and wish my mother a very happy birthday. I am sorry I am not there today, mom.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I am sure we will all indulge the hon. member in wishing her mother happy birthday.

As to her questions, first, the \$122 million that was invested in an attempt to reduce drugs in prisons was actually a total failure. It was a waste of money.

The head of Correctional Service of Canada, Don Head, has acknowledged that it has not done anything to reduce the amount of drugs, so it was basically wasted money. I think the other stakeholders and experts would say that as well. I am not saying the money was not spent, but it was money that did not do any good. If that money had been put into addictions programs, we probably would have had a better result.

My colleague made reference to victims and that I did not talk about victims' rights. I actually asked an earlier question about what is taken into consideration by parole boards in granting parole in the first place. One of the things taken into consideration that New Democrats support, by the way, which my colleague, the justice critic, acknowledged, is that victims' rights and victims' circumstances are taken into consideration when looking at parole.

I have said many times in the House that there is a lot of talk about victims' rights, but I have not heard the government talk about providing federal funding for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, which used to be a feature of the Government of Canada's support for victims. Criminal injuries compensation boards existed across this country with federal and provincial contributions. Many of them have shut down for lack of support. I have made a lot of comments about victims benefiting by having proper programs in prisons so that people do not reoffend.

Government Orders

Obviously, they are taken into consideration at the time of sentencing. That is extremely important, and New Democrats support that fully.

• (1735)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member for St. John's East sees the same pattern that I see when we talk about drugs and the Conservative policy on drugs.

In 2007, the Conservative government removed harm reduction from the goals of our national drug policy. Bill C-2 is on safe injection sites, and the government is treating it as a public security matter rather than a health matter. In talking about drug-free prisons, it is a failure to acknowledge that addiction is a medical problem rather than a moral problem.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, clearly addiction has a significant medical part to it. Part of addiction is related to the physical addiction to the drug. It drives people to criminal activities for the sake of the addiction, so to get at the problem of crime related to drug addiction, we have to get at the addiction. Whatever makes that work and can help make that work ought to be considered by any government that is serious about reducing addictions and crime. Obviously that includes some of the measures the member was talking about in terms of harm reduction, but by removing that as a possibility, the government has removed the possibility of reducing addictions in our society.

In fact, as we heard in the debate on Bill C-2 and the information that stakeholders provided, people are dying who would otherwise live and survive to fight their addictions if proper programs were in place. The government does not seem to be sensitive to that at all.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for St. John's East and I will agree on this issue as I am a firm believer in rehabilitation. When there is a lack of rehabilitation, it has far-reaching circumstances, particularly as the member said, most of these folks are going to be integrated back into society at one point.

However, I do take issue with him on a couple of other points. He mentioned at CSC there was a dramatic escalation in costs that would be assumed budget-wise and by the projections. Yet when the actual costing was allocated, CSC turned \$1 billion back for the simple reason being that those estimates did not meet the actual expenditures and they were wrong. I would take issue with his statement that the costs are going to keep escalating dramatically.

The only other point that I would make is we do appreciate the NDP's tepid, tentative support for the actual bill. I find it, and I should not say amusing because it is certainly not an amusing bill, it is a very serious bill, yet the major complaint we have heard from the members is that they do not like the name. Unfortunately, that is some of the semantics of politics in general. However, I am confident in the capacity of the bill and I would ask the member to comment on the budget variance.

• (1740)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is very good to hear that some people on the other side actually believe rehabilitation is important.

I do not think the bill is amusing. The title is not amusing but ludicrous because it bears no relation to the bill. It is being used for extraneous purposes, whether it is fundraising, or public relation or bumper sticker politics.

As to the budget matter, I did not say anything about increasing costs. I said that the populations were increasing by 20%, according to the projections of the Correctional Investigator. However, the Conservatives are cutting the budget by \$295 million when we already have a very small percentage of all of the correctional budget being used for core programs or rehabilitation.

If the member and I agree that rehabilitation is of great importance, then we ought to be spending more money on rehabilitation, on programs for addictions and other programs that are going to help people when they get out of prison, as most of them do. Obviously, there are people with life sentences who are going to serve much of their sentence and there are people who are going to have a great deal of difficulty getting parole because they are deemed likely to reoffend, but most people are going to get out. These are the ones I am concerned about. If they get out, they should be getting out in better shape than they went in, rehabilitated with some chance that they will get out and not reoffend. That is the whole purpose of rehabilitation. We need more money for that.

