



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, February 17, 2015**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

## **CONTENTS**

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 17, 2015

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

### CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER OF CANADA

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on alternative signatures.

[*Translation*]

This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

### PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 32nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership of the committee, and if the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 32nd report later today.

**Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-China Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the co-chairs' annual visit to China of the Canada-China Legislative Association held in Beijing, Shanghai, Wuxi, and Nanjing, the People's Republic of China, August 30 to September 6, 2014.

**The Speaker:** I believe that report should have been tabled in the reports of interparliamentary delegations. Does the House give its consent to allow it to be tabled at this time?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 32nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure

and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier today, be concurred in.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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## PETITIONS

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to present three petitions today; two petitions are on the same subject.

We continue to receive petitions calling on the government to refuse to ratify the Canada-China investment treaty. We know that it was in fact ratified in September 2014, but the concerns remain.

For the interest of the House, I feel it is important to table the petitions of concern about the way this treaty undermines our sovereignty.

### JUSTICE

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, this petition signed by residents of my riding throughout the Saanich Peninsula calls on Parliament to review legislation that includes mandatory minimums, to assess whether these mandatory minimums will result in the construction of additional prisons and will offend the charter.

[*Translation*]

### CANADA POST

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present on behalf of people from my riding who are defending the common good.

This first petition is in support of Canada Post's postal service. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to reject Canada Post's plan to reduce service by eliminating home mail delivery to five million households, and to explore other options for updating the crown corporation's business plan.

*Speaker's Ruling*

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in support of the future of the CBC.

The petitioners are calling on the Conservative government to guarantee stable, multi-year funding to ensure that our public broadcaster can continue providing services and fulfilling its mandate across the country.

[*English*]

## STUDENT LOANS

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from Canadians from B.C. and from coast to coast concerned about student loan fairness. They want to see us create a federal need-based grant system for Canada's student loans that reduces the federal student loan interest rate, creates the federal student loan ombudsperson, and helps defer payments for those who have massive student loans through their undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral work.

## CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present today.

The first petition is signed by people all across the country calling on the Canadian government to negotiate with the Chinese government 10-year multiple-entry tourist and business visas for Canadians visiting China, and five-year multiple-entry visas for students entering China.

They point out that the U.S. and China have negotiated a reciprocal agreement benefiting the citizens of both of those countries, and they would like Canada to have a level playing field with their American and Chinese citizens.

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is to the House of Commons. It has been discovered in the last several months that Canada is being used as a conduit to ship endangered whale meat across Canada from Halifax to Vancouver.

Canada is signatory to an international convention banning the trade in whale meat, and this is a loophole that is being exploited, which Canadians would like to see closed, because Canadians do not want to see endangered species being traded.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Finally, Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by people across the country to support the climate change accountability act. This is very important to people in Vancouver Kingsway. They would like to see the government deal with climate change and Canada to take a leading role on the world stage as we deal with this very pressing, important, and vital issue.

## DEMENTIA

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition calling for a national dementia strategy. The petitioners are asking the government to call on the Minister of

Health and the House of Commons to pass Bill C-356, an act respecting a national strategy for dementia, which was introduced by the member of Parliament for Nickel Belt.

The bill calls on the minister to initiate discussions with provincial and territorial ministers to develop a comprehensive national plan to address all aspects of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, and to provide an annual report based on an annual assessment of Canada's progress to meeting the various objectives that this calls for.

● (1010)

## ANAPHYLAXIS

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition whereby the petitioners would like to draw the attention of the House of Commons to the fact that, in May 2013, members of Parliament voted unanimously in support of Motion No. 230, because anaphylaxis is a serious concern for an increasing number of Canadians, and it is very often deadly.

Those who are travelling, particularly by public transit, like airplanes, are at particular risk at 35,000 feet because medical care is not available. The petitioners request that Parliament enact a policy to reduce the risk of harm to anaphylactic passengers, applicable to all forms of passenger transportation falling within federal jurisdiction.

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## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

## PRIVILEGE

## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER—SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on January 26, 2015, by the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard related to the government's response to written question Q-393, which was given to the House on May 14, 2014.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard for having raised this matter, as well as the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and the hon. opposition House leader for their comments.

In raising this matter, the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard expressed concerns about the response she received to her question, Q-393. She argued that there was interference by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration who, she claimed, ordered officials in the department to stop preparing a response and, instead, use the same answer that was given in response to written question Q-359 on May 12, 2014. She asserted that that answer constituted a non-answer to a question submitted by the member for Markham—Unionville. Having received the same non-answer, she contended that this impeded her in the performance of her parliamentary duties since she was not provided with a satisfactory response to her question. From this she argued that a breach of privilege had occurred.

[English]

In response, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration explained that it was the length and breadth of the member's very extensive question that was preventing departmental officials from being able to comply with the 45-day response deadline. Once advised of this, he provided the response that the member received.

Members will be familiar with the provisions of Standing Order 39(5)(a), which states:

A Member may request that the Ministry respond to a specific question within forty-five days by so indicating when filing his or her question.

In essence, the member is seeking redress with respect to perceived ministerial interference, which in her view, prevented departmental officials from responding to her question.

[Translation]

On previous occasions, the Chair has been asked to rule on issues related to the government's responses to written questions. In each instance, the Chair has sought to remind members of the clear limitations of the role of the Speaker in this regard.

*House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, states, at page 522:

There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review government responses to questions.

[English]

Speaker Milliken also noted on February 8, 2005, on page 3234 of *Debates*:

Any dispute regarding the accuracy or appropriateness of this response is a matter of debate. It is not something upon which the Speaker is permitted to pass judgment.

This applies as well when the government indicates that it is unable to provide an answer. O'Brien and Bosc confirms this approach at page 522, where it states:

As with oral questions, it is acceptable for the government, in responding to a written question, to indicate to the House that it cannot supply an answer.

[Translation]

How or why the government chooses to provide such a reply, or non-reply as some see it, is not something to be questioned by the Chair. Nor is it for the Chair to question the decision of members to ask for a response to a written question within a 45-day limit, as per Standing Order 39(5)(a), even when the question is lengthy and complex.

### Government Orders

Specifically, as Speaker, I must assess the role the government played in the preparation of responses within the limited scope that is granted to me by our practice and precedents. As I indicated in my ruling of April 3, 2014:

● (1015)

[English]

The Chair understands that the member is not asking for judgment on the accuracy of the answer provided. However, he is asking the Chair to judge the actions of the minister and the effect these have had on his ability to function as a member of Parliament. To do so would require the Chair to judge not only the content of answers provided, but also to delve into internal departmental processes past and present. Regardless of whether the department's internal processes on written questions have changed or not, it remains beyond the role of the Chair to undertake an investigation into any such matter or to render any judgment on it.

[Translation]

In view of the particular jurisprudence cited by the Chair with regard to written questions, I cannot conclude that the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard has been impeded in the performance of her parliamentary duties. Therefore, I cannot find that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred.

That being said, the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard does have one other avenue she could pursue. She could consider resubmitting her question without requesting an answer within the forty-five day deadline, particularly in light of the Minister's comments regarding the question's length and complexity.

I thank honourable members for their attention.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### ZERO TOLERANCE FOR BARBARIC CULTURAL PRACTICES ACT

**Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC)** moved that Bill S-7, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today to speak to Bill S-7, the zero tolerance for barbaric practices act. This is an important initiative for our government, one that links up with many other initiatives that we have taken over many years now.

The bill has a simple set of principles. First, we are convinced that no young girl or no woman in this country should be subject to forced or early marriage, meaning marriage before the age of 18. Second, we believe that the practice of polygamy in this country on any scale as part of Canadian communities, as part of our immigration system, as part of our visitor streams into Canada, is unacceptable and should be stopped.

*Government Orders*

We are taking action through this legislation to ensure that there is no place in Canada for so-called honour-based violence. Honour in any of its forms, whether it is widely seen to be in play in a given situation or subjectively seen to be in play by one single person, has no place in the defence of an individual charged with a violent act. Violence must be dealt with by our criminal justice system on its own terms, and an honour defence, in our view and under the terms of this act, would no longer be as readily available as it has been up until now.

We will pursue these changes to our legislative framework through the proposed amendments in the bill to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act, and the Criminal Code.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues across the House who have shown an interest in these issues. I would also like to thank individuals in our ministry. This is a joint effort with the Minister of Status of Women, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Justice, and many others, such as the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was so active on these issues around the world. We are passionate about these issues, as are many members of our caucus, committee chairs, committee members, and individual members of Parliament.

We are fulfilling a Speech from the Throne commitment with this legislation. That commitment recognizes that there are possibly tens of millions of young women and girls around the world who are still subject to forced and early marriage and the violence and the forms of compulsion that go with that. We see these practices as absolutely incompatible with Canadian values, and for that reason are proud to be putting forward concrete initiatives today to ensure that these barbaric practices that represent implicit support for the commission of violence in this country are eliminated from Canada, are discouraged and deterred, and that when they do take place, are punished.

● (1020)

[*Translation*]

All members will recall the events of April 17, 2009, when Zainab Shafia fled her home in Montreal at the age of 19 because her parents had forced her to marry a man she did not want to marry. Three months later, the bodies of Zainab, two of her sisters and the first wife of her father, who was in a polygamous marriage, were found in a canal in Kingston, Ontario.

These young women wanted a better life for themselves and their family in Canada. They never should have been subjected to constant fear and threats of violence or death solely because they wanted a better life in Canada.

[*English*]

The amendments in this bill would strengthen provisions in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act, and the Criminal Code to add further protection.

The Shafia case reminds us of how catastrophic the consequences of inaction on this issue can be. This was a forced marriage, combined with a polygamous relationship and a so-called honour-based motive for murder. Thankfully, there was a conviction for murder in this case, but none of those elements should have been in

place in the Shafia family's life as immigrants to this country. This bill will help to ensure that such a situation never arises again.

These amendments would improve protection and support for vulnerable individuals in a number of different ways, especially for women and girls. This is the summary of the substance of this bill, which I will elaborate upon shortly in more detail.

First, the bill would render permanent and temporary residents inadmissible if they practise polygamy in Canada. In other words, if immigrants and visitors to Canada practice polygamy in Canada with one wife or one spouse, they would now be inadmissible.

Second, the provisions would strengthen Canadian marriage laws by establishing a new national minimum age for marriage of 16 years old, as well as by codifying both the existing legal requirements for a free and enlightened consent for marriage and by codifying the requirements for ending an existing marriage prior to entering another. It seems almost to go without saying to many of us in this place, but these measures have not been part of the Civil Marriage Act and have not been obligatory across Canada until this proposal that is being made under this legislation.

The measures would also criminalize certain conduct related to underage and forced marriage ceremonies, including the act of removing a child from Canada for the purpose of such marriage ceremonies. In other words, anyone knowingly taking a substantive role in solemnizing or officiating at an early or forced marriage of a girl or a boy under the age of 16 years old would face consequences under the Criminal Code that have not previously been there.

Fourth, these measures would help protect potential victims of underage or forced marriages by creating a new and specific preventive court-ordered peace bond when there are grounds to fear someone would commit an offence in this area.

Finally, they would ensure that the defence of "provocation" would not apply in so-called honour killings and in many spousal homicides.

Let me delve into each of these initiatives in some more detail and elaborate on some of the important measures Bill S-7 proposes.

Polygamy is an affront to our values. As such, it has been illegal in Canada since 1890. While it is against the law in Canada to practice polygamy or to enter into a polygamous union, we know that is not the case in every country in the world. According to our most recent analysis, upwards of 60 countries allow polygamy and make it legal to some extent. The rate at which polygamy is practised in many of these countries is very low and may be only a couple of percent of the population, although in some cases it is much higher. However, we in Canada are adamant that this is not featured among our practices. It is antithetical to our values. While it has been on the books as a crime since 1890, it is only in more recent years that the first prosecutions have taken place under that law, so it is a current issue in the criminal justice system as well.

*Government Orders*

●(1025)

*[Translation]*

Thus, polygamy is already illegal in Canada. However, we must do more to ensure that this Canadian value is respected by everyone in the immigration system in order to strengthen our ability to prevent polygamy in Canada and to ensure that our immigration system does not in any way facilitate this practice.

Bill S-7 will make polygamy grounds for inadmissibility under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

*[English]*

This would give, for the first time, immigration officers the tools they need to render temporary and permanent residents, visitors, and immigrants inadmissible when they are practising polygamy. The new inadmissibility would mean that those who are entering on a temporary basis and who are in polygamous marriages abroad can only enter on their own, not with their spouses. This is not presently the case. We do not have the ability to prevent those practising polygamy from coming into Canada, either as immigrants or visitors.

Currently, visitors who practise polygamy in their countries of origin are generally allowed to enter with only one spouse at the time of seeking entry. It is unacceptable that our immigration system would allow this practice to continue. To ensure polygamy is not practised on Canadian soil, this bill proposes to ban foreign nationals who practise polygamy from entering Canada with any of their spouses, even on a temporary basis. It would also mean that permanent residents found to be in polygamous marriages would be removed on that basis alone.

The anecdotal evidence is considerable. The number of immigrants who have come to this country in polygamous unions but disguised that fact and misrepresented themselves as either not being married or not being in a polygamous union is substantial. Under these provisions, we would, for the first time, no longer need a criminal conviction or a finding of misrepresentation in order to begin deportation proceedings. We would simply need the evidence of the practice of polygamy.

Measures in Bill S-7 would also amend the Civil Marriage Act in order to address the problem of early and forced marriages. In Canada, as things stand now, there is no national minimum age for marriage. Specific federal laws that apply only in Quebec set the minimum age at 16 years old; in other parts of Canada, the common law applies.

There is some uncertainty about common law minimum age, which is sometimes interpreted as setting a minimum of 12 for girls and 14 for boys, although in some instances the legal records, the precedents in the common law, set an age as low as seven years old. I think everyone in the House would agree that this is completely and unequivocally unacceptable. It harkens back to the Middle Ages and to other periods when those traditions, if they were such, would certainly, from today's perspective, be considered barbaric. The medical evidence of harm to young people below mature ages is overwhelming, and setting a national minimum age of 16 years old would make it clear that underage marriage is unacceptable in Canada and will not be tolerated.

●(1030)

*[Translation]*

Other amendments to the Civil Marriage Act proposed in Bill S-7 will codify the requirement for free and enlightened consent of the parties who intend to marry and the requirement that any previous marriage be dissolved.

This might seem quite obvious to us, but it is extremely important to those who, to date, have had no say in their own marriage. We must ensure that the voices of all those who embark on the joyful journey of marriage are heard and respected.

*[English]*

On behalf of the voiceless, we are acting in many cases in these measures to codify a minimum age for marriage and to prevent forced marriage. For those who have been compelled into unhappy unions, unions that have resulted in violence or have subjected women to sexual assault on a repeated and continuing basis, we need to make sure that we can take action for their sake to prevent such violence against women, and violence generally.

Building on the proposed amendments to the Civil Marriage Act, Bill S-7 also contains measures that would amend the Criminal Code to help prevent forced or underage marriages, including, henceforth, making it a criminal act to knowingly officiate at an underage or forced marriage; to knowingly and actively participate in a wedding ceremony in which one party is marrying another against his or her will or is under 16 years old; or to remove a minor from Canada for a forced or underage marriage.

For example, if a parent, a mother or a father, who received payment from another family in this country or outside this country to marry off one of their children to a member of that other family, but who did not seek and certainly did not obtain the enlightened and free consent of the child involved, were there simply as the parent of the bride or the groom, even if they were not officiating at the marriage ceremony, would be committing a crime. The crime would be that they had brought forward a child, compelled a child, to be married without their consent, against their free will. This should be a crime, and I think we all agree on that in Canada today.

There is a very clear distinction between this and an arranged marriage, where families introduce children, parents want the union to happen, and the parties to be married themselves consent and agree, where they have truly decided that this is the right choice for them. That type of marriage is not affected by this bill. However, a forced marriage, where the parents or anyone else who is involved in a transaction or in the compulsion agree, but the parties themselves do not agree, would henceforth place those responsible, those with a substantial role in arranging the marriage, in a position where they are committing a criminal act.

Other proposed amendments would create a new peace bond that would give courts the power to impose conditions on an individual when there are reasonable grounds to fear that a forced marriage or marriage under the age of 16 would otherwise occur. This is particularly important in our efforts to prevent those who know that a forced marriage would not be tolerated in Canada from having an underage child, or any child, removed against their will so that the marriage could take place in another jurisdiction.

*Government Orders*

We will have the tools under Bill S-7 to take action against those who would choose this unfortunate and, indeed, dangerous course of action as well. Such a peace bond could be used to prevent an underage or forced marriage by requiring, for example, the surrender of a passport, as well as preventing a child from being taken out of Canada. This is a very important option for a young girl, for example, who wants to stop her family from taking her out of the country for a forced marriage, but does not want to press charges against her family members, a situation that arises quite commonly. She would have that important option and would be able to save herself from an unwanted fate.

Anyone who wonders whether this is widespread or necessary need only pick up the phone or come to speak to any of us at the citizenship and immigration committee, who will put them in touch with people in our global network, those retired or those still in service, who will tell them that this is happening. Forced and underage marriage is a reality in Canada, and the removal of young people to face these dreadful consequences abroad is also all too common.

Measures in the bill would also amend the Criminal Code to address so-called honour killings. Unfortunately, we have seen these cases too often on our soil. In fact, while there is not a large number—several dozen in recent decades—there have more cases in the last 10 or 15 years than in the previous 20 years, according to the available studies. So called honour-based violence is usually perpetrated against family members, usually women and girls, who are perceived to have brought shame or dishonour to the family.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

These honour killings are usually premeditated and committed with a certain level of approval from family members and the community, and sometimes with their participation.

[*English*]

However, in some cases, they may also be alleged to be spontaneous killings in response to behaviour by the victim that is perceived to be disrespectful, insulting, or harmful to a family's reputation. Under the Criminal Code, anyone charged with and found to have committed murder can raise the defence of provocation in seeking a reduction to the lesser charge of manslaughter. Under Bill S-7, that option would no longer be available.

We think, taken together, these measures represent important progress against barbaric practices that are all too common in the world today and still present in Canada. I appreciate the opportunity to present them to the House.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. He explained some of the measures in Bill S-7.

As a preface to my question, I must say that I agree with a number of the things he said. Naturally, I agree that no girl should be subject to violence and that there is no place in this country for forced marriage, honour crimes or any other type of violence against women. We agree with this principle and with the objective here.

However, I must point out that today we are not debating whether someone who forces a child to marry should be sentenced, punished or criminally charged. Anyone who commits violence against children and women should be punished. We must all do everything we can to stop this kind of barbaric practice and this type of violence.

That said, my question is about the bill itself. Will Bill S-7 really help us achieve this goal?

The minister is certainly aware that the Senate conducted a study, that a number of experts and lawyers spoke out against the bill and that some serious concerns were expressed by witnesses. Bill S-7 could make victims more vulnerable. Instead of helping victims and bringing the guilty parties to justice, the bill could have the opposite effect. A number of victims' advocates and groups working directly with victims say that the provisions in the Citizenship Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, as well as the amendments to the Criminal Code, could make people less inclined to speak out for fear of reprisals from their family.

Is the minister aware of these concerns and is he interested in improving the bill to ensure that it truly protects victims?

• (1040)

**Hon. Chris Alexander:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her question and her general support for numerous measures found in the bill. Yes, we all have the shared goal of preventing violence against women, and, in fact, all violence, period. I also want to thank her for using the term “barbaric”, because these practices really are barbaric and should be called what they are.

I am well aware of the testimony given in committee. When it comes to both immigration and the Criminal Code, we always see so-called specialized groups in one sector or another that say there is no need to legislate, that we should just let them take care of it and they will solve the problem, and no one from the legal system or the immigration system needs to get involved. We tried that method for decades. Early and forced marriages, polygamy and honour killings continue to be practised in many cases. It is time to provide women and girls who have been the victims of these crimes the same degree of protection as that provided to Canadians in all other areas and for all other crimes.

We need the full force of the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to prevent these barbaric practices and crimes. There is no other way to ensure proper protection other than legislating as we are prepared to do.



*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we agree with the intention of the legislation before us. I think all here agree that violence against women and girls, forced marriage, polygamy, and the other issues the minister spoke of in his speech are all things to be abhorred. However, the difficulty I have and that I want the minister respond to is the inclusion of the word “cultural” in any of these things.

All of these things are ethical questions, not cultural questions. I would suggest that it is inappropriate to tie any of these practices to a specific culture. Not only is it inappropriate, it is simply unnecessary. We can pass a law that bans these things, and we should, without tying them to culture. They should be tied to ethics. I would suggest that tying them to culture causes us to judge cultures by some of the worst practices within them. It is entirely unnecessary to approach this by including any cultural element.

What is added to the bill by the inclusion of “culture” in the title? Would the minister consider removing it so that the perception that any particular culture is being criticized or judged can be expunged and we can move forward collaboratively with this effort, because we all agree on the principles?

**Hon. Chris Alexander:** Mr. Speaker, no, we will not remove the word “cultural”, because it is deeply relevant to the objective we are trying to achieve here.

No specific culture, either national, ethnic, or territorial, is being targeted by this bill. What is being targeted is a culture of tolerance and sometimes a culture of indifference to these issues that have found a place in Canada and in many other places around the world. I would challenge anyone in the House to deny that there is a certain cultural environment, yes, in some communities in Canada, but definitely in some countries around the world, that tolerates these barbaric practices.

I am not surprised to hear this criticism from a member of the Liberal Party, because it was his leader who objected to the use of the term “barbaric” to describe any of these practices whatsoever. He was not willing to describe violence against women, whether female genital mutilation, forced marriage, or honour killings, by the name that Canadians, with our principled approach to these issues, insist on using.

This violence, whether against aboriginal women and girls, immigrant women and girls, or women and girls in some other community in Canada, is unacceptable and barbaric. That culture has no place in Canada. It is incompatible with Canadian values.

I will take the example of Lee Marsh, a Jehovah's witness who just turned 18. As reported in a recent issue of *Maclean's*, Lee Marsh's mother came into the room and told Lee that she would marry a 20-year-old man whom she had met only once before. She was quoted as saying that she was not allowed an opinion. She wanted to run, but she was not allowed to. She was compelled into this marriage.

The culture surrounding that type of practice is unacceptable, and the consequences, the violence that can ensue, the repeated sexual assaults, are indeed barbaric.

● (1045)

[Translation]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to speak to Bill S-7, the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act.

First, as I mentioned in the question I asked the minister a little earlier today, I agree that no girl or woman in this country or in any country in the world should have to be subject to any kind of violence. I want to emphasize that. Today, we are talking particularly about violence against women in the form of forced marriage or honour killings, for example.

Canadians are appalled by these practices, which are not acceptable in Canada and in most other countries. We need to fight against these practices. As a parliamentarian, I would be pleased to support any bill that would provide additional protection to victims and would represent a step in the right direction, even if it involved only a small contribution or a small amendment that could provide tools or help to prevent such crimes. I would be the first to support such a bill.

The battle to combat violence against women is one that is primarily being fought on the ground. I tip my hat to the front-line workers, security personnel, border officers and, in short, everyone who works on the ground and witnesses this type of violence and crime. They have to intervene to prevent these crimes and help victims. It is an ongoing battle. I tip my hat to all of those who are directly or indirectly involved in fighting this type of violence against women.

Nevertheless, this fight is not just being fought on the ground. People on the ground need decision makers and those with the power to change the laws to listen to what they are saying and partner with them so that they can get the tools and resources they need to move forward and combat violence against women.

In short, as I said, I would be pleased to support any bill that represents progress in combatting this type of violence against women, such as forced marriages. However, I am not sure that Bill S-7 is such a bill, and I will explain why.

First, little has been said about this inside the House, but a lot has been said about it outside the House, in the media. The public has talked about this a great deal and so have experts and workers in the field. I am referring to the title of this bill.

I agree that forced marriage or any type of violence against women is barbaric and cruel and must be eliminated. However, I take issue with the word “cultural” in the title of the bill, and so do many Canadians. Is forced marriage really exclusive to a few cultural communities, or any culture? Of course not. Unfortunately, violence is committed against women in every country and in every culture. Anyone who thinks that the way to fight this practice is to engage in a witch hunt and identify certain cultures is mistaken. That is not the point and it is not the right approach.

*Government Orders*

I said a little earlier that the fight against violence against women is taking place primarily on the ground. To effectively fight against this violence, we have to establish partnerships with all those who can help. That includes people from all cultures. We cannot alienate them or attack any culture. We have to bring people together and establish a partnership with all cultures.

A bill title like this one only puts up obstacles to establishing the necessary partnerships for taking on this fight.

• (1050)

I would like to quote Ms. Miville-Dechêne, president of Quebec's Conseil du statut de la femme:

Of course, punishment must be imposed, but prevention is also important, and using such a strong title and the word “barbaric” may inhibit community cooperation. However, community cooperation is a necessary part of prevention.

Basically, putting the words “barbaric” and “cultural” together will not lead us to positive solutions and will not really help us fight violence against women.

I recently met some people who need police protection to get to work. Kids now need police protection to get to school. Why? Because the social climate is so tense and some cultural communities are being targeted and experiencing tensions they definitely do not deserve.

That is due in part to the language that leaders like us use publicly and misguidedly. When ministers tell people to go back to their own country if they are not happy, when they give their own definitions of a terrorist act and associate it with a particular culture, that does not make a positive contribution to solving problems. On the contrary, that kind of language ostracizes communities and cultures and endangers children and law-abiding people who deserve to have us do everything in our power to keep them safe too.

In short, the title of this bill is completely inappropriate and could undermine our fight to protect women from abusive practices.

Second, in addition to the title, parts of this bill lead us to believe that these measures could also jeopardize women's safety and undermine efforts to fight violence against women.

Bill S-7 will amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, supposedly to help combat polygamy. We are concerned that these amendments will interfere with the protection of women. Women will be affected in one way or another by the fact that under Bill S-7, the mere suspicion of polygamy can result in inadmissibility to Canada or removal orders. This could have unintended negative consequences.

I would like to once again quote Ms. Miville-Dechêne, a witness who appeared before the Senate committee. This is what she had to say about the measures on polygamy.

However, we want women, who are not themselves polygamists—and I want to stress this—to be protected and be able to stay in the country when a deportation takes place. What would be the point of deporting the polygamist man with his women, who are not polygamists, to their country of origin? We feel that care should be taken to protect women.

That is just one of many quotes. I would also like to quote Ms. Siddiqui, the head of policy and research at Southall Black Sisters. She said:

Anything that you introduce around immigration is not going to affect just the perpetrator but the whole family — the women and children in that polygamous relationship; and that can have a detrimental effect on them as well.

Avvy Yao-Yao Go, director of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, said:

The bill seeks to deport people who are engaged in polygamy, and that would include the very women that the government claims it's trying to protect.

Many witnesses testified about this. I quoted three. If our experts on the ground have these concerns, we need to listen to them. The minister clearly told us that these opinions did not hold much water and that we had to move forward in spite of them.

I am concerned when I hear comments like that from a minister who is already telling us that he is not prepared to change the title or the content of the bill, claiming that this is what people on the ground are asking him to do. That is worrisome. I am not prepared to support a bill that could interfere with the protection of women and their children.

It is also important to address the changes to the Criminal Code with regard to forced marriages.

• (1055)

The bill suggests, for example, prison sentences for family members who participate in the marriage. The minister talked about this earlier.

This measure runs the risk of silencing the victims and preventing them from seeking the services and protections they need. Let me explain. Take for example the case of a forced marriage of a 16-year-old girl. The parents say that it is an arranged marriage, not a forced one. The girl has the choice to speak out or not. If she is given the choice between sending her parents to prison to be safe and keeping her mouth shut and figuring out a way to deal with this in order to keep people she has known her whole life, such as her parents, around her, then this 16-year-old girl might very well be too scared to say anything that could send her parents, brothers and sisters to prison.

Clearly, these people have committed reprehensible acts, but if we show a bit of empathy and put ourselves in the place of the 16-year-old, are there no other measures we could put in place to ensure that she gets the protection she deserves without having to send her parents to prison for up to five years? Of course, these cases call for punishment or intervention, but we have to think about how to go about this and how to ensure that the maximum number of victims seek the help they need. That is the goal.

How many forced marriages or child marriages are there in this country? We certainly have numbers and statistics. Nonetheless, we are unable to truly understand the extent of the problem because the biggest problem in all this is the secrecy surrounding these practices. That is the number one problem. The first thing we have to ask ourselves, as legislators, is how to address this problem, how to ensure that people are more inclined to report what they see and seek the help and security they need. Bill S-7 will not do that.

I would again like to quote Ms. Siddiqui, the head of policy and research at Southall Black Sisters in the United Kingdom:

*Government Orders*

The problem for us was that we worked directly with survivors and victims. A lot of them are girls and young women who say to us, "I do want protection from the police, but I don't want to prosecute my parents or my family. I don't want to see them go to jail." They clearly said that if they went to the police and they were going to prosecute, then they would withdraw their charges; they would not cooperate or would not even go to the police in the first place.

I could also quote Ms. Butt, executive director of the Social Services Network:

Criminalization of forced marriage, without the much needed institutional support for victims, would only further alienate and harm those facing forced marriage and gender-based violence, with the added insult of being stigmatized that they come from barbaric cultures.

In short, many people are opposed to the bill because of events that have taken place and what the experts are seeing in real life. We need to pay attention to what these people have to say. That is why I moved a motion in the House. I understand and agree with the minister's stated goal of fighting against forced marriages and violence against women and also helping victims. However I do not agree with the proposed approach, which could not only lead us in the wrong direction, but move us backwards, further ostracize victims and reduce the number of cases reported.

I will read part of the motion that I moved in order to explain it. I recommend that all my colleagues on both sides of the House support it. It reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, forced marriages are a crime that constitutes violence against women and consequently, the government should:

- (a) strongly condemn the practice;

I believe that with this bill the minister wants to condemn these practices. It is important to do so. These practices must be condemned, but we must ensure that by condemning them we do not harm those who suffer because of them.

• (1100)

Furthermore, a number of experts have said that this bill did not do much, since there are already Criminal Code provisions to convict those guilty of pushing someone into a forced marriage or a forced child marriage.

For example, Mr. Spratt, a criminal lawyer and member of the Criminal Lawyers' Association and the Defence Counsel Association of Ottawa, spoke about the section regarding a recognizance to keep the peace:

I'm not saying that that's bad or that this section is bad. It's just not a cure to the ills that this bill aims to correct, and it's not going to be effective in limiting these types of situations. It seems to be nothing more than mere puffery because it's not going to play out in court how it's been billed.

Not only are these measures dangerous, but they also do not seem relevant in terms of their application.

Deepa Mattoo, a lawyer and the acting executive director of the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, said that in most cases, there is adequate recourse in the Criminal Code of Canada to deal with forced marriages before and after the marriage. For example, she mentioned sections 292 and 273.3 regarding procuring a feigned marriage:

No person shall do anything for the purpose of removing from Canada a person [a child] who is ordinarily resident in Canada...*(a)*...with the intention that an act be committed outside Canada that if it were committed in Canada would be an offence...

These are just examples to show that the Criminal Code already includes several provisions to convict people who do this. However, do we have the resources we need on the ground to ensure that we first get the reports that will then lead to prosecutions?

My motion also asks the government to increase funding for organizations that work with potential or proven victims. As I said a bit earlier, the low reporting rate is another problem with respect to these practices. It is difficult to get witnesses and victims of these practices to report them. It is also difficult to have resources on the ground to help these people. My motion is therefore a step in the right direction. Punishment alone is not enough. We have to remember our primary objective, which is to protect victims and prevent these crimes.

My motion also calls on the government to consult women, communities, organizations and experts so that we can get a more accurate picture of the situation and figure out the best ways to fix it. I get the feeling that Bill S-7 was concocted by departmental people who never consulted lawyers or people on the ground. These problems exist. That is what the minister said, and I agree with him.

Whether these practices are widespread or not, if we can help even one victim, it is worth it. These practices exist, but we need to find out exactly what is going on. Then we have to identify the main obstacles and implement smart measures, not just measures that respond to an electoral base's fears.

Other countries have studied this issue before our debate here in the House, and they have implemented measures. We can learn from their debates and from the outcome of their measures.

The United Kingdom, for instance, has adopted a method that allows victims to choose between a civil process and a criminal process in the event of prosecution. Giving victims this power gives them the confidence they need to seek help and report someone, without necessarily sending a family member to prison, if that is something they are afraid of.

In 2008, Denmark introduced criminal offences similar to those set out in Bill S-7, and not one guilty party has been brought to justice since that time, which reinforces what I was saying earlier. If we pass Bill S-7, will we not hurt victims and prevent them from reporting violence, rather than help victims and bring criminals to justice?

I wish I could go on, but I will close by saying that the bill's title and the measures in it are hardly a step forward. That is why I recommend that the House not vote in favour of Bill S-7 at second reading, and instead vote in favour of my motion.

We need to keep our primary objective in mind, which is to combat these practices and help victims, not harm them, and yet that is exactly what Bill S-7 could do.

That is why the rhetoric has to stop. We need to completely change our perspective and our focus when it comes to issues like violence against women and adopt positive measures that really will help the people affected.

*Government Orders*

•(1105)

**Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to listen to my colleague's speech, but I was disappointed by its content.

She used the word “barbaric” in her first question, but she refuses to use that word in the title of the bill. This is a reflection of the NDP's approach to everything, when it comes to criminal justice and this bill. The NDP denounces forced marriage, honour crimes and violence against women, but it does not want to take any action. It advocates inaction. It wants young girls to report offenders and people who hurt them, but without making it clear that a crime was committed. Why?

Does the hon. member not think that in the case of misrepresentation, someone living in a polygamous relationship should be deported like anyone else found guilty of misrepresentation? If we are talking about sexual assault, of course, there is recourse and the possibility of staying here. However, misrepresentation is unacceptable in the case of polygamy and in other cases.

Let us talk about provocation. Should a person be able to use honour as a reason for pleading provocation as a defence for a crime like murder? If a young girl does not want to go through the criminal process, is the hon. member aware of peace bonds? Using—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. I ask all hon. members to keep their questions to under a minute.

The hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

•(1110)

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot respond to everything my colleague said, but I will try to cover as much as possible.

I think my colleague misunderstood what I said about the title. I do not oppose using “barbaric” in the title. I am opposed to associating the term “barbaric” with “cultural”. Do we need to say that these are cultures with barbaric practices?

I mentioned it in my speech and I will not repeat it, but that will alienate some cultural communities, rather than building bridges and ensuring that we can work with them to eliminate these practices. They are essential partners, and solutions will be found only by forging partnerships with people from all cultures. Thus, I am not against the use of the term “barbaric”.

I completely agree that forced marriages and violence against women are completely unacceptable, even barbaric. However, I am against calling them cultural practices because we have seen in several cases that, in fact, we find these practices in any culture.

I would like to continue but I have run out of time. I hope I can talk more about this when I answer the next question.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague may have answered the question I was going to ask. I would just like to be sure.

I believe that the NDP and the Liberals agree that we accept the term “barbaric”, but not the term “cultural”. It seems to me that if we use the term “cultural”, some communities will believe that they may be the problem, which is not the case. We believe that these practices

are barbaric, but found in all cultures. It seems to me that the term “cultural” adds nothing to this bill.

I would just like to check whether my colleague agrees with that.

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** Mr. Speaker, I agree, and that is more or less what I was just saying.

I would like to take this opportunity to also speak about the purpose of this bill, because we have not really addressed that. This is a classic example of the Conservatives claiming to want to combat some type of wrongdoing or crime and then proposing a bill that is completely off the mark.

In 2012, the Conservatives introduced the conditional permanent residence status in order to combat fraudulent marriages. Everyone on the ground agrees that rather than helping to do away with such marriages this measure makes women more vulnerable. What is more, many experts are calling on the government to reconsider this measure and do away with the conditional permanent residence status. The Conservatives are turning a deaf ear.

More recently, Motion No. 505 was implemented in 2014. The purpose of that motion is also to combat fraudulent marriages; however, it actually attacks proxy marriages. Since refugee claimants are often married by proxy, this motion does more to interfere with family reunification than it does to combat fraudulent marriage. This is a classic example of the Conservatives saying that they want to combat x, y or z but then implementing measures that are harmful to victims and that make certain groups more vulnerable.

That is unacceptable, and Bill S-7 is yet another example.

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. We have had two very high profile cases that have shown the power of our courts to go after groups that abuse young women.

The case involving the Mormon fundamentalists in Bountiful was brought all the way to the Supreme Court. Some said that they were fighting for religious freedoms, but clearly this was an abuse of young women and girls, and the courts upheld the anti-polygamy laws.

It is the same with Lev Tahor, the fundamentalist orthodox cult. The Quebec and Ontario police moved against it because they recognized that within the so-called claim of religion there was an ongoing attack against young women and girls, and there was a need to protect them.

What is in this bill that would give the police and the authorities any new powers that they do not already have in going after anyone who uses religion, or culture or whatever to abuse young women and girls in forced marriages? If the laws already exist, if they have been upheld at the Supreme Court level, what possible additions have been added to this at which Parliament needs to look?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I would also like to thank him for making those important points.

*Government Orders*

Many also believe that this bill will not only harm victims but it will also fail to provide the additional necessary tools. I can mention others. The minister spoke earlier about honour killings. The government is saying that Bill S-7 will ensure that the provocation defence will not apply to honour killings. Meanwhile, a number of rulings have shown that cultural grounds cannot be used to justify an honour killing. On the contrary, the court interpreted such arguments as a reason for the crime, rather than mitigating grounds. The court saw these arguments as proof that the unacceptable crime was planned. If we look at the decisions rendered in the past, we see that the courts are able to deal with such grievances under the Criminal Code.

• (1115)

[*English*]

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member's intervention on this bill. I take exception to and would like clarification on something she said. She takes exception to the term "barbaric culture". She has no problem with the word "barbaric", but takes issue with the word "culture", thinking that somehow that speaks to a specific cultural group, which the bill does not.

Within some families in specific groups, if a 15-year-old girl is forced into a marriage against her will and if she rebels against it and says that it is not consensual, that she does not want that, she is stoned, or killed, or defamed in some way because she somehow has brought disrespect to the family. Is that not a barbaric culture? This is a cultural tool that is used in some groups to resolve an issue they think has brought disrespect to the family.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** Mr. Speaker, I am not the only one to say so. A number of people on the ground are saying that we need to be careful because this title will hurt us and prevent us from achieving the objective of the bill.

Earlier, my colleague mentioned Bountiful. Could the parliamentary secretary tell me what culture is in Bountiful?

This is not what we are debating, and it does no good to point fingers at certain cultures that are already ostracized as a result of debates being held at different levels in this country. I can name a number of people who say that the very title of Bill S-7 and the various legislative amendments it would bring about are based on racist stereotypes and contribute to xenophobia against certain radicalized communities.

This title encourages xenophobia and racism, and it further ostracizes communities. These are major problems that we need to look at. What good does that do for this bill?

[*English*]

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to share my time with my colleague, the member for Charlottetown.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Speaker, it means that members only have to listen to me for half the time. They might approve of that proposition.