I am not making projections about where the budget is going to go, but we do have projections of a 20% increase in the size of the prison population with not enough money, more overcrowding and nastier policies—

Mr. Daryl Kramp: The projection's wrong.

Mr. Jack Harris: It is wrong to have more overcrowding and worse conditions in prisons because it would lead to greater crime, not less crime.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present my thoughts on Bill C-12 today.

The first comment I would like to make about the bill is about its title. The Conservative members have said that they find the title funny. I do not find it funny at all. I think it is misleading.

When the title of a bill states that it will eliminate drugs in prisons, but no part of the bill actually comes up with ways to do that, not only is it misleading, it seems deceitful. I do not find it at all funny when the Conservatives introduce bills that do not fulfill their stated objectives and that, furthermore, will have a negative impact on the public safety of Canadians.

I would like to talk about the objective of the bill before us today. It makes an existing practice official. Currently, an offender who is found, by means of a blood test, to have taken drugs will not be granted parole. That practice already exists; this bill makes it official.

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If the title of the bill talked about regulating a situation that already exists and respecting Correctional Service officers by giving them the tools they have been asking for, that would show good faith. This bill says one thing and does the exact opposite. We find it very hard to support a bill that does not respect its own objectives.

This bill's scope is so limited that the opposition will have a hard time not sending it to committee. This bill does so little that the Conservatives need to ask themselves if they really think they can eliminate drugs from prisons. They could do a lot better than slashing \$295 million from the budget of Correctional Service of Canada. This measure will not help control harmful situations in prisons; on the contrary. It will make an already bad situation worse.

Parole has an objective. When an inmate is released, the number one priority is monitoring him in order to protect the public. As for the number two priority, the public security department in Quebec says that parole is aimed at rehabilitation. Specifically, the objective is as follows:

Parole release enables offenders to pursue the steps begun during detention to resolve problems that contributed to their encounters with the criminal justice system.

The objective of parole is not only to ensure public safety, but also to help the individual reintegrate into society as a good, law-abiding citizen who also respects his fellow citizens.

Today, as people are well aware, most inmates enter the correctional system with some sort of substance abuse problem. In fact, 80% of inmates have a history of substance abuse. This statistic is very troubling.

• (1745)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I need to ask the hon. member if he will be sharing his time.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

Let us now return to the issue at hand.

The goal of rehabilitation is to allow offenders to be released on parole so that society can be sure that they are acting in good faith, that they can obey the law and that they can respect their fellow citizens. This also helps offenders to prepare to reintegrate into society. They will thus contribute to society and may be able to find a job. They can be citizens that Canada will be proud of.

However, the bill does allow for any progress in that area. Not only will there be no progress, but the significant cuts to Correctional Service of Canada may even make the situation worse. What is more, an increasing number of prisoners are double-bunked. Canada's prison population has reached a record high. Last year, Canada had over 15,000 inmates. It can therefore be expected that, in March 2014, Canada's prison population will reach close to 20,000 inmates. The prison population is growing much faster than it should be.

This begs the question: does a higher prison population make Canadian society safer? In my opinion, the answer is no. These inmates will eventually be released. If they receive very little or no assistance at all with their addictions, they will not have the opportunity to gradually reintegrate into society while being monitored and given support. These individuals will eventually be

released back into society but in a way that is less safe than when they went to prison.

Funding has been allocated to Correctional Service of Canada with the so-called intent of decreasing the use of drugs within prisons. However, from what we have seen to date, these investments have not had any impact at all. The government allocated funding to Correctional Service of Canada in order to put an end to drug exchanges in prisons. Unfortunately, less was invested in treatment and the reduction of risk, which is what might actually work. Time and time again in Canada, we have seen that if addicts are given medical treatment, then they have a much greater chance of overcoming their addictions. We want to help these people.

Prisons are not just a holding tank where prisoners are left to reflect on the laws they have broken and people's rights they have violated. In prison, an inmate can come to the realization that some tools may help him to change his attitude and become a better citizen, one who contributes to society.