I am pleased to say that the Liberals will support this legislation, but as I will indicate in a few minutes, we have problems with the title. We also, in particular, want to remove the word "cultural".

We are, of course, opposed to these barbaric practices, including forced marriages, underage marriages, polygamy, honour killings, and domestic violence. We would argue that on the whole, this legislation would do little to advance the fact that these practices are already illegal. Maybe around the edges some improvement would be achieved, but my main point is that this legislation misses a golden opportunity to do something real on the subject of domestic violence and in particular on the abuse of women.

This issue came up very strongly in the hearings at the immigration committee over the past months on the subject of the treatment of women by the immigration system and measures to reduce violence against women.

One of the issues that got a lot of attention was the provision for a two-year conditional state for people who bring in spouses from overseas. In the old days, the spouse from overseas would immediately become a permanent resident, but now that person has to live with his or her spouse for a period of two years before achieving landed permanent resident status. Witness after witness testified that this system led to the potential for abuse and actual abuse, and it is not difficult to understand why. It is an extremely unequal relationship. If one is a woman who is married to a man, and the woman has just come from overseas, and if that woman is subject to abuse of any kind and moves away from the marriage, she has no status in Canada anymore and is liable to be deported back to her own country. That forces the woman to stay within the marriage, even if it is abusive.

I remember counting the expert witnesses who testified to this effect and argued that this provision should be terminated. I do not remember the exact number, but it was perhaps six out of eight witnesses or something to that effect. All of these expert witnesses, who ran organizations, who sought to help women who had been subject to abuse, believed that this provision was aiding and abetting the abuse of women.

If the government wanted to do something concrete in this area, it has missed a golden opportunity to simply repeal this two-year provision. I understand that marriages of convenience are a challenge that have to be dealt with in many ways, and I do not minimize the importance of the issue. However, my point would be that the fight against marriages of convenience should not be fought on the backs of women who are subject to abuse because of this two-year rule. More important than all of the other parts of the bill, which are largely covered by existing law in any case, would have been action on this front, which would have a real impact on the barbaric practices and domestic violence that we all decry.

*Government Orders*

In that respect, I agree with my colleague in the NDP that this legislation largely addresses issues that are already covered by existing law and leaves a big hole on issues it chooses not to cover. As a consequence, at the end of the day it would not do a great deal to advance the cause.

The other point I would like to focus on is the use of the word “cultural”. That word is both offensive and unnecessary. We on this side of the House agree that these practices are barbaric, so we do not object at all to the use of that word.

● (1120)

When one inserts the word “cultural”, it carries the implication that there are certain cultures, certain communities, that are being targeted. Whether that is in the minds of the Conservatives is something we can debate, but it certainly carries that implication across the country. There is no reason to force that implication to be carried, because as has been pointed out, in terms of polygamy and other barbaric practices, they are certainly not limited to any one community. We had the example of the Bountiful group, which is Christian. We had the Jewish group that was mentioned. Across all religions and all cultures we see, in some cases, the practice of these barbaric acts.

I do not think the word “cultural” adds anything. It certainly does not add anything to the content of this bill, and it is misleading in that it carries the implication in the minds of some Canadians that this bill is targeting their particular culture or community.

I know that the Conservatives are not always quick to accept suggested changes to their wonderful legislation, but I would say to them that this word adds nothing to the content of the bill and nothing to the agreement we have on all sides of the House that these practices are indeed barbaric. All it does is lead certain communities to believe that they are being targeted or insulted, and there is no reason whatsoever to carry that implication. I would once again urge the Conservatives to drop that word.

With regard to the elements in the bill, we certainly agree that underage marriage is and should be illegal. We agree with the age of 16 that is in the bill. We obviously are opposed to forced marriages, to polygamy, and to honour killings. It is almost unnecessary to make these statements, because the vast majority of Canadians are opposed to these practices. The existing law already makes these practices illegal. The bill would add a few details to make them even more illegal. Therefore, we will support it. However, I do not think that, at the end of the day, this bill would do very much more than is already in the existing law.

I also think that with the use of the word “cultural” the Conservatives are unnecessarily insulting segments of Canadian society.

Last but not least, by ignoring important practices and allowing them to continue, such as these two-year conditional marriages, they are wasting an opportunity to do something real to improve the situation for immigrants, and particularly for women, in this country.

● (1125)

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I am delighted to hear that the Liberal Party will be

supporting this piece of legislation, although I have some concerns regarding some of the content of the member's speech this morning.

I see quite a significant flip-flop in the Liberals' position on the name “barbaric”, as the Liberal leader took exception to the word “barbaric”. However, I am happy to see that the Liberals have now seen the light that these practices are indeed barbaric and are not taking exception to that word.

I want to talk about the tie the member tried to make between the phrases “barbaric cultural practices” and “cultural communities”. They are two completely different things. A cultural practice that would impose violence and possibly death on a young lady because she does not concede to what the family decided the day she was born is indeed a barbaric cultural practice. Does the member not see that there is no correlation between that and specific communities? This fearmongering and trying to point to specific cultural communities is way off base.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I thank the member for thanking us for our support, so I will be pleasant in my comments. However, I think he is tying himself in knots in terms of the definition of the word “cultural” in the English language.

Of course, a culture of honour killings is something we oppose, but there is no need to use the word “culture”. As I said, the word “culture” adds nothing to the content of the bill and nothing to the message being sent. However, it sends a negative message to many individuals within this country. It is unnecessary. It adds nothing. It is offensive to some.

If the government had an element of consideration for Canadians across this land, it would remove that word.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk to my colleague about the content of the bill.

He knows that a number of witnesses spoke to the bill. For example, Ms. Yao-Yao Go of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic said:

The bill seeks to deport people who are engaged in polygamy, and that would include the very women that the government claims it's trying to protect.

Ms. Mattoo of the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario said:

We stand for victims and survivors of gender-based violence, whose voices have told us, time and time again, that they would not come forward if it meant criminal sanctions or deportation of their families.

The bill could hurt and further ostracize women and victims of forced or polygamous marriages. What does my colleague have to say about such statements? Does he not worry that by supporting Bill S-7, he is promoting the victimization of women?

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague just quoted some of the witnesses I mentioned, who oppose the notion of having to be married for two years before permanent residence is granted. Those quotations support our proposal concerning that provision.

I am not sure whether the bill's provisions make things any worse, but I do not think they improve things, either. The government could have taken other measures, but it chose not to.

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill S-7, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act. This bill targets several practices that the Liberals fundamentally disagree with, including early or forced marriage, polygamy, and domestic violence. Although we have been accused otherwise, we agree that these practices are barbaric and will be supporting the bill for further study at committee.

I want to state off the top that we do not agree with linking violence against women to culture, as the Conservatives have tried to do. Violence against women is a phenomenon that exists in every culture, and we are saddened that the government is trying to score cheap political points with respect to this serious matter. Violence against women is not an issue of culture; it is an issue of ethics. It is not an issue tied to place of origin, language, wealth, or ethnic nationality. Wherever we find it, violence against women is an issue of right and wrong.

Equality and justice are universal values. Kindness and respect are universal values. They are not linked to any particular culture any more than misogyny is linked to a particular culture. Barbarism is barbarism wherever we find it, and we should not judge any cultural group by the worst practices of some of its members.

My point is that for the Conservatives to look outwardly and point out how other cultures treat women is to ignore the misogyny that transcends culture. As great philosophers and religious intellectuals have demonstrated, ethics are rational, and people everywhere can reason about right and wrong, so I say again that misogyny is not a cultural problem; rather, it is an ethical one. I would say the same of discrimination or violence based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or mental or physical disability.

Let us not denigrate entire cultures. Instead, when talking about barbaric practices, let us talk about ethics. Let us talk about universal values instead of suggesting that entire cultures are somehow in conflict.

Canada's multicultural success story insists the exact opposite. Many cultures have come together and flourished here on the basis of universal values, the values enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Our charter is an ethical document, not a cultural one. It gives legal force to rational, moral principles based on the best arguments, not cultural principles based on history or tradition. Therefore, let us agree to language that unites, not language that divides. Let us build consensus on what is right and wrong rather than drawing lines between cultures and shouting back and forth. For that reason, I repeat that barbaric practices are unethical actions, not cultural actions.

That is how this conversation should be framed, and language makes a huge difference. People are more likely to accept a valid moral argument if we do not make it while insulting their entire culture. For that reason, the Liberals will move an amendment to remove the word "cultural" from the short title of this bill and change it to "zero tolerance for barbaric practices". After all, if we listen to how it sounds, it has a nice ring to it. It is something everyone in the House can get behind.

Therefore, why not cut one word from this bill? Heaven knows that the current government has cut everything else. In Prince Edward Island, we know that better than most.

With respect to the content of this bill, I say at the outset that there are some good ideas here. What would the bill do? On early and forced marriages, Bill S-7 would establish a national minimum age for marriage of 16 years of age. Previously, only Quebec has had a legislated minimum age, while other provinces relied on common law definitions. The bill also proposed to codify the requirement for free and enlightened consent for marriage or divorce.

Bill S-7 also creates a new Criminal Code offence for knowingly officiating at a forced or early marriage, for knowingly and actively participating in a forced or early marriage, or for removing a child from Canada for the purpose of an early or forced marriage. These measures are similar to current laws in the Criminal Code that relate to bigamy.

• (1135)

In addition, Bill S-7 would create a peace bond regime with regard to early or forced marriages that would allow a person to petition a court for a peace bond to prevent an early or forced marriage. Violating the requirements of this peace bond would be an offence. The peace bond provision would create an opportunity for someone from outside the affected family, such as a community member or a teacher, to petition the court if they became aware of an issue.

As to polygamy, that practice is already illegal in Canada. The B. C. Supreme Court has upheld that limit on freedom of religion because of the harm the practice causes to women, children, and the institution of monogamous marriage. Bill S-7 further addresses polygamy by amending Canada's immigration rule to make those planning to practice polygamy in Canada inadmissible to the country. It also clarifies that those seeking permanent residence in Canada must stop practising polygamy and will be permitted to immigrate with only one monogamous spouse.

Colleagues, though I agree that we do not want to see polygamy coming into Canada, I would flag to the committee that there could be some practical legal problems flowing from this chain. For example, what happens to additional spouses that an immigrant to Canada leaves behind? Would their property claims against their absconding husband be enforceable in Canada if we do not recognize the marriage? If somehow an additional spouse also gets into Canada—independently, for example—could they obtain a divorce from their husband? Also, what happens to the children of additional spouses? Could they come to Canada, but only if they leave their mother behind?

I do not know the answers to these practical legal problems, but I expect the committee to take a good, hard look at them before changing the law. The last thing we want to do is exacerbate the harms of polygamy and hurt vulnerable women and children who have done nothing wrong.

*Government Orders*

Finally, we come to the issue of domestic violence, and in particular crimes that are often called honour killings. Stories of such atrocities have shocked Canadians, particularly the Shafia family quadruple murder in Kingston in 2009. In an attempt to address this issue, Bill S-7 would place restrictions on the long-standing provocation defence, which can reduce culpable homicide from murder to manslaughter.

As it currently stands, provocation reduces murder to manslaughter if the accused acted in the heat of passion and immediately following a sudden provocation. The provocation must be an act or insult by the victim that would be sufficient to deprive an ordinary person of the power of self-control. Further, that act or insult cannot be something that the victim was incited to do by the accused to gain an excuse.

First, it is worth noting that this defence has never succeeded in an honour killing. Second, the proposed change would require the victim to have committed a criminal act against the accused for the defence to be available. Notably, this amendment would mean that insults are no longer provocation, including insults using racial epithets and so forth.

I am not sure this change is a good one, since some insults are actually more provocative than some assaults or threats. I trust the committee will look closely at this issue.

I will leave my concerns at that for the time being. I will say that when this bill goes to committee, Liberals will expect the government to act responsibly, to consider legal expertise, and to maintain the coherence and logic of Canada's Criminal Code.

In conclusion, this bill targets several practices with which Liberals fundamentally disagree. However, at this stage we have three concerns with Bill S-7. The first is the use of the term "cultural" in the title. The second concern relates to practical legal problems arising from immigration changes around polygamy. The third has to do with meddling with the provocation defence in a way that may go against common sense.

Of course, more concerns may arise on closer review, and I hope the committee will be open to constructive amendments. Our goal, as always, should be making good public policy.

• (1140)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague.

Bountiful, the fundamentalist Mormon cult, escaped from Utah to escape prosecution and set itself up in British Columbia. There was a huge challenge that went all the way to the Supreme Court around whether Canada's polygamy laws would stand. There was a bogus argument that this was somehow a religious right, a religious freedom argument. However, the courts disagreed and upheld the anti-polygamy laws, because in these kinds of patriarchal cults, the issue of abuse is clearly paramount.

We can look at the issue of Bountiful and other fundamentalist cults. Lev Tahor is another one. It has been called the Jewish Taliban. The Quebec police moved against them, and the Ontario courts moved against them as well, so laws are already in place against these kinds of actions.

Could my hon. colleague explain whether he thinks this bill is redundant and whether it adds new powers currently unavailable to police in protecting young girls and women against this kind of abuse?

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay raises a very valid point in that virtually all of the practices that are the subject of the bill are already illegal in Canada. This is true.

A constant question we have when we see these types of bills come before Parliament is whether the efforts of government would be better spent on resources than in tinkering with the provisions of the Criminal Code or, in this case, the Immigration and Refugee Act.

I will point to one specific measure in the bill that appears to provide new provisions as a new tool that would be available to law enforcement. The peace bond provisions proposed in the bill do not presently exist. They represent an expansion of those powers and will have some value in the issues the bill seeks to address.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was actually wondering how my Liberal colleague could even think of supporting this bill when we know that the title reeks of sensationalism and xenophobia, and furthermore, it does not in any way address the source of the problem. We are talking about criminalizing these things, although community groups, specialists and victims are saying that that will not work.

Instead, we need to provide support and funding to organizations that help victims. They can then provide information on Canada's immigration system, which is complex, and give them a plan with basic information on how to get out of these kinds of situations. We must give them the tools needed to seek help, but that aspect does not appear in Bill S-7 as it stands.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

• (1145)

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague's comment is quite right. It is true that we almost always find, in the debates of the House, that the best way to address a problem is through bills or fiscal measures. She made a very good point regarding the fact that fiscal measures would probably be more effective.

It is important to point out that that is not the question that was asked. The question is whether we support this bill. The bill clearly speaks out against forced marriage and polygamy, for example. I think it is important to send the message that we are against those practices. It is important to show this through our votes.



*Government Orders*

[English]

**Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Bill S-7, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act, reflects the high priority that our government places on supporting women and girls to live their lives free of violence.

As Minister of Status of Women, I am proud of the many actions our government has taken to address violence against women and girls, and Bill S-7 is yet another example of these efforts. This bill would ensure that no young girl or woman in Canada becomes a victim of early or forced marriage, polygamy, or violence committed in the name of so-called honour, in addition to other forms of barbaric cultural practices. I can say that this is something about which I feel very strongly. Let me be clear. Our government is taking a very strong stance against these abhorrent practices and all forms of gender-based violence.

In the most recent Speech from the Throne, we highlighted the fact that millions of women and girls worldwide continue to be brutalized by violence, including those inhumane practices of early and forced marriages. That is why Canada is leading an international effort to address these cultural practices as violations of basic human rights.

In fact, the elimination of child marriage, early marriage, and forced marriage was a key priority for me when I led Canada's delegation to the 58th meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York last year, and it will be a focal point for me and the Government of Canada yet again this year at the UN commission.

Canada was proud to be a leader in having the United Nations declare October 11 of each year to be International Day of the Girl. This important day ensures that girls' rights get the attention they deserve around the world. I was delighted when I visited India just a month ago that the Indian government is starting to take action and heed our direction in leading the way and is following our lead of dealing with this issue of early and forced child marriages.

We are also committed to ensuring that these cultural practices do not take place here on Canadian soil, and that is the reason I am here today, to speak to the measures in Bill S-7 to bring about real action. This bill would amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act, and the Criminal Code to provide protection and support for vulnerable individuals, primarily women and girls. Let me list a number of the protections and supports.

I noted earlier that the member opposite commented on how there is only one change. I disagree. There are some fundamental changes here that would make a tangible difference for women and girls across the country.

The changes would render permanent and temporary residents inadmissible if they practise polygamy in Canada. They would strengthen Canadian marriage laws by establishing a new national minimum age of marriage at 16 years of age and by codifying the existing legal requirements for free and enlightened consent for marriage and for ending an existing marriage prior to entering another.

They would criminalize certain conduct in underage and forced marriage ceremonies, including the act of removing a child from Canada for the purpose of such marriage ceremonies. This is fundamental. Children should not be put in harm's way, and we would put an end to this practice.

They would help protect potential victims of underage or forced marriages by creating a new and specific preventive court-ordered peace bond where there are grounds to fear someone would commit an offence in this area.

Finally, they would ensure that the defence of provocation would not apply to so-called honour killings and many spousal homicides.

Bill S-7 sends a clear message to anyone coming to Canada and to those who are already part of Canadian society that these practices are incompatible with Canadian values. Like all forms of violence against women and girls, they will simply not be tolerated here. The legislation before the House today is part of a multifaceted approach our government is taking to help make sure women and girls can live free of violence.

Among other important actions that have been taken has been the funding of Status of Women Canada that is at a record high, funding more than 720 projects through the women's program since 2007. This includes funding for violence against women and girls in rural and remote areas, post-secondary campus communities, and high-risk neighbourhoods. Additional projects are working to prevent the trafficking of women and girls through community planning. We are helping communities engage youth in preventing and eliminating cyber violence and sexual violence against young women and girls, and we are engaging men and boys in their efforts to end gender-based violence.

● (1150)

Just last week I spent a significant amount of time in Vancouver. One of the announcements I made was with the BC Lions, men who are taking responsibility to end violence against women and girls by making sure that other young men are well educated and treat women appropriately. This social behaviour change is essential in making sure that we end violence against women and girls, which is something our department of Status of Women Canada is focused on, as I hope all Canadians are.

Status of Women Canada is also focused on the elimination of harmful cultural practices through community-based approaches. In Montreal, we are supporting a project in partnership with the Shield of Athena family services to address family violence and violence against women and girls committed in the name of so-called honour.

In announcing this project, the Prime Minister said:

Our government is committed to protecting women, girls and other vulnerable persons from all forms of violence, and to hold offenders accountable for their acts. Honour crimes are intolerable and barbaric, and violate Canadian laws and values.

*Government Orders*

This funding will help train community liaison officers to promote awareness in their communities, identify at-risk situations, and refer potential victims to assistance.

What could be more important than making sure victims of these horrific crimes actually receive the support they deserve?

Status of Women Canada is also partnered with the Indo-Canadian Women's Association in Edmonton, on a project to find ways to end violence committed in the name of so-called honour. This project mobilizes local southeast Asian and Middle Eastern communities, service providers, faith organizations, teachers, academics, advocates, and students to find ways to end forms of gender-based violence. It included a two-day conference entitled "In the Name of Honour: Cultural Practices that Hurt Women".

From that conference came Daughters Day, a significant initiative that now takes place every September in Edmonton to make sure that individuals understand what changes have to be made and, quite frankly, what is unacceptable behaviour.

All of these projects demonstrate our government's strong commitment to giving communities the tools they need to end gender-based violence.

Our government is also taking action and dealing with the issue of violence against aboriginal and girls. This is something I take very seriously. More than talk, we believe in strong actions that reflect our society's desire to reduce and prevent violence against these aboriginal women.

We demonstrated this commitment in taking action when I announced the Government of Canada's action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women last September. This action plan takes immediate and concrete action to prevent violence, support victims, and protect aboriginal women and girls through new and ongoing commitments over the next five years. Also, there is new funding of \$25 million over five years, as well as renewed and ongoing supports, and in practical terms, nearly \$200 million over the five-year period.

The action plan includes measures that prevent violence, support aboriginal victims, and protect aboriginal women and girls from violence. This plan will support community safety plans across Canada, focus on projects that break intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse by raising awareness and building healthy relationships, support projects that engage men and boys such as I was just talking about, with our support for the BC Lions, to denounce and prevent violence, as well as provide support for aboriginal victims and their families.

In addition, Status of Women Canada will share information and resources with communities and organizations and report regularly on this progress under the action plan. We are also supporting the creation of a DNA-based missing persons index through Public Safety Canada.

I should add that these Government of Canada efforts to address violence against aboriginal women and girls also complement important work being done in the provinces and territories, the police and justice systems, aboriginal families and communities, and organizations across the country.

Status of Women Canada is very focused on this, as I said. Our dedication of an additional internal \$5 million over five years will be accessible as of April 1 to really focus on improving the economic security of aboriginal women and girls and promote their participation in leadership and decision-making roles.

It is important to note that all of these measures outlined in the action plan represent a substantive investment of close \$200 million, with some of the investments beginning as early as month and a half from now.

● (1155)

These complement a number of additional actions that our government has taken to make sure the communities are safer; quite frankly, to make sure the most vulnerable in these communities, women and girls, are safer, whether or not that be the introduction of the victims bill of rights to create clear statutory rights at the federal level for victims of crime, the first time in Canadian history this has been created.

We launched a national plan on anti-cyberbullying. I would encourage many people to look at the stop hating online initiative. Again, particularly young women are the targets of these cyberbullies.

We introduced legislation to give police and prosecutors new tools to address cyberbullying, and we launched an action plan to combat human trafficking.

We did all of this, as well as pass the Safe Streets and Communities Act to improve the safety of all Canadians.

However, one government, one person, or single organizations simply cannot do this alone. All Canadians need to be part of this solution. We must rededicate ourselves as a society to changing attitudes by underlining the fact that violence is never acceptable or normal behaviour. We need to continue to empower girls and women to speak out. We cannot continue to sweep these issues under the carpet.

We must keep working together to increase the responsiveness of our systems to meet the needs of these victims and other survivors. We must keep taking actions like those outlined in Bill S-7. This legislation sends a strong message to those already in Canada and to those who wish to come to our country that we will not tolerate cultural practices that deprive individuals of their basic human rights. We will not tolerate those who would use their cultural practices as an excuse for committing violence against women and girls. As I said earlier, these practices simply will not be tolerated on Canadian soil.

*Government Orders*

Bill S-7 is another important step we are taking as a country to help women and girls live free of violence. Creating a society in which violence against women is no longer tolerated will take a long-term commitment and continuous action, but it actually is possible. There must be a zero tolerance policy on the issues. Canadian women and girls deserve this, and I personally and our government are committed to making sure this is achieved.

Let us all pass this legislation, and let us all support this legislation and send a strong message to those who want to perpetuate these heinous crimes, these barbaric acts against women, that they simply will not be tolerated here in Canada.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her remarks on the bill. Clearly everyone in Canada is opposed to polygamy and abuse of young people who are being forced to marry against their will. However, I was speaking just last night to a young Muslim woman in Edmonton, who reviewed the bill and gave me her feedback. Her concern is that proposed section 293.1 of the Criminal Code would make anybody guilty of an indictable offence if they celebrate, aid, or participate in a marriage rite knowing one of the persons may be marrying against their will.

What is not clear from this, as she pointed out, is whether that would apply to a marriage only in Canada. It does not say so. She is deeply concerned, and I notice today that the minister misconstrued what the provisions said. When he testified at the Senate, when the same concern was raised, he said people would have to be active participants and undertaking a substantial role.

I wonder if the minister can speak to that, whether she can defend section 293.1, and whether she agrees with this young Muslim woman that she may be subject to an indictable offence if she attends a marriage where somebody is unwilling to be married, whether here or in another country.

● (1200)

**Hon. K. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear that early and forced marriages are simply unacceptable. I have been very clear on this. Our government has been very clear. These barbaric practices will not be practised in Canada.

Young women and girls need to be protected. We know that, when young women are married under the age of 16, there are huge ramifications for their education and huge ramifications for their health. These are basic human rights that need to be protected, and we as Canadians have a responsibility to protect these young women.

I am happy to chat about the details involved here, but the principle is what is important. The principle is that we make sure these early marriages, child marriages, and forced marriages simply do not happen to Canadian children.

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have three short questions for the minister. First, does the minister agree that forced marriage, early marriage, and polygamy are wrong and should be condemned, regardless of the culture? Second, if she agrees with that, does she agree that the word “culture” adds nothing to the bill? Third, if she thinks the word “culture” adds something to the bill, which cultures should be condemned?

**Hon. K. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, I have been very clear: early and forced child marriages should be condemned. They are a breach of basic human rights.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for her very eloquent, but also very passionate, speech. I know how important this issue is to her, not only as a parliamentarian but also as part of her lifelong work to assist women and girls who have unfortunately found themselves in these very difficult situations.

The minister spoke about the importance of not allowing these barbaric cultural practices to happen in our country. I wonder if she could elaborate a little on the importance and significance of educating and empowering these young girls and women so they know what avenues they have—and the bill provides many of those—and can seek some assistance when they find themselves in very difficult situations. These are often very personal family situations where, indeed, it is a cultural practice to force violence on a young girl because she did not heed what the parents promised the day she was born. I wonder if she could elaborate a little on the education and empowerment aspect of the bill.

**Hon. K. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, what occurs many times, as I have personally seen when standing in an emergency department, is that the young girl is scared. These young girls do not necessarily know where to go and do not know what their basic rights are. They do not know that these violent acts being committed against them are things they can simply say “no” to and that here on Canadian soil they will be protected.

Status of Women Canada has been working with a number of community based organizations across the country to make sure that the individuals who would be available to help these young victims can have access to the supports they require. These individuals would both educate them, to make sure they understand what their rights are, and let them know where they can go to seek support and be supported within their own local communities and within their families, so they can achieve a healthy outcome for themselves in the future.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Status of Women in Canada if she thinks we need a national action strategy to prevent and end violence against women.

The issue we are talking about today is really violence against women. Why does the government want to isolate one community by saying that it is different and it is cultural? We are talking in general about violence against women. This is a problem that we have to consider in its entirety, not in a piecemeal way depending on culture and different groups, such as aboriginal women and newcomers. We need to approach this problem the same way for everyone, not propose an essentially racist bill.

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Hon. K. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, the government has taken action in a number of areas dealing with eliminating violence against women and girls. I guess what I find most concerning is that when we put forward initiatives, the opposition simply says “no”, whether in response to our action plan to support aboriginal women and girls, the victims of crime, or to our national action plan against human trafficking, which obviously substantially impacts women. We have put forward initiatives to decrease and eliminate cyber violence and cyberbullying. We know that this disproportionately impacts young women. However, the opposition has voted against all of these things.

We are moving forward and acting to make sure that these victims of crime are supported, that we prevent crime, and that those who conduct these heinous acts are put behind bars. I wonder why the members opposite never seem to understand that they should support these initiatives to protect women from these violent offenders.

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, I would follow up by asking the minister whether she realizes that this bill would further marginalize women whose family members have put them in this situation of violence and who are, therefore, not able to bring forward criminal charges. They often do not want to.

They need resources and tools available to them, rather than our simply changing the law and saying that we are going after this problem in isolation, when we are just going to drive these women further underground.

**Hon. K. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I am surprised by this comment.

Women and girls deserve to be protected. As I mentioned in my speech, if the member had been listening, there have been 726 projects since 2007 that focus particularly on eliminating violence against women and girls. Our government is focused on action to support these victims of crime and the individuals who have experienced these horrendous acts.

I do not know if the member opposite has met any of these women. I have met them in the emergency department after they have been beaten and harmed. I would encourage her to step up and support these women and to support what our government is doing, because we are going to protect these victims. We are going to support them and their families.

[Translation]

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this debate.

This issue is very important to me. I am very concerned about violence against all women in Canada. This is my first speech as the NDP critic for status of women, and this is a very relevant issue that is all about violence against women.

This is now the most important issue facing women in Canada and around the world. There is still so much work to do to achieve equality, and one of the first things we have to do is end this violence for the sake of all women. It is very important to take a holistic approach and to recognize that social inequality, which affects all women, is the cause of this violence.

● (1210)

[English]

Let us start, though, by speaking about and understanding what forced marriage is in Canada. I will read some of the great work that has been done on the issue of violence against women in the form of forced or non-consensual marriage, because I think it will give us a good idea of what it is to live in a forced marriage.

This is from the report entitled, “Report on the Practice of Forced Marriage in Canada: Interviews with Front Line Workers”, prepared by Nai’ma Bendriss, presented to the Department of Justice in November 2008:

Although contrary to the law and an infringement of human rights under international law, forced marriage is most often the repetition of a cultural practice and a significant part of matrimonial traditions in families which practice it.

It continues:

A marriage is regarded as forced when the people who bring it about are not concerned about the consent of the individuals involved and put pressure on them in order to achieve their goal. Violence is always present, whether verbal, psychological or physical, and mainly targets young women. Because it is a taboo, this practice is still greatly underestimated if not completely ignored in Canadian society, and victims keep it a secret so as not to bring public disgrace to their families. The secrecy is heightened by the fact that the situation occurs in private.

It further states:

...women who are in a position of dependency and a relationship of subordination with their husbands because they have been sponsored by them. This situation can hinder women’s independence and strengthen the spouse’s hold over them and thereby create an unequal relationship. This is the case with many women who met our respondents, who were married against their will and sponsored by their spouse and who, in addition, are victims of conjugal violence, making their lives a series of painful events [that] can leave them increasingly vulnerable.

It goes on to state:

Because...they are vulnerable because they are in a dependent situation precisely as a result of their status as a sponsored family member, which ties them to their husbands and can be used by the husbands for all sorts of blackmail, threats and humiliation.

Bill S-7 would further chip away at these women's opportunities. This legislation would greatly exacerbate the problem, in other words, and I want to talk about why and why the government needs to understand the issue better.

It happens far too often now that we throw legislation at a problem and say, “We’ve changed the rules. This is now in the Criminal Code, this is now illegal and, therefore, the problem is solved”.

In this particular case, there are already Criminal Code routes to address this. It is not as though one cannot be prosecuted for beating one’s wife just because it happens to be an honour killing or because it is a case of a forced marriage. Those are still prosecutable crimes. They are not changed based upon where one comes from. That is something to keep in mind.

*Government Orders*

However, I wonder if this is really what this is about, because we recently heard comments by the Prime Minister singling out niqab-wearing women and antagonizing them, which is simply a way of dividing and singling people out and creating a national debate about something that really should not be happening, when we really should be working on empowering people rather than antagonizing them and creating an “us and them” narrative. This “us and them” mentality, this idea that violence against women is barbaric in some cultures, is simply unfortunate, because it seems to imply that if it is not part of a cultural community or something done by new immigrants, then it is simply some bad choice or not something systemic or societal. That is something I cannot support. I think it is incredibly important to ensure that we look at all forms of violence against women, no matter which community someone comes from.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Experts who came before the Senate committee and studied Bill S-7 told us that criminalization is not enough to solve the problem and that it will have the opposite effect and exacerbate the problem. While survivors and victims rarely choose to take legal action in cases of forced marriage, a number of provisions in the Criminal Code already provide legal recourse with regard to the offences named in this bill.

Instead of politicizing the issue of gender-based violence, the government could and should strengthen the legislative measures already in place and invest in the organizations that provide services on the ground, where the real work is done. I sincerely believe that we need to have a national action plan to end violence against women, because violence exists in every community.

The short title of this bill, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act, is truly xenophobic. It isolates a community, calling it barbaric for its violence against women. This is a problem that exists everywhere. It does not make sense to target one community in particular. It is an extremely serious problem that we all experience, and we should do everything we can to stop it. However, it is racist to isolate a community in this way. This title reinforces the prejudices against certain cultural groups by targeting them. We have to address the problem as a whole instead of marginalizing these women.

[*English*]

As I said, current legislation sufficiently addresses the issue. Civil and common provincial laws require marriage to be entered into with free and enlightened legal consent. Canadian criminal law provides recourse relevant in most cases involving force, minors, threats, abduction, confinement, sexual offences, et cetera. Further, Canada is a signatory to multiple international treaties, including CEDAW, which is the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. These are already things that we are doing.

Of course we need to reinforce these things. That means we need to help shelters and organizations that work with communities and women on the ground. That is how we do that. We give tools to law enforcement. We give tools like legal aid, and we give mental health and health services as well. Simply going about it in having a law

that specifically targets one community is a one-track way of doing it and it is not looking at the whole problem in totality.

Further, criminalization would prevent individuals from seeking help. It would marginalize the women. Over and over, we have heard front-line workers and women and girls saying that they do not want protection from police, that they do not want to prosecute their parents and family, and that they do not want to see them go to jail.

We need to keep what they are asking of us in mind. We need to listen to these women. They will often withdraw charges rather than see someone in their family prosecuted. I completely acknowledge that it is a difficult situation, but we do need to work with them. We need to recognize that where there is the desire to prosecute, those laws are there and if there is no desire, then we still need to find a way to intervene. That is why a national strategy is important.

They may often also be financially or otherwise dependent on the person who is violent toward them. They may be afraid of the repercussions of revenge by other family members, or something like that, or other people in the community.

Victims have reported that being forced to break up family ties forever can lead to rejection, stigma, ostracization, a sense of shame and dishonour, and depression. We need to keep all these things in mind.

I want to quote from the testimony given by Hannana Siddiqui, head of policy and research in the United Kingdom, during the Senate hearings. A women's minority organization called Southall Black Sisters works on the needs specifically of black and minority women who face gender-based violence in the UK. Dr. Siddiqui said:

We obviously wanted to condemn forced marriage as a practice within communities, but we disagreed on the need to criminalize it. The problem for us was that we worked directly with survivors and victims. A lot of them are girls and young women who say to us, “I do want protection from the police, but I don't want to prosecute my parents or my family. I don't want to see them go to jail.” They clearly said that if they went to the police and they were going to prosecute, then they would withdraw their charges...I think the concern was that the whole problem of forced marriage would be driven underground, particularly at a time when we were trying to encourage victims to come forward. The other thing victims said was that if you criminalize it, then it may mean that they have to break up family ties...

That is important to keep in mind. This is from someone who has been through the legislative process in the United Kingdom saying that this is exactly what is happening in this debate.

Furthermore, this legislation is inherently racist, as I said. Treating violence toward immigration women specifically as somehow being more barbaric than any other kind of gender-based violence is simply ridiculous because all violence should be considered unacceptable. Therefore, specifying “particularly” is really just adding a racist dimension to it. This makes it a cultural problem rather than a gender one, which is what it really is, therefore making us forget that we need to tackle it in all communities.

### *Government Orders*

It is also important that I quote from the status of women committee. Just two weeks ago Dr. Deepa Mattoo appeared before us. She said:

—it's not only marginalizing women, it's also marginalizing the communities they come from and targeting certain communities more so. I think it takes us away from the discourse and the reality that violence against women happens across cultures and across people's historical backgrounds, and more so when there has been a history of colonization and there has been a history of marginalization of other kinds.

Not considering violence against women a holistic issue and coming up with the discourse that there is some kind of barbaric culture in certain communities and new immigrants are necessarily more violent than people living here in Canada I think is very problematic.

As I mentioned as well, it also drives people further underground because they do not know what to do. They cannot come forward and prosecute because they do not have the resources in the community and the services to help them. The only option they have is to send a family member to jail, which would result in a very difficult situation for the individual in the community.

This bill would also politicize the issue. That is what we would be doing. Like I said, it is this us and them mentality. This is a cultural problem. It is not a gender problem. It is not something we all need to be addressing. It is specific to this community. That is very problematic as well.

● (1220)

It is also important to mention the lack of work or consultation with stakeholders. It does not listen to women, to survivors. It does not listen to their story, and that is also incredibly important to point out.

While the bill purports to protect and support vulnerable individuals, arguing that these practices exist as a result of immigration and that the government is committed to ending it, it is really a problem that is gendered.

In the time I have left, I want to talk about violence against women.

Violence against women happens all across Canada and around the world. The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. That can include, and this is very serious stuff we are talking about, physical abuse such as slapping, choking, punching, using hands or objects as weapons, threatening with a gun, a knife and committing murder. That is physical abuse.

Sexual abuse is using threats, intimidation or physical force to force women into unwanted sexual acts.

Emotional or verbal abuse is threatening to kill, whether it be the woman, her children, her loved ones, or pets: threatening to commit suicide; making humiliating or degrading comments about her body or behaviour; forcing her to commit degrading acts; isolating her from friends or family; confining her to the house; destroying her possessions; and other actions designed to demean or restrict her freedom and independence.

There is financial abuse such as stealing or controlling her money or valuables. This is particularly a problem with regard to older women. Forcing her to work or denying her the right to work is also including in this.

There is also spiritual abuse such as using religious or spiritual beliefs to manipulate, dominate or control.

Criminal harassment and stalking is considered violence against women, following, watching in a persistent, malicious and unwanted manner, which is important to underline, and invading privacy in a way that threatens personal safety.

There are so many ways in which violence against women exists in our society, and who is affected? All women are affected, young women, elderly women, working women, mothers, teachers, sex workers, CEOs, members of Parliament, indigenous women particularly and immigrant women as well because they face these double whammies of racism and sexism. That is why, when we look at intersecting a violent problem, we need to do it in a lens that is all-encompassing toward ending violence against women. It happens as much to women in Toronto as it does in rural Saskatchewan, so we really need to look at it holistically.

This is what we need to do, and I want to cite Deepa Mattoo one more time. When they started to work on the issue, she said:

—one thing that we have been clear about is that it is part of the continuum of violence against women and nothing else. It should be dealt with within that same framework. We were never wanting it to be dealt with any differently...we wanted the systems to be sensitive and alive to the issue of the distinct experiences of the women who faced this form of violence, but we wanted it to be included in the violence against women framework. But unfortunately it has been somehow discussed in a way...and we know there's Bill S-7 that is on the table at this point as well.

There is an assumption that is coming that somehow the current legal system does not have enough in it to address this issue, whereas our education from our clients, the survivors, and our education from the communities, very much tells us that the existing systems and the structures are enough to serve the needs of the population if they want to access the law and justice in that way. Unfortunately, I think we haven't learned enough from what we see, that women don't necessarily want to report.

We need to support those communities. We need legal aid. We need to listen to the women who come forward. We need to consult our stakeholders that are able to list recommendations of specifically what needs to be done, and that includes supporting women when they do immigrate to Canada. This means really ensuring that economically, socially, physically and politically, women are equal, all of us, and that means structurally, helping out the organizations on the ground and really listening to women.

● (1225)

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to that very confusing speech. Clearly, the member is confused about the legislation. It is doubtful that she read the legislation, and if she did, whether she understood the purpose of the legislation. For her to suggest there is a correlation between a barbaric cultural practice and a targeted cultural community is bizarre and absurd. To also suggest in this House, in this sacred place, that a piece of legislation that two of the parties are supporting, the government and the third party, is racist is way beyond the pale and crosses the line.

*Government Orders*

The member also said that we should be listening to people across the country. Well, we are.

My question to her is simply this. What does she have to say to Aruna Papp from the *National Post*, who stated on November 3, 2014:

Forced into an abusive marriage at 17 and unable to leave it for 18 years, I can attest to the fact that a forced marriage is effectively a life of slavery. I congratulate the Canadian government for taking a bold step on behalf of women who have nowhere to turn for help.