The title of the drug-free prisons act is misleading. Let us be honest. The bill will not reduce drug use in prisons and will not make prisons drug free. The only thing this bill will do is put back in prison offenders who are about to be paroled. It will increase the prison population at a time when budgets are being cut.

The Correctional Service of Canada budget was recently cut by almost 10%. That is going in the wrong direction. We absolutely have to invest in prisons so they can become centres for social reintegration and not just a place to incarcerate people and forget about them all the while hoping that they will return to society by osmosis.

• (1750)

These people need support and assistance. The Parole Board is there to help them return to society. Unfortunately, offenders' access to parole will be curtailed further.

If the bill passes second reading and goes to a committee, I hope that the Conservatives will carefully study it and consider the corrections aspect and not just the emotional pull. In committee, we will carefully study how to improve this bill in order to gradually eliminate drug use in prison.

That will not happen with this bill. It will have the opposite effect. More inmates will remain in prison and will remain drug addicts. They will want more and more drugs. Furthermore, it will become increasingly difficult to manage the situation because of the budget cuts. I hope that we will have the opportunity to solve this problem in committee.

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine for his excellent speech. He spoke about the recommendations that were put forward to the Conservatives regarding this bill.

Does my colleague know why the Conservatives did not take those expert recommendations into consideration when they wrote Bill C-12?

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Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, it really is a mystery. The Conservatives seem to feel that expert opinions are not that important or necessary, and not only for this bill, but for many others as well.

We saw it with Bill C-2. We are seeing the same problem with other addiction-related bills. The Conservatives seem to have their minds made up: these people need to be put in prison and left there as long as possible, instead of dealing with what, in essence, is a disease.

Science really must be taken into consideration. We must also look at treatment options to help people become model citizens who can contribute to our society. Unfortunately, with the bills we have seen since the Conservatives formed a majority, we seem to be moving in the wrong direction. There are fewer resources for experts and more prison sentences. It could ultimately lead to a volatile situation.

• (1755)

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. He brought up various problems. For one, budgets are being cut and the prison population is on the rise, even though crime is decreasing. The focus is not on rehabilitation but on harsh treatment for those who commit crimes. In addition, corrections officers are facing greater safety issues in a growing prison system.

Could my colleague talk about what could be done differently to rehabilitate people and ensure a safer society at the same time?

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question and congratulate him for the great work he is doing in his committee.

The most important thing to do is to see how we can help people integrate into our society. I am speaking about both offenders and regular people with addictions. Both groups need more support to break the vicious circle that makes them feel they have no choices left. They see no choice other than a life of crime to obtain more resources to pay for their addictions.

We should have more tools and ways to help people fight addiction. They should be able to seek help in centres like InSite in Vancouver. If we could give them more support, I am confident we would have a much safer society. In addition, we would have people who are far more likely to contribute to our society. We must invest more in rehabilitation and treatment and less in incarceration.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I sat on the public safety committee. The Commissioner of Corrections Canada testified a number of times, as did correctional officers. They told the committee time and time again about the valuable programs that are put in place in the correctional facilities across Canada.

I know from being a deputy superintendent of a correctional facility in the Yukon that correctional centres, albeit the last location one would want to send people, are locations for help, hope and healing when programs are put in place. However, the member opposite stood here and for 10 solid minutes said, without substantiation, that nothing is being done. There is \$154 million that is put into the correctional centre for core programming,

including drug and alcohol treatment, in Canadian penitentiaries every year. That is not nothing.

When the commissioner testifies in front of the public safety committee, he is proud of the core programming, the educational programming and the drug treatment programming that they deliver.

Bill C-12 is dealing with a point at which an inmate is about to be released. If they are still on drugs when they are about to be released, that must be considered. I wonder if the member opposite has a comment about the point at which we need to start turning inmates back for continued programs if they are still on drugs on the day they are being assessed to be reunited with the community?

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, if the programming he is referring to is so efficient, why is there a waiting list?

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to speak to Bill C-12, as members will be aware.

However, if I may take advantage of my great privilege to speak in this place, I will preface my comments with special wishes for my friend, Nancy Mutch. Nancy for many years volunteered in Jack Layton's constituency office, and since Jack's death, has volunteered in mine. She has a golden heart, but for a couple of weeks now has been in Toronto East General Hospital under great medical care but engaged in a difficult struggle. She has always paid special attention to what goes on in this place, so I am hoping Nancy will hear me say, when I say it here, to keep fighting, that we love her, and that we need her back on the phones.

Drug addiction in our prison system is a serious problem. We have well established that so far this afternoon. It is serious, because it is linked to inmate violence and gang activity in our prisons. It threatens the safety of our correctional officers, makes it difficult for offenders to effectively reintegrate into the community once they are released, and leaves them much more likely to reoffend.

However, serious problems need serious solutions. Not only does Bill C-12 not offer any serious solutions to the drug problems in our prisons, it in fact offers no solutions at all. It has been a long-standing practice at the Parole Board to use drug tests as a tool to evaluate an offender's eligibility for release. All this bill would do is validate this practice. It is, in effect, another lame effort by the Conservatives to appear tough on crime and tough on drugs without doing anything at all to help us solve the complex problems related to drug use in our prisons.

This bill has been called, so accurately and evocatively, bumper sticker policy by my colleague from Gatineau, the justice critic for our caucus.

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The Conservatives' effort to eliminate drugs from our prisons has been a remarkable failure. Proving themselves once again to be the great mis-managers of the public purse, the Conservatives have now spent more than \$120 million on this interdiction effort, and according to the Correctional Investigator, this spending has had no impact on the prevalence of drugs and drug use in our prisons.

To sincerely address the problem of drug use in prisons, the Correctional Service needs to develop a proper intake assessment for all new inmates that can evaluate their needs for addiction and mental health programming and rehabilitation. It is only by providing proper addiction and mental health treatment and education to offenders that we can actually have an impact on the prevalence of drugs, violence, and gangs in our prisons.

According to the Correctional Investigator, the Conservatives' current anti-drug strategy lacks three key elements. First is an integrated and cohesive link between interdiction and suppression activities and prevention, treatment, and harm-reduction measures. Second is a comprehensive public reporting mechanism. Third is a well-defined evaluation, review, and performance plan to measure the overall effectiveness of these investments.

The Correctional Investigator's report goes on to say

A “zero-tolerance” stance to drugs in prison, while perhaps serving as an effective deterrent posted at the entry point of a penitentiary, simply does not accord with the facts of crime and addiction in Canada or elsewhere in the world. Harm reduction measures within a public health and treatment orientation offer a far more promising, cost-effective and sustainable approach to reducing subsequent crime and victimization.

Not only have the Conservatives made no progress in improving the drug situation in our prisons, they have actually made the situation worse. While the Conservatives have been happy to waste millions of dollars of public money on “drug-free prisons”, despite a consensus among experts that these efforts are ineffective, they have made cutbacks in core correctional programming that includes support for treatment for addiction and mental illness. Today federal offenders with drug-addiction problems face long wait lists before they can get treatment. There are currently over 2,400 prisoners waiting for addiction treatment in our country in federal prisons, and this situation is absolutely unacceptable.

• (1800)

It is unacceptable, because too often this results in offenders being released from prison without ever having access to appropriate treatment for their addictions. This leaves them more likely to commit crime and end up in the correctional system once again.

While the Conservatives like to think that they are tough on crime and they like to put forward empty gestures such as the bill before us, their policies have actually increased the chances that offenders will be released from prison as addicted to drugs as they were on the day they were arrested. Our communities have become less safe, not more safe, because of these policies.

Last year, the number of people incarcerated in Canada reached an all-time high, with over 15,000 federal inmates, and that number is projected to rise to almost 19,000 by next year. Despite these trends, budgets for addiction treatment and counselling in our corrections system have been decreasing.

Our prisons are becoming more and more overcrowded, with the practice of double-bunking increasingly becoming the norm. This is a situation that fosters the proliferation of gangs and violence in our corrections system. This situation puts the safety and security of our federal corrections officers in jeopardy.

The federal government has a duty to ensure that work conditions are safe for every citizen under federal jurisdiction in this country, but it has a particularly sacred duty to ensure the security of those who put their lives on the line for the public, such as the federal police, our military and corrections employees.