I would hope that the member would retract some of the shameful words she used in her dissertation earlier.

● (1230)

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, I am offended by the fact the member suggested that I had not read the legislation and that I did not know what I was talking about.

I would point to a continued sexism that exists in this House. I really think he misunderstands. Perhaps he was not listening to my speech. I did go into French at some point, so I am not sure if he followed me the entire way.

I am saying that the way he has brought forward this issue is creating an us-and-them mentality, which is evidenced as well by the comment he just made. This is a cultural issue. It is a problem that exists here, and that approach is racist, because we know that violence against women exists everywhere. That does not mean that just because people belong to a community, they are violent toward women, and that is why what the Conservatives are doing right now is problematic.

It is important that we listen to what women want us to do. Currently, there are criminal ways of prosecuting when these things happen, but we need to figure out how not to marginalize. One thing we could be doing is to have better protection for permanent residents and persons without status. That is a concrete action. It is something we could be doing that we are not. Instead, we are trying to marginalize these women by saying that the only option for them is to prosecute.

I am not saying that the way they are living is not horrifying. All violence against women is horrifying, and we need to address all of it.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, does my colleague think it is responsible to criminalize all these acts without any concern for the potential consequences to the lives of these women and without any plan to minimize these consequences or to help the women get through these trials and integrate into the community?

Should we be more concerned about what happens after these acts are criminalized? Should the government have presented a plan to address the potential consequences along with the provisions that further criminalize these acts?

[*English*]

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, as I have said several times, there needs to be a national action plan to address violence against all women. We need that.

That would include actually consulting with women, all women, to understand what the problem is. Part of understanding what the problem is means having accurate data and doing accurate research. That is a really important thing that is currently missing with the present government, because it does not fund that kind of research.

Also very important is safe and affordable housing. We need to be helping out the shelters that are doing the work on the ground. We can cite specific funds sent to certain specific shelters, and it is good that we are helping, but we are nowhere near to helping as much as we should be. We need to make addressing this problem part of a national strategy. Shelters are where women go to get services and to get help to get out of a situation. That is the front line. That is where we need to be putting our effort.

As I was saying, it is really important to remember that it is not just by doing such things as changing the criminal law that we should be addressing this issue. We need to be giving women a way out.

Very quickly, I am going to quote Deepa Mattoo, who said that women:

...are threatened with deportation by the abusers. Also, the system is built in such a way that they can actually face, as a consequence of that violence, being deported. Irrespective of whether or not they reported it, they can face the consequences of being deported because they were violated or because they chose to report abuse.

Maybe we need to be addressing this issue rather than simply criminalizing it further.

● (1235)

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Mr. Speaker, the audacity of a member of Parliament to stand in this House and suggest that a question arising from her presentation is somehow sexism in the House is unbelievable, truly unbelievable.

[*Translation*]

I am going to quote Julie Miville-Dechéne, president of Quebec's Conseil du statut de la femme, in an article in the November 6, 2014, edition of *Le Journal de Montréal*: "This will allow us to address the phenomenon of young girls forced to marry when they are sent abroad during their vacation."

I would like to know what the member would say to Julie Miville-Dechéne.

[*English*]

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think the member is understanding me. It breaks my heart to understand that women across this country and around the world face incredible violence. I cannot believe that the member does not see that I feel that way about it.

What I am saying is that when women are faced with this situation, they can prosecute. Those laws are there. Would it not be ridiculous if in Canada a woman could not prosecute because she was living in a situation of violence? However, we know that very few women report any kind of violence, let alone make it through the complicated and cumbersome legal system to actual see a conviction. What we need are services and supports. That is what we need to be doing.

*Government Orders*

I do not understand why the member is accusing me of not understanding that. I do see these things myself. I know women who have been beaten, who have been murdered. It is very important that we address that for all women. We need specific, culturally appropriate services that are helpful, including housing and shelters, across Canada.

This is something that all of us are facing as women. To isolate it as the member is doing is, as I said earlier, simply racist.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak to this very important piece of legislation.

Canada is a free and open society built upon the premise of the equality of all of our citizens. While it is clear to most Canadians that violence against women and girls is unacceptable, unfortunately, violence against women and girls can and does still occur anywhere, including at home, in our workplaces, and on our streets.

In the 2013 Speech from the Throne, our government committed to taking further action that would help to prevent barbaric practices involving violence against women on Canadian soil. This bill would meet that commitment.

Unfortunately, harmful cultural practices continue to brutalize millions of women and girls worldwide. Among those affected are some individuals and families within Canada's diverse cultural communities. We know that some immigrant women in Canada are more vulnerable to such forms of violence. They may not be familiar with our laws. They may not know that certain practices are a crime or unacceptable, or that they interfere with their basic human rights. Such practices include early and forced marriage, polygamy, and so-called honour-based violence. These practices are the subject of the bill before us today.

Tolerance of any individual's or family's view that cultural traditions can somehow justify depriving other individuals of their basic human rights goes against the very essence of our great country's values. It is imperative that we prevent such barbaric practices from occurring on Canadian soil.

This Conservative government firmly believes that any practice that involves violence directed at women is barbaric. The opposition refuses to condemn these practices as barbaric. In fact, the leader of the Liberal Party thought that the word "barbaric" was too harsh to use when referring to these practices. We believe that this is an insult to all women facing violence from their own family members.

All Canadians know that a free and democratic society requires the full participation of women and that any practice that constitutes violence against women and girls negatively affects our democracy and our society. It goes against the very fabric of what it is to be Canadian. It must be condemned as a barbaric cultural practice.

Any practice that involves violence is abuse that must be stopped, particularly when meted out behind closed doors and within families, where women and girls are especially defenceless, or when whole families conspire to ensure that underage women lie about their age or take part in a forced marriage. No one in Canada should have to face violence and abuse, especially from their own family. This is barbaric, and I emphasize that.

That is why I am pleased to speak in the House about our government's zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act. It contains very concrete steps that would help to further prevent and address certain forms of violence against women and girls in all of our diverse communities.

I gained a greater understanding about the nature and extent of this problem over the past year when the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration conducted a study on strengthening the protection of women in our immigration system. We heard from victims of abuse and from representatives who provide services to immigrant women from right across the country. These important discussions focused on domestic violence, forced marriage, the immigration process, and how we could strengthen the protection of vulnerable women and girls.

They also revealed many ways in which our government could help address the problems stemming from harmful cultural practices. If implemented, the measures in this bill would amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act, and the Criminal Code.

● (1240)

Let me first address the practice of polygamy, which is already illegal in Canada and is an affront to Canadian values. While it is against the law in Canada to practise polygamy or to enter into a polygamous union, and that ban has been upheld as constitutional, that is not the case in every country of the world.

To complement the existing criminal law and to prevent polygamy on Canadian soil within the immigration context, Bill S-7 would create a new inadmissibility provision in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act for anyone practising polygamy. This would enhance existing immigration tools to render both temporary and permanent residents inadmissible for practising polygamy in Canada, where there is a criminal conviction or misrepresentation. This new inadmissibility would strengthen officers' ability to refuse visa applications and would also allow removal orders to be made where there is clear evidence that the person is or will be practising polygamy in Canada.

However, polygamy is not the only barbaric cultural practice contradicting Canadian values. Additional measures in Bill S-7 would also amend the Civil Marriage Act to address the problem of early and forced marriage.



*Government Orders*

In Canada there is no national minimum age for marriage. While provincial and territorial laws have added requirements for minor children, such as parental consent or court approval, they do not have the authority under the Constitution to set the minimum age below which a child may never marry. Only in Quebec is the minimum age set at 16 under a federal statute. In other parts of Canada, the common law still applies, which sets the minimum age at 14 for boys and 12 for girls, although historically it went as low as age seven. Yes, age seven.

In contrast, Austria, Australia, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom all have a minimum age below which no one can marry, even with parental consent. Thankfully, very few marriages in Canada now involve people under the age of 16, but setting a national minimum age of 16 for marriage would make it clear that early marriage is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in our country.

Other amendments to the Civil Marriage Act proposed in Bill S-7 would codify the requirement that those getting married must give their free and enlightened consent to the marriage and would codify the requirement for the dissolution of any previous marriage. This is very important. A marriage should be a union between two consenting people. It should not be forced on them.

Building on the proposed amendments to the Civil Marriage Act, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act also contains measures that would amend the Criminal Code to help prevent forced or underage marriage. These measures would criminalize knowingly officiating at an underage or forced marriage, actively participating in a wedding ceremony knowing that one party was marrying another against his or her will or was under the age of 16, and removing a minor from Canada for a forced or underage marriage.

Let us think about that for a moment. A student in grade 10, born and raised in Canada, can conceivably be put on a plane to go on vacation to another country only to find out when he or she arrives that a forced marriage has been arranged. There is a big difference between an arranged and a forced marriage. Young people can find themselves coming back or staying there, married, when they are just out of grade 10. It is unbelievable.

Building on these proposed new offences, a related amendment would create a specific new peace bond that would give courts the power to impose conditions on an individual. Such a peace bond could be used to require the surrender of a passport and to prevent the child from being taken out of Canada.

● (1245)

Such conditions would apply when there were reasonable grounds to fear that a forced marriage or a marriage under the age of 16 would otherwise occur, whether in Canada or abroad.

Finally, there is a measure in the bill that would also amend the Criminal Code in relation to honour killings and many other spousal homicides. So-called honour violence is perpetrated against family members, usually women and girls, who are perceived to have brought shame or dishonour to the family, usually by not respecting what the family has chosen for them, quite often at birth or at a very young age. It is usually premeditated and committed with some

degree of approval from family, or in many cases, community members.

Generally speaking, violence committed for a motive related to a family's honour can take many forms and be of varying degrees of seriousness, all of which are fully prohibited in Canada under our criminal law. So-called honour killings are murder, just like any other intentional killing. However, under the Criminal Code, someone charged with murder can use the defence of provocation in seeking a reduction to a lesser charge of manslaughter. In other words, a person found to have committed murder can argue that the victim's conduct in some way provoked his or her own killing, twisted as that might sound. This defence has been raised in several honour killing cases in Canada. Accused murderers have claimed that lawful conduct by the victim, such as real or perceived marital infidelity, disrespect, defiance, or insulting behaviour on the part of the victim toward a spouse, sibling, or parent, provoked the killing.

On the facts and evidence presented, the provocation defence has been rejected in so-called honour killing cases. However, our government is mindful of the fact that the provocation defence has been and continues to be successful in spousal killings, where men have killed their partners in circumstances that are very similar to those in honour killing cases. In fact, for many decades, both in Canada and abroad, one of the most serious concerns expressed about the defence of provocation has been that it excuses male homicidal rage against women who exercise their right to make personal choices for themselves.

Canadian women from immigrant and non-immigrant communities deserve the full protection of the law. Therefore, the proposed change in the bill would apply in both situations. Measures in Bill S-7 would amend the Criminal Code so that legal conduct by the victim could no longer be legally considered as provocation. This would not only prevent the defence from being raised but would also bring our criminal law in line with Canadian values with respect to other spousal killings, holding people responsible for their murderous rage and actions, even when they were verbally insulted before the killing. Similar changes to the defence of provocation have already been made in most like-minded countries.

In summary, these amendments would improve protection and support for women and girls in Canada, including the particularly vulnerable from immigrant communities, in a number of different ways. They would render permanent and temporary residents inadmissible if they practiced polygamy in Canada. They would strengthen Canadian marriage laws by establishing a new national minimum age for marriage of 16 and by codifying the existing legal requirements for free and enlightened consent for marriage and for ending an existing marriage prior to entering another, which is a key point.

*Government Orders*

•(1250)

They would criminalize certain conduct related to underage and forced marriage ceremonies, including the act of removing a child from Canada for the purpose of such a marriage. They would help protect potential victims of underage or forced marriages by creating a new specific court ordered peace bond where there were grounds to fear that someone would commit an offence in this area. They would also ensure that the defence of provocation would not apply in so-called honour killings and many spousal homicides.

Five years ago, our government introduced a new citizenship guide called *Discover Canada*, which is used by prospective new Canadians to learn about Canadian citizenship and to prepare them for their mandatory citizenship test, and ultimately their integration into our country. Since its introduction, the guide has proven to be popular not only with newcomers to Canada but with many Canadians interested in learning about the rights and responsibilities that come with being a citizen of our great country. One of the most important points made explicit to all readers of *Discover Canada* is that men and women are equal under Canadian law. In fact, the guide states:

Canada's openness and generosity do not extend to barbaric cultural practices that tolerate spousal abuse, "honour killings," female genital mutilation, forced marriage or other gender-based violence.

Although the equality of men and women under the law is a fundamental Canadian value, unfortunately violence against women and girls continues to affect tens of thousands of Canadians each year, and barbaric cultural practices still exist as a reality for some Canadian women and girls. Our government is determined to address gender-based violence so that all women and girls in Canada can be empowered and protected from harm and can feel safe at all times.

Our Conservative government has already taken a number of actions to help end violence against women and girls in all its forms and in all communities across the country. We have strengthened criminal justice measures and provided greater support for victims of crime. For example, we recently introduced the action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls. These build on the recommendations of the House of Commons Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women and on earlier concrete action taken to address the devastating and truly barbaric cases of murdered and missing aboriginal women and girls.

We also introduced a national action plan to combat human trafficking to address a heinous and barbaric form of violence against women and girls. Imagine those who are so sick as to profit by trafficking women, bringing them to Canada just so they can make money in illicit fields.

With the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act we are strengthening our laws to protect Canadians and newcomers from barbaric cultural practices. We are also sending a strong message to those in Canada and those who wish to come to Canada that we will not tolerate cultural traditions that deprive individuals of their human rights.

Our Conservative government is committed to taking concrete steps to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women

and girls in Canada. We will continue to stand up for all victims of violence and abuse.

•(1255)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague. I am interested in the issue and what we saw with the cult of Bountiful that came across the border into Canada to escape prosecution in Utah. They set themselves up in Canada. There were all manner of allegations of abuse and of young girls as young as 12 being forced into marriage. This had gone to the courts in B.C. in 2007, I believe it was. It did not believe it had the power to go through with it, but it was tested at the Supreme Court of British Columbia in 2011, which upheld Canada's polygamy laws.

We have the tools necessary to go against these cults.

We saw the same thing with Lev Tahor, where there was all manner of allegations of abuse and forced marriages of children. The Quebec police and the Ontario courts moved against them.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague about the one provision that concerns me, which would apply to participants in a wedding. I am concerned about this, because there may be people who are brought to a wedding who would now be complicit. If we attempt to draw the circle too wide, we are actually not going to be able to target who we need to target, which are the people running these cults. The courts have already given us the tools in Canada. The police have the tools to go after them for forced marriages, child abuse, and polygamy. Would not the criminalization of the overall community actually drive people underground?

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Mr. Speaker, clearly polygamy, as the member knows, is not legal in our country. The Supreme Court of Canada has, as he stated, upheld the polygamy laws of the land. If anything, Bill S-7, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act, clearly indicates that those who are in a polygamous relationship would not be welcome to come to Canada. In fact, as the minister said earlier, they can come here as individuals but cannot bring their spouses here with them.

We have also introduced the peace bond, as the member would note, upon review of the legislation. This bond would assist us in many respects in stopping that activity from happening in our country, and stopping those who want to come to Canada and unfortunately want to partake in polygamous relationships.

•(1300)

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have three short questions that I posed to a couple of the members of the cabinet, who did not answer them. Perhaps I could try with the parliamentary secretary.

*Government Orders*

First, does the parliamentary secretary agree that violence against women, forced and early marriage, polygamy, and genital mutilation are wrong in any culture? Second, if the parliamentary secretary agrees with that, does he agree that there is no need to reference the word “culture” in the title? Third, if he does not agree, which cultures would he seek to condemn?

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the member ask that question earlier, but did hear succinct and clear responses. Perhaps I can assist him by providing the following.

Of course, violence against women and girls of any kind is clearly wrong, clearly a crime in Canada, and clearly we as parliamentarians should all be on board in doing everything we can to ensure that it does not happen in our communities.

The phrase “cultural practices” does not refer to a specific cultural community. It is a cultural practice in some families to tell their children when they are five, six, seven, or eight that when they are 14, 15, or 16, they will have chosen for them the person they will marry and that if they do not marry that person, they will bring shame to the family. When the children bring shame to the family, the members of the family threaten them with violence. It is a cultural practice. There is a huge difference between the words “barbaric cultural practices” and “a cultural community”. There is no relationship between the two phrases. That kind of practice is barbaric, cultural or not, anywhere.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government is deeply concerned about the treatment that women and girls in Canada have suffered because of some cultural practices that Canadian society and the Supreme Court of Canada reject. These include genital mutilation, and being forced into polygamous marriages and marriage at a very young age.

I would think that any reasonable, concerned, and decent Canadian would also want to protect women and girls in this country from those terrible fates. Yet, unbelievably, we see the opposition members, including young women over there, doing everything they can to attack this legislation, to disagree with it, to find reasons not to support it. I cannot believe this.

Could the parliamentary secretary explain why the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party in the House would not want to protect Canadian women in this way?

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her passion and commitment because I know that over the course of her life, she has been a very strong voice for women's rights and, certainly, a strong advocate for putting in place crime legislation to ensure that women and girls are protected in our country no matter where they live.

The problem I have with the opposition, particularly the New Democratic Party, and with some of the wording from the Liberal party, even though they are supporting the bill, is that this is one of those pieces of legislation that should transcend political parties and alliances. This is not a piece of legislation to hang one's hat on. I say to my friends in the NDP who oppose this that it is impossible to justify to Canadians our not putting in place legislation that would educate and empower women and protect them in their communities, particularly within the walls of their own homes.

I implore the member to speak to her leader—

• (1305)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I find it insulting to be told by members on the other side that I am not opposed to violence. The young female members on this side of the House are opposed to all forms of sexual violence, whether it is polygamy, forced marriage or early marriage. That has been clear from the start.

What we are saying is that a number of women's advocacy groups are opposed to this bill because it criminalizes the victims. The victims do not want their family members to face criminal charges. There are several shortcomings. This bill has a number of serious consequences, including the potential deportation of children and victims.

I want to know whether the government will undertake to broadly consult experts and groups and whether it will undertake to eliminate the bill's unintended consequences, such as the deportation of the victims' children and families.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question I would like to ask the NDP member. In the November 6, 2014, edition of *Le Journal de Montréal*, Julie Miville-Dechéne, president of Quebec's Conseil du statut de la femme, said, “This will allow us to address the phenomenon of young girls forced to marry when they are sent abroad during their vacation.”

Does the NDP member have something to say to Julie Miville-Dechéne today?

[*English*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Before resuming debate, I would like to remind all hon. members that we are now moving into mostly 10-minute speeches, with only five minutes for questions and comments. I have allowed the questions and answers to become rather lengthy, but the harness will be tightened when we move to questions for the hon. member for Surrey North, who now has the floor.

The hon. member for Surrey North.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure and an honour to speak in the House on behalf of my constituents of Surrey North.

I have some grave concerns regarding Bill S-7, a bill that has made its way to this House from the other side, the Senate side, which is the unelected, unethical, and unaccountable place. I will not talk about that because we have talked about it at other times.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague, the very hard-working member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

*Government Orders*

First, the bill is an example of Conservative rhetoric, of doing something yet achieving nothing. It is a waste of taxpayers' time and money and a cruel joke on our democratic system, as most of these measures would not actually achieve anything. Basically, it would duplicate existing laws that are in place. Additionally, a couple of the legislative amendments in Bill S-7 would invoke racist stereotypes and fuel xenophobia toward minority groups, rather than achieving anything positive.