Conservative cutbacks and jail overcrowding have made the job of our corrections officials more dangerous, according to the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers. A recent article in the *Huffington Post* quotes corrections officer Trevor Davis, who works at the William Head Institution on Vancouver Island, as saying, “[The Prime Minister] wants to be tough on crime...but he’s not giving us the resources to do it properly”. As Mr. Davis puts it, “[The Tories] are making our jails unsafe.”

We talked about this matter this morning at length in the context of Bill C-5, about the current, and frankly, previous governments' disregard for the issue of workplace health and safety. Let me come back to Bill C-12 and the bumper sticker approach to drug-free prisons. The bill would not render our prisons drug free. It would simply turn practice into law and leave a dire situation, the need for assessment and treatment for the incarcerated in the interest of public safety, untouched.

According to the report of the Correctional Investigator, close to two thirds of offenders were under the influence of intoxicants when they committed the offence leading to their incarceration. That is a statistic closely connected with the fact that 80% of offenders arrive at a federal penal institution with a past history of substance abuse. The bill would change none of that. It would send offenders back into the population without ever seriously addressing the circumstances that gave rise to their offences.

That is the stuff of this government and its bumper sticker politics. It is beneath this place and all of us, but it is to this kind of politics from the Conservative government that we have unfortunately become accustomed.

With that, I welcome any questions.

• (1805)

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I suppose we should all put on our hard hats, because it sounds as though the sky is falling.

I remember in 2011, when the NDP said that the prison population was going to be 20,000 after 2011. Now, today, the member opposite stands up and says it is at 15,000, but just wait until 2014 when it will be 20,000. It was supposed to be 20,000 in 2011. We were on a prison building agenda in 2011, according to the NDP. Then we got criticized for closing prisons down.

Government Orders

Here again, in the House, what we get is continued fearmongering about prison populations and the work that we are doing. I reiterate that \$154 million is invested in the Canadian prison system to work directly on core programming and education, including substance abuse and addictions programs.

The member opposite made an interesting point about the care and concern for workers. We had a corrections worker testify in committee who said:

As a front-line staff member, I can say we spend a lot of time with the inmates. It needs to be drug free. It has to go right out of the system in order for them to make the proper choices, move forward with healing, and create a safe environment. There are a lot of pressures in the correctional facility on people trying to get drugs, do drugs, force other people to do drugs, and collect drug debts. It's the whole nine yards. To have drugs and alcohol right out of the system would help us in our job....

That is what our government is attempting to do. That is at the behest of correctional officers who work very hard in this country every day. Their safety is our priority. I ask the member opposite to stand behind them and support the legislation.

• (1810)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I find it very rich for the member opposite to be accusing the NDP of fearmongering. The government constantly raises the fears of the public in an effort to raise funds for their party coffers.

What we are pointing to is in fact a very real situation of a high level of offenders in our prison system having drug problems. What we are proposing are real solutions for rehabilitation and treatment of those who are incarcerated with substance abuse problems, so that when they get released the likelihood of reoffending is lessened and the chances of improved public safety is greater.

With respect to the budget numbers that the member threw around, it is interesting to note that the correctional services overall budget cut announced last year was almost \$300 million. At the best, the correctional services devotes only about 2%, or about \$1,000 per prisoner per year, to these core correctional programs that the member references.

This is hardly enough to improve public safety and deal with the issue of drugs in our prisons.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for a very eloquent and thoughtful presentation on a bill that has a name that is more like a bumper sticker. However, in content all it does is put into law what the Parole Board already does. It has nothing in it that I can see that would help us to move towards drug-free prisons, or do anything in the short term.

My question to my colleague is, with an increasing population in our prisons, with double-bunking, cuts to the budget, specifically around correction and drug abuse, what is in this bill that would help to keep our prisons free of drugs?

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is nothing. With regard to the longer question, I would like to go back to the question from the member for Yukon about the sky falling.

The numbers we on this side of the House have been citing with respect to increasing prison populations come from the Correctional Investigator. There were 15,100 inmates in federal prisons as of July

last year. The Correctional Investigator anticipates there will be 18,684, based on new Conservative public safety and justice legislation, for example, mandatory minimum sentences.