The bill would seek to deport people engaged in polygamy or forced marriages, including the very women the government claims it is trying to protect.

We on this side, the NDP, the official opposition, recognize that violence against women remains a systematic and widespread issue in Canada, and we have shown to Canadians that we are committed to ending violence against women and to protecting them within our immigration system, and system at large. However, Bill S-7 does not intend to protect women; instead, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act intends to further marginalize racial minorities as part of the Conservative agenda.

What is "barbaric" to me is the very title of the bill, which is simply racist. It actually suggests that all cultural practices are somehow barbaric. The title of the bill alone reinforces prejudice against certain cultural groups by targeting racial minorities for practices that are in fact found in Canadian society at large, not only in these communities. The Conservatives are once again politicizing a very serious issue. They are targeting racial minorities with offensive stereotypes, meanwhile claiming that these measures somehow address the issue of gender-based violence when, in fact, they do not.

We have heard from many experts who expressed concern about the purpose of the bill and have stated that the bill would in fact worsen problems of violence against women.

Lawyer Deepa Mattoo from the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario stated that:

Bill S-7 lacks the understanding of the complex issues of violence faced by women and children and does not achieve the goal that the government desires to achieve with this <sup>^</sup>[bill].

Another witness, Dr. Naila Butt from the Social Services Network, also stated that:

Criminalization of forced marriages, without the much needed institutional support for victims, would only further alienate and harm those facing forced marriages and gender-based violence, with the added insult of being stigmatized that they come from barbaric cultures.

Canadians are clear that the current government does not actually care about women's rights.

• (1310)

This is the same government that, time after time, has neglected the very issues facing women in Canada, across our country. If the Conservatives really wanted to tackle the issue of violence against women, they would finally launch an inquiry into Canada's missing and murdered indigenous women.

Over the Valentine's Day weekend, we saw protests across this country. Women, men, children, boys, and girls were out in full force

across this country demanding that the Conservative government hold an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women.

We have heard, over and over, that there are more than 1,200 cases of missing and murdered indigenous women in this country. The stats are absolutely shocking. Yet the Prime Minister stated this issue "isn't really high on our radar". This is coming from our Prime Minister.

It is very concerning to me that we have violence that has happened across this country, that 1,200 women are missing or murdered, and the government is not looking into it or calling for an inquiry, yet it claims that it is somehow protecting the women of this country. I find that very appalling. A lot of Canadians find this appalling. I have heard it from constituents in my community. I have heard it from people across this country. They want to know why the government is not calling an inquiry into the murdered and missing indigenous women.

This kind of attitude, the Conservative government's attitude towards issues of violence against women, is simply a lack of respect toward all Canadians.

This bill also has many unintended negative consequence. The bill follows a pattern of the Conservative government of sensationalizing measures that do not actually achieve their stated goals and instead have unintended negative consequences for many Canadians.

Many witnesses who testified before the Senate committee on human rights stated that Bill S-7 is likely to have many unintended consequences. UNICEF expressed concerns that the bill would impose criminal sanctions against minors who attend, celebrate, or help organize a forced marriage, effectively impacting their future with a criminal record. These are minors I am talking about.

Essentially, this bill re-victimizes women and children who are at risk of violence by imposing criminal sanctions on them rather than protecting them from predators.

Additionally, the Senate committee heard that because the penalties include criminalization and deportation, some women and children will not want to come forward to report forced marriages.

There are many other negative consequences for Bill S-7 and its impact on family reunification. We heard in the immigration committee that, when families are not able to reunite with their family members, it has consequences on women and children.

No woman, regardless of race, citizenship status, or religion, should be subject to gender-based violence, including the practice of forced or underage marriages. Women at risk of violence need adequate support and programs.

However, this bill makes no reference to support services. That is what is needed at the ground level, support services that provide education and additional help for these women. The Conservative government has been cutting the very programs that actually provide these services to women in these situations.

*Government Orders*

This bill's intentions are only political and are not actually meant to protect women. If the Conservatives were actually concerned about preventing violence against women, they would make a serious investment in services that support vulnerable women.

In conclusion, this bill is yet another example of the government's abuse of power in making useless pieces of legislation that only sensationalize a very serious issue and that discriminate against a part of the population in order to further the Conservative agenda.

• (1315)

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's speech, and I have two questions.

First, the indication from the speaker opposite is that they are not supporting the bill because they do not like the words "cultural" and "barbaric" together. I looked up the definition of culture. *Merriam-Webster's* definition of culture is:

the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time  
a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, etc.  
a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (such as a business)

Where in the bill does the NDP find a specific cultural group identified? It is about barbaric activity that individuals believe is the right thing to do to their wives, children, and other women. We do not agree with it. It is not the Canadian way.

Where in the bill does it mention any particular cultural group?

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Mr. Speaker, a question has been asked of the Conservatives, and they have been dodging and ducking it. Why have "culture" in the title of the bill? They are saying it is not culture based, so why do the Conservatives have "culture" in the title of the bill?

On this side of the House, we believe that violence against women is gender-based, and we should be looking at ways to protect our women across the country. However, the Conservatives are somehow linking it to a particular cultural group, as if it has been imported here by a different culture.

The very problem we need to address is violence against women. That runs across cultures. It is a part of Canadian society, and we need to take steps to protect women.

• (1320)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I somewhat appreciate the comments from the member. I do not necessarily agree with everything he said, but there is a lot of validity in some of his comments.

The issue of zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices, the name of the act, is something that could be held into question. The Liberal Party has strongly suggested that the word "culture" should be dropped from the title at the very least, and we hope to see that.

Having said that, going through the legislation, it seems to me that there are some positive attributes to it that somewhat obligate us to seriously look at voting in favour of the legislation. An example is the minimum age being set at 16 for marriage here in Canada.

I wonder if the member sees any benefits inside the current legislation? I will be voting in favour of it. I would like to see it amended to take out "culture", but does the member see any benefit?

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Mr. Speaker, we are always open to new legislation and having proper scrutiny of the legislation that is brought to the House.

What we have seen from the Conservatives is that any sort of positive addition, whether it is in witness testimony or amendments from the official opposition to prop up the bill and ensure that its intention is kept, is turned down. Experts say that we need the amendments that we have introduced. What we have seen time after time is those amendments being turned down by the Conservatives.

I know that the Conservatives do not believe in facts. They do not believe in expert testimony. They do not believe in consulting the very stakeholders who are going to be affected by this.

I will support this bill if the Conservatives take into consideration the number of amendments that we will introduce and the amendments that experts will bring to committee.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I prefer throughout my speech to refer to this as Bill S-7, and it will become apparent why that is the case when I speak. It is an act that would amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act, the Criminal Code, and a number of other ancillary criminal-related bills.

I would like to make the comment right at the outset that what has coloured this legislation, based on the testimony given in the Senate, is that it is the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration who has chosen to speak to the bill. Normally it would be the Minister of Justice tabling a government bill to amend the Criminal Code. That probably explains why people are reacting and why they are concerned about targeting certain cultures and certainly targeting immigrants.

I feel obliged to make reference to the offensive title of the bill, which I choose not to repeat, and which others have expressed as grossly offensive and an unnecessary descriptor. As pointed out by many others, it harkens back to the reprehensible historic descriptions of aboriginal Canadians.

As the bill is by and large focused on immigrants, many view it as discriminatory. It is as if the government has alleged the bill does not target immigrant communities and yet it is tabled by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. This is clearly a confused message.

As testified by the Canadian Council of Muslim Women:

The title is racist, discriminatory and further exacerbates the racism and stereotyping of some of us in Canadian society.... We should all remind ourselves of the treatment meted out to our First Nations, who were seen as barbaric, primitive and uncivilized....

The overt message of this act is that these barbaric practices will be brought into a pristine Canada where there is no violence, where women and girls are not subjected to these horrible practices of forced or early marriages, where polygamy is abhorred, and where there is no femicide — that is, no killings of women and girls. Our organization objects...to the label of honour-based violence....

*Government Orders*

I remind the government that is coming from the Canadian Council of Muslim Women. This association and a number of others, while testifying before the Senate, referenced the instance of polygamy in British Columbia since the 1950s, which was yet to be effectively addressed by Canadian authorities.

In speaking to the bill before the Senate committee, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration shared that, in his view, the intent of the bill is to:

...help to ensure that no young girl or woman in Canada becomes a victim of early or forced marriage, polygamy, so-called honour-based violence or any other form of barbaric cultural practice.

Those are the very words of the minister.

He further went on to claim the measures “would improve protection and support for vulnerable individuals, especially women and girls”. The question then before us is this. Would Bill S-7 actually deliver on that intent? I wish to make it clear that in my opinion no woman, or frankly any man, girl, or boy regardless of their race, citizenship, or religion, should be made a victim of gender-based violence, including forced or underage marriage.

As a co-founder of a sexual assault centre in Edmonton, I am well apprised of the dangers and risks far too many girls and women face. I am also aware of the many factors that prevent girls or women from revealing the abuse to authorities. This is a significant factor raised by many who have concerns with the effectiveness of the bill to genuinely address or prevent abuses, particularly by criminalizing the actions.

It should also be kept in mind that polygamy is already prohibited in Canada.

My comments will by and large reflect the views of the bill and the issues involved held by a number of communities of women, as well as legal experts and associations that address trafficking and abuse, as to whether Bill S-7 would actually deliver the remedies and protections alleged to be contained in the bill by the minister.

A common concern has been raised about the inadequate consultation with the potentially impacted communities and the many organizations and experts involved in the matter of forced or underage marriage. I have spoken with the Canadian Council of Muslim Women and the Edmonton-based Indo-Canadian Women's Association and many of its members, as well as organizations addressing trafficking.

Some time ago, I met with a group of Canadian women who were concerned about the failure of the Government of Canada to take enforcement action against the situation in Bountiful. This is despite the direction of the courts that enforcement action is possible under the Criminal Code, reportedly, to protect young girls brought into Canada from the United States for the purpose of polygamous unions.

● (1325)

According to the Indo-Canadian Women's Association:

Given the widespread occurrence of this practice and its harmful effects, many countries have undertaken a number of initiatives to counter it...

In Canada, there are a number of grassroots initiatives launched by community organizations such as the Indo Canadian Women's Association that seek to educate the community and provide links to social and medical resources for those seeking

assistance in the community. Through education and continuing efforts of the community, we can begin to leave our mark in ending this harmful practice.

I would like to add that just a few minutes ago I spoke to a very respected member of the Edmonton Muslim community, Soraya Hafez, who is concerned about the bill, in particular because she is seeing a refocusing away from prevention and support to the community organizations, such as her own, and toward the criminalization of this kind of behaviour.

That view has also been endorsed by Preet Atwal, a young Sikh woman in Edmonton. She writes:

The statements presented do not seem to be supported by real statistical or realistic data, spreading myths about arranged marriages. It is making it seem as if violence against women is a cultural issue only taking place in certain communities. Criminalization will only further marginalize radicalized communities and will not do anything to actually prevent forced marriages and violence against women. If we truly wish to combat that issue we should use education, community awareness, and law enforcement....

Those are profound viewpoints.

I noticed that the Minister of Status of Women had previously said that she had also spoken to this Edmonton community. They are deeply disturbed that she had suggested that their conference on honouring young women was about honour killings. In fact, it was actually about honouring young women in the Asian community, and I was delighted to participate in that conference.

I would also like to share briefly the words of Avvy Yao-Yao Go, who is the director of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic. She also testified before the Senate on Bill S-7. She stated:

From the very naming of this bill to the various legislative amendments it seeks to amend, Bill S-7 invokes racist stereotypes and fuels xenophobia towards certain racialized communities. It exudes hypocrisy disguised as morality. It mocks the practice of polygamy elsewhere as a sign of cultural inferiority while ignoring the fact that polygamy, both formal and informal, is being practised in Canada by some Canadians and that all too often marriages break down in Canada due to infidelity and/or abuse.

Alia Hogben, the executive director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, testified at the Senate that she thinks it is important to consider the views based on the direct experiences working with women who are at risk of forced marriages or abuse in their marriages.

She said:

First let me acknowledge how pleased we are that the government is paying attention to the issues within violence against women and girls. There is definitely a kernel of genuine concern being expressed by this act, and we support the intent of addressing the issues of forced or early marriages, polygamy and other forms of gender-based violence.

She says the council is less convinced that these proposed measures are necessary or appropriate. They are also disappointed they were not accorded the courtesy of being consulted in the initial stages of drafting the bill.

They identified that the current Criminal Code and Civil Marriage Act already criminalize polygamy and bigamy. In their view, what is sorely missing is the attention to actually enforcing these laws and the assignment of resources to address problems faced by immigrants and other victims. This appears to be a common view of those actually working with trafficked women or women attempting to escape forced or abusive marriages.

*Government Orders*

They are equally concerned at the focused attention on certain backgrounds, given the high level of violence against all Canadian women and girls. Some have mentioned, as have some of my colleagues, the fact that there is still a refusal by the government—and, sadly, by the Premier of Alberta—to call an inquiry into the over 1,800 missing aboriginal women and girls.

They have noted the failure to prosecute polygamy over the past six decades. They remind us that as recently as 2011, the courts have clarified that charges can go forward under existing laws.

What they recommend instead is to engage and educate the community on the law and their rights and to build the capacity for community-based responses to human trafficking. They also emphasize the need to eliminate the vulnerabilities that lead to trafficking.

Those I have talked to say that they think there should be more support to settlement services and that we need to consider the particular vulnerability of poor or abused women. We need organizations to be onside with the law, as they are the very mechanisms who help those who are being abused.

Finally, I would like to add in closing that they are puzzled that the government is not also including civil proceedings, as many of women would be frightened to be engaged in criminal proceedings.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, does my colleague think it would have been good for the government to take a look at our country's history? Our grandmothers were subject to an enormous amount of violence and they did not speak up. For example, if a woman went into town wearing a skirt that was too short, her husband could beat her. There are many examples of fathers beating their daughters. This was not too long ago.

I think that the focus on autonomy and education for these women and the institution of many social measures really helped put an end to these barbaric practices—not a focus on criminalization.

Does my colleague think that social measures like the ones taken here in the past could apply in some cases in order to help these women combat the barbaric practices we are discussing today?

[*English*]

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, if I understand my colleague's question, I think she is asking if we can look at how we have addressed and reduced abusive marriages in the history of Canada and apply that to situations we are running into now. I can only attest to the fact that many women's organizations deal with the trafficking of women and girls or with women in forced marriages, as opposed to arranged marriages, and they are deeply concerned that there may be a misunderstanding between the two.

There certainly seems to be strong, profound evidence across Canada from the very organizations that are working with vulnerable women in these situations that what they need are more resources, both to prevent these kinds of activities and to help remove women from that kind of situation. They are deeply concerned that

criminalizing is only going to ostracize these women from the very communities and families they need to turn to for support.

• (1335)

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member spoke quite eloquently in her speech, but she referred to women somehow having difficulty in their own communities arising from this particular piece of legislation. I wonder if the member could elaborate a bit.

Does she not see that there are hundreds of cases annually in this country of women being forced into marriages and being threatened with physical violence if they refuse those unions? It may be here or abroad, since sometimes they are forcibly taken out of the country. It actually happens. It is a cultural practice in some families, and it is barbaric.

To establish a law that would help prevent and hopefully eliminate that from happening in our country seems to be widely supported by Canadians. Certainly that is what the citizenship and immigration committee heard from a wide variety of witnesses who testified before it.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I am grateful that the parliamentary secretary has asked a question, because I want to put a question to him.

I mentioned the testimony that was presented in the other place, and hopefully the committee will hear similar testimony if the bill goes to committee. We heard from rape crisis centres, organizations dealing with the trafficking of women and girls, Indo-Canadian organizations, and the Muslim association for women. These organizations are telling us, based on their experience, that in the case of forced marriages, merely relying on criminal law would make it highly unlikely that any of these women would lay a complaint.

I would put to the member a situation in which a young, vulnerable woman is up against her parents, aunts and uncles, grandmother and grandfather, the head of the community, and so forth. She may well be a woman located in another country, so she will not be able to bring the charge here anyway.

There is good intent here. There are a lot of good provisions in the law, but what we are being told is a reality fix.

What I would ask the government is why it did not adopt the British law that allows for the laying of charges either criminally or civilly. Apparently in the United Kingdom the majority of women are choosing the civil proceeding route.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the chance to speak about Bill S-7, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Burlington.

In the most recent Speech from the Throne, our government recognized that millions of women and girls around the world continue to suffer from violence, including the appalling practices of early and forced marriage. That speech emphasized the government's commitment to ensuring that such barbaric cultural practices do not occur in our country.

*Government Orders*

In his appearance before the Senate human rights committee on this bill, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration made it clear that any practice that involves violence directed at women is barbaric. Our government firmly believes that women should never be subjugated to violence or even death for any reason, especially the reasons used in honour-based violence.

The measures in Bill S-7 are the culmination of that commitment to improve protection and support for vulnerable individuals, primarily women and children, and would do so in a number of ways.

They would render permanent and temporary residents inadmissible if they practised polygamy in Canada. They would strengthen Canadian marriage laws by establishing a new national minimum age for marriage of 16 years old and by codifying the existing legal requirements for free and enlightened consent for marriage and for ending an existing marriage prior to entering another.

They would criminalize certain conduct related to underage and forced marriage ceremonies, including the act of removing a child from Canada for the purpose of such marriage ceremonies.

These measures would help protect potential victims of underage or forced marriages by creating a new and specific preventative court order peace bond when there were grounds to fear someone would commit an offence in that area, and they would ensure that the defence of provocation would not apply in so-called honour killings and many spousal homicides.

I would like to take the opportunity to focus on those measures in Bill S-7 that address what I have already described as appalling practices involving violence directed against women and girls, namely early and forced marriage. These are practices that contradict Canadian values and cause great harm to victims.

In Canada, there is no national minimum age for marriage. Provincial and territorial legislation set out certain ages for additional requirements, such as parental consent for those under the age of majority or court approval for even younger children. However, they lack the Constitutional jurisdiction to set the absolute minimum age below which no child can marry.

Federal law currently sets the absolute minimum age at 16 years old, but in Quebec only. In other parts of Canada, the common law applies because there is no federal legislation. However, there is some uncertainty about the common law minimum age, which is usually interpreted as setting a minimum of 12 for girls and 14 for boys, although historically it has been as low as seven years old.

While very few marriages in Canada now involve people under the age of 16, amending the Civil Marriage Act in order to set a national minimum age of 16 years old for marriage would make it clear that underage marriage is unacceptable in Canada and will not be tolerated. In contrast, Austria, Australia, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom all have a minimum age below which no one can marry, even with parental consent.

Other amendments to the Civil Marriage Act proposed in Bill S-7 would codify the requirement that those getting married must give

their free and enlightened consent to marry each other and would codify the requirement for the dissolution of any previous marriage.

Building on the proposed amendments to the Civil Marriage Act, Bill S-7 also contains measures that would amend the Criminal Code to help prevent forced and underage marriage. These measures would criminalize knowingly officiating at an underage or forced marriage, actively participating in a wedding ceremony knowing that one party is marrying the other against his or her will or is under the age of 16 years old, and removing a minor from Canada for a forced or underage marriage.

Other proposed amendments would create a new peace bond that would give courts the power to impose conditions on an individual when there were reasonable grounds to fear that a forced marriage or a marriage under the age 16 would otherwise occur.

Such a peace bond could be used to prevent an underage or forced marriage by, for example, requiring the surrender of a passport as well as preventing a child from being taken out of Canada. This is an important option for a young woman, for example, who wants to stop her family from taking her out of the country for a forced marriage but does not want to press charges against her family members.