The closing of certain facilities and the increasing population is adding to the problem of double-bunking, and directive 55 makes this the new norm. Again, this does nothing to help with public safety and the chance for offenders to come out after their time served to be productive members of our community.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas to resume debate, I have to inform him that I will have to interrupt him at around 6:30 p.m. because that will be the end of the time allotted for government orders. I will tell him how much time we have left and the hon. member will be able to finish on another day.

The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the same questions keep coming up. When we talk about public safety, we always get the same old simplistic platitudes to try to describe our position on this file, which we believe is the responsible one. I can certainly address several points that are often raised by our Conservative colleagues.

Before getting deep into this discussion on Bill C-12, I would like to tell a story.

I had just recently been elected. This was in January 2012, if I am not mistaken, so almost a year after the election. We were taking part in an activity that we organize every year and that takes place in Chambly. It is an informal reception organized by community organizations that gathers all MNAs and MPs from the region to discuss issues of concern for the coming year. Often the issues are smaller and more local and involve funding for the organizations and their goals. However, there are many organizations working on prevention with young offenders. At that time, the omnibus Bill C-10 was a significant source of concern for some of these organizations.

I would venture to say that the points that were raised still apply today. Those involved are proud of the position that I took. It is also the position of all of my colleagues and of our party, which is responsible, despite what the members opposite may say. Public safety is certainly not an easy issue. We must create a society in which people feel safe, a society where they not only feel safe but truly are safe. We need to do this in a responsible manner. For example, people who are ill must be treated, whether they are dealing with a mental illness or an alcohol or drug addiction, which is what we are talking about today. This requires some compassion. I hesitate to use the word compassion because the members opposite practically consider it to be a bad word. It is difficult to balance compassion and safety, but we are trying to do just that. It is not easy, but we did not choose to go into politics to face easy challenges. We are prepared to take on that challenge. I believe that our public safety critics, my colleagues from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca and Alfred-Pellan, and our justice critic, the hon. member for Gatineau, who sometimes works with them, do an admirable job in this area.

Government Orders

They do their work responsibly, rather than boiling these very complex issues down into catchy phrases such as the title of the bill, which has been referred to many times today as a bumper sticker policy. The title is dishonest by the way.

Saying that the bill will help to do away with drugs in the prison system is dishonest because the bill basically legislates to implement a practice that is already used by the parole board. That practice will now be enshrined in law. Of course we support this bill. We do not have a problem with enshrining an existing practice into the law or with doing away with inappropriate actions associated with this practice. However, when we talk about getting rid of drugs, we have to keep in mind that drug addiction is an illness and treat it as such.

I spoke about the approach that my constituents shared with me in forums, such as the informal reception that I mentioned, and in the letters they write to me, because every time we talk about justice or public safety, the government always accuses us of being against public safety, and that is not true.

● (1815)

Interestingly, the people in my riding are very proud of our approach. Given how the government is handling this issue, it seems to be suggesting that the people in our communities, the ones who elected NDP MPs, are less concerned about safety in their communities, but that is absolutely wrong. The difference is that, in addition to advocating for safety, we also advocate for solutions to social problems everywhere, including in the prison system.

As I have said before, the problem is that this is a disease. I have said it before and I will say it again. What do we do with people who are sick? We try to make them well. This is a public health problem. I really want to emphasize that because in the end, we are not doing this just for the individuals, but for the community. By the time these people come back into our communities, back into society, we want to have done our part as citizens and as legislators by creating an environment that will support their reintegration and help them get better. People around them will feel safe knowing that we have stepped up to help these people. I see no shame in that. It is a balanced approach that people are very proud of; at least the people in my riding are.

Since this debate started today, whenever we talked about treatment and the fact that these are diseases and that we should do more to protect public health, others have talked about all the funds invested in various programs. That is not enough. We hear about waiting lists, and a Conservative member claims that those lists are a sign the program is working, but the opposite is true. Those people are not there because they want to stand in line for treatment. We have to take this problem more seriously, and we will not solve it by cutting resources, which is what has been going on for a long time. When the government says that it has invested a certain amount, once again, it has to specify that it is covering only one small aspect, among many, of drug treatment. It is not a priority. It is an amount invested in the prison system—not to mention all of the cuts—and only a small percentage is actually allocated to this major problem.

If we do not take this problem seriously, we would be sending the wrong message to the communities that might reintegrate these people after their release. In addition, this problem also affects the

employees of the corrections system. In prison environments, the same phenomenon is seen when it comes to double-bunking: a government that does not care about the details, and when we try to point them out, it accuses us of standing up for criminals, although that is not the case.

We want to create a safe environment for people who work there, such as the prison guards, but also an environment where these problems do not spread any further. For instance, it is important to help people who enter the system with substance abuse problems, which will also prevent the spread of such problems. If that is not done, substance abuse will continue despite our best efforts, and will spread to other people. We will have done nothing to solve the problem. I do not believe that such a bill solves the problem. Once again, we will be supporting this bill, but the fact remains that it is not nearly enough.

● (1820)

It is as though we have travelled only half a kilometre on a journey that is 100 kilometres long. Much more is needed, although that is not what this government is doing.

If we do not help these people and if we do not take this scourge seriously, we will do nothing to eliminate the problem of drugs in our prisons.

Coming back to the bill's title, it talks about making our prisons drug free, but that is not what this bill does. The Conservative Party is not addressing the real problems. Even worse, it is going to try to get itself re-elected based on a bill's title that gives the impression that it actually does something. As an MP, I find that unacceptable, and my constituents share that opinion.

I would not be surprised to see a fundraising letter from the Conservative Party boasting about what it did to eliminate the problem of drug use in prisons, saying that this is how it got drugs out of our prisons.

What happens then? The voters and even the members of the Conservative Party who want to fix this problem as much as we do will get the impression that something was done, when in fact, the government simply adopted a band-aid solution. The issue is much more serious than this bill and the Conservative Party's rhetoric would have us believe. It is not just a matter of safety, but also a matter of health.

I think that putting on rose-coloured glasses and ignoring the problem shows a lack of respect. Earlier I mentioned addressing this issue responsibly, and it is not as though the government is not trying to solve the problem. It is interesting that a Conservative member who sits on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security told my colleague from Beaches—East York during his speech, that the NDP was acting as though the sky was falling.

I know our public safety critic very well and I know that he would never resort to exaggeration. He is very thoughtful and insightful. I know from experience that he makes fair and sensible proposals in committee to fix public safety problems.

Adjournment Proceedings

In conclusion, we will support this bill, but we urge the Conservative government to take this issue as well as public safety more seriously. We are calling on the government to stop taking intellectual shortcuts and accusing us of supporting the criminals. That is ridiculous and it needs to stop.

We need to start acting responsibly, to fix public safety problems and also to create an environment in which our constituents feel safe. Furthermore, when people get out of prison and reintegrate into our communities, we will have taken a step in the right direction to try to combat their illness.

It is time to stop insulting the NDP and claiming that we do not take this seriously. We do take this seriously. The Conservatives need to stop telling me that I do not take my constituents' safety seriously. That is untrue. I also take public health problems seriously. This is the balanced approach that my constituents support. I hope that they are proud to see that the NDP supports this, and this is certainly the responsible approach we will take to form an NDP government.

We must stop using a black or white approach to public safety. We must stop causing division in our communities. It is time we realize that we can both help the people who are seriously ill and keep communities safe. Any rhetoric that encourages disdain or cynicism is no use when it comes to this issue. We must keep this in mind as we debate this bill.

We will support this bill. I am fully confident in my colleagues who will discuss these issues further in committee.

• (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas will have five minutes for his speech when the House resumes debate. Of course, the time allotted to questions and comments will be 10 minutes.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that since the 1960s, nearly 600 aboriginal women have been murdered or gone missing in Canada. The Native Women's Association of Canada says that many cases were not documented and that this sad finding is probably much higher than it appears.

Therefore, the precise number of missing and murdered women remains a mystery, since the RCMP does not compile data on murdered women according to their ethnic origin.

As part of the Sisters in Spirit research and education project, the Native Women's Association of Canada has collected information on the disproportionate number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada. The final report of this research project

referred to the disappearance or death of over 580 aboriginal women and girls in Canada since 1960.