● (1340)

At the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, members had the opportunity to listen to Kamal Dhillon who was forced into a marriage at a young age and repeatedly abused for the 12 years of her marriage. She told the committee that she was constantly subjected to emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse, and even attempted murder several times. The bill seeks to prevent situations such as Ms. Dhillon's. I am glad to say that she escaped her marriage and is now an advocate for women who have been the target of barbaric practices.

The provisions in Bill S-7, including those that address underage and forced marriage, will help ensure that immigrant women and girls are protected from isolation and violence. The full participation of women and girls is essential in our democracy. Women seeking a better life for themselves and their families in Canada should never be subject to constant fear and threat of violence or death simply for living their lives and seeking out better opportunities for themselves.

We know that immigrant and newcomer women and girls face additional barriers in protecting themselves and seeking assistance compared to women born in Canada. These practices also have a very negative impact on families and society in general, as does all violence directed against women and girls. They also seriously affect all those involved from influencing immigration outcomes to breaking down opportunities for integration and success.



*Government Orders*

Bill S-7 would strengthen our laws to protect Canadians and newcomers to Canada from barbaric cultural practices that direct violence against women and girls. Through the enactment of Bill S-7, Parliament will send a strong message to those in Canada and those who wish to come to Canada that we will not tolerate activities that deprive individuals of their human rights.

I am sure we would all agree that we must stand up for all victims of violence and abuse, and take necessary action to prevent these practices from happening on Canadian soil. That is exactly what we will be doing by ensuring the bill's passage into law. That is why I urge my hon. colleagues to join me in supporting the passage of the bill.

• (1345)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the members in the Liberal Party have indicated that, in principle, we support the legislation going to second reading and quite possibly beyond. One of issues our critic has asked today is in regard to having the reference to “culture” in the title of the legislation.

Could the member explain why she believes it is important for the word “culture” to be incorporated into the title of the bill? It seems it is just not necessary. Could she expand on why she believes it is absolutely critical for the legislation?

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Mr. Speaker, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act would send out a clear message to those coming to Canada that forced marriage, honour-based violence or any other form of harmful cultural practices would unacceptable and would not be tolerated in Canadian society. That is why I like the word “cultural” in there, because we are talking about harmful cultural practices.

Our government will continue to ensure that Canada is protected from harmful barbaric cultural practices and continue to protect Canadians vulnerable to these abuses.

We will continue to take action by increasing the support for victims of crime, including through the victims bill of rights. We also passed the Safe Streets and Communities Act. Since 2007, over \$2.8 million has been approved through Status of Women Canada for community-based projects that address harmful cultural practices such as honour-based violence and forced marriages, and 720 projects were funded that support women and girls.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, many people who immigrate to Canada are not familiar with Canadian laws, and many women who immigrate to Canada are not aware of their rights.

If the Canadian government wants to provide real assistance to these women by taking positive action, could it not provide or help to provide prevention and support services to victims, instead of potentially criminalizing these women?

[English]

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Mr. Speaker, I agree that many women who come to Canada do not know their rights and we have taken steps to ensure they do. Victims advocates have said that they needed resources and we gave them those resources.

Our government has taken action to protect vulnerable Canadians, particularly women and girls, from early and forced marriage and other harmful cultural practices through, for example, special language programs for immigrant and refugee women. We are able to address issues such as family violence, spousal abuse, women's rights, legal rights, responsibilities and health care, and include bridging or referral to other available services in the community. This is very important for them.

Also publications such as Discover Canada and Welcome to Canada are guides that clearly communicate that Canada's openness and generosity do not extend to harmful cultural practices such as forced marriage or other forms of gender-based violence. This is for everyone, not specific to a particular culture or community. These are some examples of what we are doing to ensure women are aware of their rights when they get to Canada.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women for her great work on the committee and for her dedication to this very important cause.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell us how important this legislation is in giving additional powers to both educate and empower women so they know their rights when they are in Canada and find themselves in abusive situations such as these?

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Mr. Speaker, it is very important that the bill get passed so women and girls will be safe in Canada. This bill is all about that. Every time we put through measures to strengthen laws or bills that would help women and girls, the opposition members always vote against them.

It is time we help women and girls. This is a problem in Canada and we need to support it. Everyone should remember too that part of the bill would commit to an age of 16. Right now, as I said in my speech, someone could force a young girl to get married as young as age seven.

We need to pass the bill so all women and girls in Canada safe.

• (1350)

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to Bill S-7. I have listened to the speeches all morning. I have been on duty here and have been able to take in the speeches from all sides.

In particular, as a father of two daughters, it is important for me to express my feelings on Bill S-7 and what it means to me as a father. My two girls do not listen to their father that much to start with, so I cannot imagine me forcing them into doing anything. However, it boggles my mind that there are cultural beliefs from a variety of different organizations.

*Statements by Members*

I received a tweet a few minutes ago from someone who asked me which cultural group the Government of Canada was targeting with Bill S-7. The Liberal Party agrees to have the bill go to committee, which is excellent. The official opposition says that it disagrees with some of the wording. It does not like the word “cultural”. I think what is happening is the message is getting out that the bill is targeting different cultures. That is absolutely inaccurate. I read the definition of “cultural”. It is about a set of beliefs and values. People can look it up in *Webster's Dictionary*.

However, this is about barbaric cultural practices. It does not say it is X culture that does this. It could be any group or organization. The laws of our land have opposed polygamy since the 1800s. When the government of the day made the decision that polygamy was the wrong, it did not target a specific culture. The opposition has tried to portray cultures through the bill, which are not mentioned anywhere in the legislation. There is no specific culture identified. Those cultures the opposition have tried to identify did not exist in Canada, unless we consider Scottish culture or English culture as groups.

It is a cultural practice, a belief system, that an individual or organization has. Wherever the origin, if families have grown up believing that their fathers have the absolute right to force their daughters to marry someone against their will at the age of 15, regardless of where they are from, that is not tolerable in Canada. This legislation would put an end to that barbaric activity.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration indicated that the official opposition members should take this back to their leadership and ensure they understood what they opposed. They do not like the title of the bill because of the use of the word “cultural”. It does not say X cultural activity. They really should reconsider their position on this.

Of course everyone cannot withstand “barbaric” activity. Some people in the House may think that word a bit strong, but that is exactly what it is. Why would we not call it what it is? Who in the House, who in the country, believes in violence against their sons or daughters because they disagree with them on who, when and at what age they should marry? How is that not barbaric? The legislation would deal with that.

• (1355)

I have heard some other comments that we are ending people's ability to have an arranged marriage. That is not the case. Arranged marriages, the ones I am familiar with, have two consulting individuals, two people who decide. An arranged marriage would not work in my family, but it may work in others, and that is fair. The man and the woman, based on an arrangement made by their parents, consent to the marriage. They say it is a relationship, a marriage, they would both like to enter into. There is nothing wrong with an arranged marriage of two consenting adults.

The difference between an arranged and a forced marriage is that in the latter, one of those individuals, either the male or the female, does not agree, has had no say in it, and is not consenting to the marriage. That is what the bill is aiming at addressing.

There is a discussion about how many people this would affect and whether or not we have good statistics. In my personal view, if we have legislation that protects one young woman, one victim, from

this happening to her, we have done our job as parliamentarians to pass laws protecting individuals. We cannot decide whether or not this is a barbaric activity based on whether or not it only affects one person that we know of. It is barbaric in itself as an action, and not barbaric based on its numbers.

We on this side understand that the Liberal Party will be supporting the bill at second reading. There may be some amendments. The Liberals are supporting the concept that there cannot be one more victim.

I was at an event this past weekend in my riding. I think it was called “one billion awareness”. An organization was bringing awareness across the globe to the fact that one billion women in this world have faced some sort of aggression from a male, whether physical or not. In this country, we need to take every opportunity to make sure that barbaric activity, that aggression against women, comes to an end here and around the world.

Unfortunately, we cannot make it happen in other countries, but we do have a responsibility. I have a responsibility to my children, to my daughters. I have a responsibility to my wife to make sure that we take every opportunity we have to protect women and young boys in this case, young men and young women, from barbaric activities not of their choice but a result of a cultural norm some of their family members believe in. We need to be able to protect them from that. We cannot and should not tolerate that here in Canada.

This piece of legislation, in my view, should be supported by all parties. We should be able to deal with this at second reading, quickly get it to committee, quickly get it back to the House and pass it. We should have done it long ago. It is long overdue, and I appreciate the support of all members of Parliament for Bill S-7.

• (1400)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Seeing that the time for government orders has expired, the five minutes of questions and comments for the hon. member for Burlington will take place when this matter returns before the House.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### SENIORS

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, seniors play an important role in our families and communities. They helped build Canada and continue to contribute to its success.

That is why I always make a point of regularly visiting many of the wonderful seniors homes and organizations in York Centre. As I do every year to mark Valentine's Day, this past week I visited the Sunshine Centre for Seniors, Earl Bales Park Senior Centre, Downsview Retirement Community, and St. Bernard's Residence to distribute roses to all the residents.

As always, the smiles on their faces touched my heart. I want to thank them all for welcoming me so warmly. I also want to acknowledge and thank the directors, caregivers, and volunteers at these homes and organizations for all the hard work they do to care for their seniors.

*Statements by Members***EDUCATION**

We can best show our respect and gratitude to seniors by working hard to make sure that our communities are places where older people can participate, and find encouragement, acceptance, assistance, and services to continue to lead their lives with dignity.

For all they have achieved throughout life and all they will accomplish, we owe them our deepest gratitude. To quote poet Robert Browning:

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be.

\* \* \*

**ARTS AND CULTURE**

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to our nation's artists and cultural workers, many of whom call my riding of Parkdale—High Park home.

The arts and culture sector contributes \$47.8 billion to the Canadian economy annually and strengthens communities by allowing us to share our stories and find new ways of understanding the world we live in.

Sadly, under the government, artists are struggling to have their contributions respected. Conservative cuts to Canadian Heritage, the CBC, Telefilm, the National Film Board, and Library and Archives Canada will have a negative and lasting impact.

Without a strategy for ensuring that Canadian content is present in the digital realm, producers are missing key opportunities, and Canadian stories and voices are being drowned out.

New Democrats respect our artists and are committed to supporting them with stable funding for our national institutions, reversing the cuts to the CBC, and fostering continued growth in the cultural sector.

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**ASSISTED SUICIDE**

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this month, the Supreme Court made a historic decision in *Carter v. Canada*. The unanimous ruling to strike down the prohibition on physician-assisted death is a decision that the vast majority of Canadians support.

I wish to congratulate organizations such as Dying With Dignity Canada and the many other individuals, such as the Carter family, who brought this issue back to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court has said that a competent adult should have more options at the end of life. Those options should be based on their own life experience, ethics, morals, and religion.

The Supreme Court ruling mirrors the spirit and the letter of my private member's bill on this issue. This Parliament and Canadians must respond to this new empowerment of the individual. This is not a partisan issue. We can discuss it with dignity, mutual respect, empathy, love, hope, and mercy.

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to offer my congratulations to the Canadian-based charity, Educating Girls of Rural China; their founder, Tien Ching; and her board; and to wish them all the best as they celebrate their 10th anniversary.

Educating Girls of Rural China is dedicated to sponsoring the secondary and post-secondary education of financially challenged young women from rural western China who would otherwise miss out.

Since its establishment in 2005, EGRC has awarded hundreds of high school and university sponsorships to deserving young women. Through the help of its Canadian donors, EGRC has successfully sponsored 247 young women through to graduation, and presently supports 265 women students enrolled in secondary or post-secondary institutions.

As an enthusiastic supporter of the education of girls, of women's economic and social equality, and EGRC, I am delighted to see the continued success of this incredible organization. I believe I speak on behalf of all parliamentarians when I wish them the very best in their work to empower young women in rural China for many decades to come.

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● (1405)

**MICHAEL GREEN**

**Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I am wearing yellow to honour a creative genius, the co-founder of Calgary's celebrated One Yellow Rabbit Theatre Company, Michael Green.

Tragically, last week Michael Green died in a car crash, along with two other respected members of the artistic community, just outside Regina. It is a tremendous loss not only for Calgary but also for the nation.

Michael Green curated and produced Calgary's 2012 Cultural Capital of Canada extravaganza. He was the fuse that lit an explosion of artistic creation.

Over 1,200 people packed the Jack Singer Concert Hall to the rafters yesterday to praise Michael. I remember just a couple of weeks ago, when I joined Michael's parade, along with a bagpiper, clowns on stilts, and dancers wearing horses heads, as we paraded through Calgary's downtown, much to the surprise and delight of lunch-goers.

He was absolutely fearless and fun. He showed us the transformative power of art. We are heartbroken over what we have lost, but we are grateful for what we have gained.

*Statements by Members***EDUCATION**

**Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on February 6, I was delighted to welcome over a hundred students and teachers from St. Maria Goretti Catholic School during their visit to Parliament Hill. I had the distinct privilege of bringing them into this chamber, the very heart of our democracy and their Parliament. I hope they found the visit inspiring.

Their organizing teacher, Mr. Rawle Biran, who has organized trips to Ottawa with his students for the past decade, will be retiring at the end of this year. Mr. Biran is a teacher who strives to enshrine in his young students a sense of their civic duties, their rights, and their responsibilities.

I believe it is important to recognize the contributions of Mr. Biran and teachers like him, in the education and development of our young citizens. They often work long hours, with little recognition, to ensure that future generations are well-equipped to succeed in our evolving world.

I call upon all to applaud Mr. Rawle Biran and teachers like him for their years of service and to express our best wishes to them when they take their well-deserved retirements at the end of the school year.

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**CIVIC ACHIEVEMENT**

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to share with the members of this House the accomplishments of an outstanding constituent in my riding.

Larry Noonan is a retired school principal, a volunteer, a historian, a steward of the Altona Forest in Pickering, and a proponent of the Rouge national urban park.

Larry Noonan has contributed to the City of Pickering and the City of Toronto environmental initiatives, has served on park committees, and has been active in leading adult and youth groups and school classes into the Rouge Valley, for both leisure and study activities.

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of our national flag, our government decided to award this proud symbol to fifty Canadians and organizations who have contributed significantly to the well-being of our citizens, and Larry Noonan was one of them.

I would like the members of this House to join me in congratulating Larry Noonan for his achievements and successes and wish him all the best for his future endeavours.

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**2015 CANADA WINTER GAMES**

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it was my honour to attend the opening ceremony of the 2015 Canada Winter Games last Friday and to pay tribute to the athletes competing in my home riding of Prince George—Peace River.

2015 has been proclaimed as the Year of Sport in Canada and the Prince George 2015 Canada Winter Games is one of this year's signature events.

We can all be proud of each of the participants and of Canada's largest domestic multi-sport event, which brings together athletes from 19 sports over a two-week period and is a true testament to the dedication and hard work of Canadian youth.

We know that when we embrace the power of sport and lead more active lives, we build healthier and stronger communities.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the coaches, mission support staff, officials, game organizers and, of course, thousands of volunteers and parents who have supported these athletes through the years, with a special thanks to Bryan, Peter, and André of Pioneer Log Homes for their donation of the beautiful Canada Winter Games log cauldron.

Please join me in congratulating all of those who are making the Prince George 2015 Canada Winter Games a huge success.

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[Translation]

**“PASSE RONDELLE” HOCKEY TOURNAMENTS**

**Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in the House on this Mardi Gras.

The Tournois “Passe Rondelle” are back in Quebec City, and atom, novice and pre-novice players will compete in a unique atmosphere for more than six weeks. There will be 2,800 young hockey players and their families at the Gaétan-Duchesne arena in the wonderful Les Saules neighbourhood. For Quebec City, the tournaments also generate almost half a million dollars in economic benefits for the region.

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding work done by president Paul-André Rousseau, who was awarded the Prix Méritas by the Revue Sportive 2015. My thanks go to the passionate young players, their dedicated coaches, their parents who support them, the spectators who cheer them on and, finally, all the organizers and volunteers who make this possible.

Come one, come all to Quebec City to encourage the next generation and enable our young players to live out their passion.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

[English]

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians support the tax relief our government has brought forward to date. Bringing in higher taxes and higher debt is not the path we believe Canadians want to be on. A carbon tax is not a way to deal with economic issues in our country. Canadians cannot afford more of the NDP and Liberal risky tax-hike schemes. Luckily for Yukoners, the premier has come out condemning a carbon tax, saying it would hike taxes on northerners and raise costs. A job-killing carbon tax is reckless.

Our Conservative government is lowering taxes for families and putting more money back into their pockets. Keeping taxes low and creating jobs are essential to keeping this economy on the right track.

*Statements by Members*

We will never punish Canadians with a job-killing carbon tax.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CBC/RADIO-CANADA**

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister is accusing CBC employees of stirring up all kinds of plots, the government continues to axe funding for our public radio and television broadcaster. The Conservatives are carrying on with the destruction that the Liberals started in the 1990s, and they are jeopardizing the regional news that would sometimes be non-existent were it not for the CBC.

For 15 years now, residents of Abitibi—Témiscamingue have been able to stay on top of what is going on in our vast region—in Ville-Marie, Amos, La Sarre, Barraute, Rouyn-Noranda, Val d'Or and our small towns—because of two daily programs and a team of experienced reporters.

The NDP is the only party that has promised to restore appropriate, predictable funding for the CBC. I am also proud to say that hundreds of residents of Abitibi—Témiscamingue will gather this Saturday evening in Rouyn-Noranda to stand up for our public broadcaster, which we sorely need in the regions.

Many artists and artisans will declare their affection for the CBC loud and clear. I will be by their side to make the voice of Abitibi—Témiscamingue heard.

\* \* \*

[English]

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, thanks to our new family tax cut and enhanced child care benefit, 100% of families with children in Westman will be better off. Due to these measures, every parent in Canada will now receive just under \$2,000 per child.

There is a stark difference between our plan and the Liberal and New Democratic plans. While we are directly supporting hard-working families, the opposition would take money away from families. While we are cutting taxes, the Liberal leader would raise taxes. While our plan helps 100% of families with kids, the NDP plan would help only 10% of families.

Our tax cut plan will benefit every family with children in Canada. That is more than 4 million families.

I am proud to be part of a government that is reducing taxes and putting more money back into the pockets of each and every Canadian family with children.

\* \* \*

**MARK GOLDBLATT**

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, since becoming the Liberal advocate for co-operatives, I have had the privilege of meeting many community leaders dedicated to the co-operative cause. One of the most dynamic of them was Mark Goldblatt, former executive director of the Co-operative Housing

Federation of Canada and founder and chair of the Funeral Co-operative of Ottawa.

Mr. Goldblatt suddenly passed away on Wednesday, February 4. Many will miss his sage advice, me included.

A positive force for change in the co-op world, he also served as president of the Canadian Worker Co-operative Federation for 14 years. For the last 10 years of his life, he remained very active and developed 3 new housing co-operatives and 2 non-profit housing projects.

The recipient of several awards, Mr. Goldblatt was an iconic figure of Canada's thriving co-operative community. His actions paved the way for future generations of co-op entrepreneurs.

The memory of Mark Goldblatt and the impact he had lives on and will continue to do so for a long time yet. I want to thank his family for sharing him with us for so many years, and I want to thank Mark for his selfless dedication.

\* \* \*

● (1415)

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada has confirmed that middle-class families are better off under our Prime Minister than under the previous Liberal government.

The Liberal leader has no idea what it is like to be middle class. He has promised to reverse tax benefits for middle-class families, but under our family tax cut and enhanced child care benefit, 100% of families with children will receive an average of over \$1,100 a year. A single mother with two children earning \$30,000 would benefit from an additional \$1,500 a year.