According to the report, 153 of these victims were murdered between 2000 and 2008. Therefore, in eight years, 153 aboriginal women have been murdered. Compared with non-aboriginal women, aboriginal women are more likely to be victims of homicide. They represent about 10% of the total number of female homicide victims in Canada, although they make up only 3% of all women in the country. They are also at greater risk of being murdered by a stranger, and what is truly horrible, their murderers are much less likely to be convicted.

The Native Women's Association of Canada is not the only organization speaking out against this situation. Amnesty International has issued two reports—one in 2004 and another in 2009—on the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women, and those reports talked about the need to protect their rights.

In October 2008, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women urged Canada to look into the cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and to take the necessary steps to remedy the deficiencies in the system. That is serious.

In February 2013, the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies, the umbrella organization for the federal, provincial and territorial human rights commissions, urged Canada to establish an independent and inclusive inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

More recently, in October 2013, the UN special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples asked Canada to take action. James Anaya called on the federal government to launch a national inquiry and said that Canada “faces a crisis when it comes to the situation of indigenous peoples”.

I believe that it is high time to shed light on this matter. The families have the right to know. Not only will this commission of inquiry allow us to understand what is happening but, more importantly, it will ensure that it never happens again.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for giving me a chance to clarify the response of the Government of Canada on this very important matter.

The government is deeply concerned about the unacceptably high number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada and has been for many years. That concern is shared, I know, by many Canadians and by many members of this House, regardless of political stripe.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would agree with the hon. member that this situation is unacceptable. It is a personal tragedy for family and friends, a cultural loss for communities that lose part of their future, and an unquantifiable loss for all Canadians who will never know which of these young lives might have ended up affecting us all. Quite simply, this situation cannot be ignored or allowed to continue.

I would remind members that it was the Government of Canada, through Status of Women Canada, that funded the initial research conducted by the Native Women's Association of Canada to determine the scope of the deaths and disappearances across Canada. When that research showed an alarmingly high number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls, the Government of Canada not only acknowledged the seriousness of this tragedy but moved to take immediate and concrete action on this criminal justice priority. That was in 2010.

Today the Government of Canada has committed \$25 million over five years for a seven-step strategy to improve community safety for aboriginal women and girls and to ensure that law enforcement and the justice system can better respond to cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

The government's response has to be seen against the broader context of other investments by the Government of Canada to address the underlying causes of violence facing aboriginal women and girls and their higher vulnerability to that violence.

I mentioned already the important work of the Native Women's Association of Canada on this issue. Its work builds on and complements the work of more than 45 studies, commissions, inquiries, and other reports, including the 1999 Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the House of Commons status of women committee, the B.C. Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, and many others.

This government has committed to concrete action to resolve this issue and has renewed that commitment in the recent throne speech at the beginning of this session of Parliament. I look forward to the report of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women this coming March.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I would like to go back to the fact that after meeting with representatives of the federal and provincial governments, first nations leaders and aboriginal peoples

from Quebec, Ontario and western Canada, in October 2013 the UN special rapporteur urged Canada to establish a national commission of inquiry to shed light on this matter.

I heard my colleague say that the government is concerned by this situation and that it is unacceptable. However, what these women want to know, as do all the institutions that have approached the government—Amnesty International, the UN, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Native Women's Association of Canada or the Quebec Native Women's Association—is when will the government launch a national commission of inquiry to shed light on this matter. When? We just want a date.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear in my response.

I am pleased that the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of justice have now declared this issue a priority in four portfolios: justice, public safety, aboriginal affairs, and status of women.

Thanks to the extensive number of reports, studies, and recommendations, many reflecting the voices of aboriginal victims of violence, community members, and families of missing and murdered women and girls, there is already a consistent picture of what needs to change.

This government has committed to concrete action to resolve this issue, and it renewed that commitment in a recent throne speech at the beginning of this session of Parliament.

I look forward to the report of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women in March. I sit on that committee. It is studying this whole issue in great detail. There will be a number of recommendations. The Native Women's Association of Canada is an expert witness and adviser to that committee.

There will be a comprehensive report, which I think the member would be very interested to read. I look forward to that report as well.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:39 p.m.)

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