We know that, for the important decisions that affect the lives of children, the decision-making power should be with moms and dads, not with government and certainly not with the Liberal leader.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CBC/RADIO-CANADA**

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in an interview yesterday, the Prime Minister said that Radio-Canada employees “hate” conservative values.

The Prime Minister is mistaken. It is not the majority of Radio-Canada journalists who dislike his party's policies, it is the majority of the population.

When he said that Quebeckers support his party's values, he did not point out that Quebeckers cast 10 times more votes for New Democrats than for Conservatives in the last election.

I must also point out that last Sunday, the member for Calgary Centre shocked everyone by saying that the closure of the Sun News Network was worse than the death of three journalists.

### Oral Questions

Everything is black and white for the Conservatives. There are no 50 shades of grey.

There are the good conservative media and the bad media that are too critical of the government.

We know that the Prime Minister would like the CBC to become the Conservative Party's news agency. It can take control of the board of directors and cut the CBC's budget, but this year, when the NDP replaces this government, it will restore the CBC's budget and ensure its independence.

\* \* \*

### TAXATION

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** During the week of constituency work, I had the pleasure of hearing from many families in my riding of Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, who are thrilled with our new tax cuts and other benefits for families.

Every family in Quebec and Canada will benefit by an average of \$1,100 per year. Thanks to us, from now on, parents will receive approximately \$2,000 for every child under the age of six. However, the Liberals and the NDP intend to take that money away and put it back into the bureaucracy. Our plan helps every single family with children. The NDP's plan will not put money back in the pockets of families. The Liberal leader, in turn, plans to increase taxes for ordinary Canadians. We will never let that happen.

The Conservative government believes that Canadians should be able to keep more of their hard-earned money. With our tax cuts and other benefits for families, we are proud to help them do exactly that.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, from the outset, the Prime Minister has been refusing to tell Canadians the truth about our role in Iraq. Our troops were not supposed to be on the front line and they were not supposed to be involved in combat, but of course we now know that they are. Now the Parliamentary Budget Officer says that the Conservatives “appear to breach [National Defence]’s legal obligations under the Parliament of Canada Act”.

In clear terms, they have broken the law, and it is because the Conservatives are refusing to tell the truth about the cost of the war in Iraq. Why does the Prime Minister keep hiding from Canadians the truth about his war in Iraq?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of course the government has released the costs of the mission exactly as it said it would, an additional \$122 million in incremental costs to this point in time. That is very clear. I do not know how much clearer it could be.

The reality is that the New Democrats will hate even a cent spent on the Canadian military. However, I can assure the House that, for this mission, we are ensuring not only that our personnel are well

paid but that they are well equipped and have the ordnance necessary to do their job. All Canadians are very proud of the job they are doing fighting ISIL.

[Translation]

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the Prime Minister keeps changing his story.

He did not tell the truth about sending our troops into the line of fire. He did not tell the truth about the cost of the war in Iraq. Once again, he is not telling the truth. However, today, the Parliamentary Budget Officer is telling us the truth.

If the Prime Minister is so convinced that his war in Iraq is a good idea, why on earth is he refusing to tell Canadians the truth about the cost of his war?

• (1420)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government is clearly telling the truth about the cost of our mission with our international allies in Iraq. We have told the truth about the air combat mission and the mission to assist and advise the Peshmerga forces. I am very pleased to see that Canadians support this truth. Only the NDP hates the truth.

\* \* \*

### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the minister of public peril said that he was not going to get caught up in definitions. That is not reassuring for anyone, especially since the Conservatives are unable to explain how peaceful dissent would still be protected under Bill C-51.

The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness refused to give any examples of activities that CSIS might now undertake to “disrupt threats”.

Can the Prime Minister tell us how far CSIS will be able to go under Bill C-51?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of measures in this bill, including making it a crime to promote terrorism. I think that is what the public expects because we must protect our country.

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, let us look at what else will be considered a crime in Canada.

[English]

Bill C-51 would expand CSIS's mandate to spying on “interference with...infrastructure” and “interference with...economic or financial stability”. The language is so broad that it would allow CSIS to investigate anyone who challenges the government's social, economic, or environmental policies. What is to stop this bill from being used to spy on the government's political enemy?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we knew that, with the NDP, it would be only a matter of a couple of weeks before we got into this kind of conspiracy theory. That is what we have come to expect from the black helicopter fleet over there.

*Oral Questions*

Of course the reality is that, under the legislation, based on information about imminent terrorist activity in Canada, should CSIS find it necessary to disrupt that, of course it would have to go to a court to get court sanction for those actions.

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**CBC/RADIO-CANADA**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure the Prime Minister will show us where the word “imminent” appears in that law.

[*Translation*]

The problem is that the Prime Minister sees enemies everywhere. Right now, he has CBC employees in his sights.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that CBC reporters “detest” Conservative values, and that the majority of CBC reporters, no less, want to get rid of his government.

Is it possible that the Prime Minister is mistaken and what he actually meant to say is that he has finally realized that the vast majority of Canadians want to get rid of his government?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we believe that a large percentage of Quebecers agree with our government on tax breaks, tax cuts, direct benefits to families and the fight against crime and terrorism, rather than with a party that wants to increase taxes, provides benefits to bureaucrats and unions, and does not take the fight against terrorists, jihadists and criminals seriously.

The orange wave in Quebec has become orange construction cones, and Quebecers will get rid of them.

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was astonished and disappointed yesterday to hear the Prime Minister attack the ethics and professionalism of CBC/Radio-Canada employees.

Canadians are proud of their public broadcaster and its mandate to connect Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Is the Prime Minister going to apologize to CBC/Radio-Canada employees and the Canadians who support them?

• (1425)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know very well that the Liberals, the New Democrats and the sovereignists would rather increase taxes, give the benefits of our programs to unions and bureaucrats and not take the fight against terrorism and crime seriously.

In our opinion, these are not the values of Canadians. These are not the values of Quebecers. However, these are Conservative values, and we will continue to do our job.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I think there was a translation problem with the question.

[*English*]

There are five new measles cases in Ontario. The Prime Minister has run no ads promoting the life-saving benefits of vaccinations. He has in fact cut public health's immunization budget by 23%.

Will the Prime Minister stop his self-promoting, partisan government ads and invest instead now in a campaign that encourages parents to vaccinate their kids?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and other members of the government have been very clear on the fact that Canadians should seek proper vaccines against measles and against a range of other illnesses. These vaccines have historically proven extremely effective in reducing and in some cases even eliminating certain types of previously debilitating ailments.

We will continue to make sure, when we are responsible, that Canadians are aware of these options, not just in the health area but across all areas of government.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week we learned that there were 10 measles cases in Lanaudière. The government has failed to inform parents of the importance of vaccinating their children.

Furthermore, Mr. Harper cut the budget by 23%—

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Papineau knows that he must use titles or riding names and not proper names.

The hon. member for Papineau.

**Mr. Justin Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, I apologize.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister cut the Public Health Agency of Canada's immunization budget by 23%.

Will the Prime Minister stop his useless partisan ads and immediately start promoting vaccinations for our children?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health always advocates the use of vaccines. Vaccines have historically proven effective in improving the health of our children and families. We encourage this all the time.

As for the ads, we have a responsibility to make Canadians aware of all government measures, and we will continue to do so.

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**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in its report, the RCMP says that the anti-petroleum movement—the RCMP's word, not mine—is a threat to Canada. No one here encourages or tolerates violence. However, this report clearly targets environmental organizations. In light of Bill C-51, that is very strong language.

Does the minister think that environmentalists really pose a risk to the stability of the Canadian economy?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our bill is clear. It targets people who commit acts of terrorism. Now, the RCMP also wants to monitor people who commit such acts.

The member should read clause 2 of the bill, which clearly states that peaceful demonstrations, protests, and dissent are not covered by the bill. That should reassure her.

[*English*]

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are right to be concerned that the Conservatives are going too far with this bill. Yesterday the minister failed to explain how the bill would impact legitimate dissent, and so today let us talk about another section.

Bill C-51 proposes a new criminal offence: to advocate or promote terrorism in general.

Canada already has strong laws that make it an offence to incite a terrorist act. Can the minister provide a single example showing that such a new offence is necessary?

• (1430)

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we saw this weekend that Copenhagen and the world are at war with the jihadist international movement.

Our anti-terrorism bill is clear. Our security agencies can only target those who pose a risk to Canada and not legitimate dissent. The member should read clause 2 of the bill, which clearly states that an activity that undermines the security of Canada “does not include lawful advocacy, protest, dissent and artistic expression”. Please read the bill.

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the word “lawful” is a new insertion there, which seems to say that most dissent is something other than lawful.

Today the government failed to give us a single example of the new activities CSIS would be allowed to engage in to disrupt under Bill C-51. The minister still cannot clearly explain the provisions of the bill that experts think will impact legitimate dissent and free speech.

How can Canadians trust the current government if members will not answer basic questions about what is in the bill with anything except talking points?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week, we saw the NDP oppose a bill to fight terrorism. Yesterday, we saw them oppose measures to improve parliamentary security on the Hill. They are even incapable of saying that the attacks on October 22, here in Ottawa, were terrorist attacks.

Canadians can count on our government to put effective measures in place to protect Canada from terrorism.

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to employment insurance, it looks like the arrival of a new minister does not herald a new approach. First the Conservatives imposed harsh restrictions on employment insurance, and now they are telling departmental officials to make it harder for unemployed workers to get the benefits they are entitled to. Officials who are a little too helpful are getting slapped on the wrist. That makes no sense.

Instead of attacking unemployed workers and public servants, why do the Conservatives not attack unemployment by creating jobs?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my predecessor worked to eliminate wait times for benefits. He succeeded. Currently, over half of the people receive their benefits in less than 28 days.

We are also working to create more jobs by lowering taxes. We are trying to put more money in the pockets of businesses and individuals to promote economic activity and create opportunities for people to work.

[*English*]

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in December 2004, the member for Nepean—Carleton told the House that it was “...not politicians, who create jobs”. It is an odd statement, given he is now the jobs minister.

Fewer than four in 10 unemployed Canadians are now getting benefits, and now he has been given this new responsibility. What will the minister do to fix EI so that it actually works for unemployed Canadians, or is that somebody else's job?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member illustrates the distinction between the two sides of the House. On that side, they believe in increasing taxes, increasing the burden on families and employers so that politicians and bureaucrats can hoard all the money for themselves.

On this side of the House, we believe in reducing taxes, which has created 1.2 million net new jobs. We have lifted hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty, including during the recession, and Canadians are better off. Our job record is the best out of all the G7 countries. Low taxes work.

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**CHILD CARE**

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what nonsense. From job losses to EI to their failure to create child care spaces—

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



**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for London—Fanshawe has the floor. Members need to come to order.

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am glad you reminded them of their manners.

From job losses to EI to their failure to create child care spaces, Conservative economic mismanagement is hurting ordinary Canadians. Labour force participation is at a 15-year low, and people like Jillanne Mignon, who wants to work but cannot afford the high cost of child care, are out of luck.

Why will the Conservatives not adopt the NDP leader's plan for affordable child care and ensure that all parents who want to work are given the opportunity to work?

• (1435)

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, here is the difference between their plan and our plan. Our plan gives power to parents: rural parents, parents who are not working nine to five, parents who may be using another family member to help look after their children, or parents who make a decision themselves to stay home and look after their children. Our plan puts money into the pockets of every single Canadian family with children. Their plan would help less than 10% of all Canadian families.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, one thing is for sure: the Conservatives are unable to create good jobs.

The country's participation rate is at its lowest even though Canadians want to work. For parents with children, one salary is not enough to pay for day care. The NDP has a plan to help families and create affordable day care across the country.

Why is the minister refusing to help Canadian families that want to work and raise their children?

[English]

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP has failed to talk to parents from different areas in this country, rural Canadian families, families that are not working nine to five jobs, and families that have decided that one parent will stay home to look after the children. New Democrats are not considering any of those families when they talk about their child care plan.

Their plan would only help less than 10% of all Canadian families. Our plan helps every single Canadian family with children. It puts money directly into their pockets and—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

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#### TAXATION

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** What is clear, Mr. Speaker, is that the Conservatives cannot be bothered to help ordinary Canadians, but they will bend over backwards to help the well off, even if it means turning a blind eye to tax evasion. Leaked documents show that more than 1,800 Canadians are holding secret Swiss bank accounts with HSBC, but there have been no charges of tax fraud or tax evasion.

#### Oral Questions

Why are the Conservatives using kid gloves on wealthy tax cheats while ordering public servants to deny EI benefits to the unemployed?

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has a very strong record dealing with tax evasion. Since 2006 the CRA has audited over 8,600 international tax cases, identifying over \$5.6 billion in additional taxes that are being collected.

Regarding the HSBC accounts, where non-compliance was expected the CRA conducted hundreds of audits, which have led to over \$21 million in taxes and penalties being reassessed. Furthermore, the CRA has received more than 250 voluntary disclosures. That is \$123 million in previously undisclosed accounts.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the scandal involving HSBC's Swiss subsidiary is rocking the whole world, but here in Canada, the Conservatives are asleep at the switch.

We know that over 1,800 of the richest Canadian businesses and individuals have secret bank accounts in Geneva, mainly to avoid paying taxes here in Canada. Several well-known names were made public by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, but no charges have yet been laid.

When will the minister bring down the hammer on these white collar criminals?

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has a strong record when it comes to fighting international tax fraud.

[English]

We are doing something about it, as I have just said. I will give the numbers again, because, frankly, they are quite impressive.

With respect to the HSBC accounts where non-compliance was expected, the CRA conducted hundreds of audits. That has led to over \$21 million in taxes and penalties being reassessed. The CRA has received more than 250 voluntary disclosures about HSBC accounts. That is \$123 million in previously undisclosed documents.

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#### THE ECONOMY

**Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a recent Conference Board study shows that Canada's younger generations are earning less and receiving fewer pension benefits than their parents. It states, "young Canadians may have a lower lifetime earning potential than any generation before".

There is no more dire indictment of a country's economic performance than the prospect that our future may be poorer than our past.

*Oral Questions*

Stale and misleading talking points, like the ones we have heard already today, will not deliver prosperity for this generation. When will the government finally table a budget with a real plan for jobs and growth?

• (1440)

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians know they are much better off with our Conservative government. Our government is focused on what matters most to Canadians, and that is jobs and the economy. Over 1.2 million net new jobs have been created since the recession. These jobs are overwhelmingly full time and in the private sector.

Both the IMF and the OECD forecast Canada to have one of the strongest growing G7 economies in the years ahead. The future looks bright. I know that for young Canadians who are involved in skill development, the future looks bright.

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**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the only thing that is more snarled than GTA traffic is the government's jumbled priorities when it comes to municipal infrastructure. Roads, sewers and bridges are vital job creation tools, but Conservatives have flushed over \$750 million of infrastructure money into taxpayer funded partisan ads. Roads are cracking, bridges are rusting and the Conservatives are using infrastructure money to buy votes, not infrastructure, not steel and not concrete.

Does the minister agree that the only thing growing faster than GTA potholes is the Conservative addiction to lavish partisan ads?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the new building Canada plan is the longest and biggest ever in the country. We have done that with respect for jurisdictions. That is very important.

We have invested more in the infrastructure of the country than the former government, and we will continue to do so.

Since our government took office, Canada has consistently led G7 countries in total investment in infrastructure as a percentage of GDP. It is quite a contrast to the Liberals.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is all about priorities. Imagine over \$2 million for ministers to take pictures.

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The irony is that all those members yelling "louder" makes it impossible for the Speaker to hear the member. Perhaps if they stop shouting that, the member would not have to speak so loudly.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North has the floor.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, over \$2 million tax dollars have been spent for pictures when ministers have their special events. They really need to learn how to take selfies. Hundreds of millions of tax dollars have been spent on political advertising. It is

about priorities. At the same time, there was a cutback from spending over \$2 billion on infrastructure to \$210 million last year.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Why has he given up on valuable infrastructure expenditures? He should think of the Prairies. He should think of the needs of Calgary, Winnipeg and other municipalities.

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when we talk about selfies, the member just has to look in front of him to find the king of that. He is talking about \$2 million. I remember the \$40 million from the sponsorship scandal that are still missing.

We are investing in infrastructure in the country like never before.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives are also spending hundreds of millions of dollars on the war in Iraq, they are making our reservists wait nearly two years for their severance pay. It is completely unacceptable that 2,754 soldiers are waiting for that pay.

When will the government get its priorities straight and put its resources in the right place in order to resolve these outstanding files as soon as possible?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this backlog is unacceptable. That is why, as of the beginning of this month, the Department of National Defence has asked its staff to process the back payment for reservists, and I have been assured that it will be done as soon as possible.

• (1445)

**Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, our soldiers and veterans deserve better.

While the Conservatives are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on their war in Iraq, soldiers and veterans do not have access to their pension benefits and proper health care. The government clearly does not have its priorities straight.

When will the minister finally improve services for our soldiers and veterans?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are proud of our record. We have increased investments in the Canadian Armed Forces by 27%. Modern tools to help them do their job are important. We are taking care of our men and women in uniform.

However, the reality is that the NDP wants to drastically reduce the Department of National Defence budget and it does not support our soldiers' mission in Iraq, all against the wishes of Canadians. We are there to help and work with our men and women of the Canadian Forces.

[English]

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the sad fact is that the Conservatives spend hundreds of millions of dollars on war and yet fail to provide basic services for our soldiers when they come home injured.

Reservists, like those in Thunder Bay and right across the country, are now waiting two years or more for severance pay, and there is a backlog of over 2,700 and growing. It is simply unacceptable.

We welcome the new minister, but when will the Minister of National Defence fix this mess and finally give the Canadian Forces and reservists the support they need and deserve?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I gather the member did not hear my first answer, which is that from the beginning of this month, my department directed people to process the back payment for reservists. I agree that backlog is unacceptable and must be dealt with expeditiously.

When the member says that this government spends money on war, in fact what we spend money on, through the Canadian Armed Forces, is protecting the security and interests of our country. We are doing exactly that in Iraq. That is why the men and women in uniform sign up to fight for our country to defend its interests and its security.

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#### VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister stated in the House of Commons that when it came to cuts to the DVA, only backroom jobs would be cut.

Just recently 44 front-line jobs have been cut in order to transfer that work over to backroom private service insurance companies to deal with insurance benefit claims for veterans. Now we find out that Medavie Blue Cross will cut off the benefits of veterans if it cannot reach them by phone.

My question for the minister is very clear. This ideology that the government has regarding cutting public service jobs and transferring that work over to the private sector will not improve benefits for veterans. In fact, it will frustrate them even more. Will the minister reverse his decision and bring those jobs back to the public service?

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as that member well knows, those jobs do not need to be brought back because there were no cuts. The employees at issue were reassigned to front-line jobs at Veterans Affairs Canada. Their salaries were maintained and there were no moves involved.

In fact, the changes to the treatment authorization centre recognize the increased number of service providers across the country and these changes should bring processing times down. That

is something I think the member would agree is a priority for our veterans.

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#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pro-Russian forces have blatantly violated the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine. Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs please update the House on the government's response to this ongoing Russian military aggression against sovereign Ukrainian territory? Canadians need to know this.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the violation of the agreed upon ceasefire is completely unacceptable. For that reason, today I am prepared to announce that we will increase the number of sanctions against prominent Russian individuals and entities. Details will be released in the coming days, but Canada has already sanctioned over 210 individuals and entities. I am proud to say that we have the toughest sanction regime in the world in Canada.

This conflict will only end when Russia halts its invasion. We will continue to stand with the people of Ukraine, as we always have.

\* \* \*

● (1450)

#### FORESTRY INDUSTRY

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's forestry industry provides good middle-class jobs in communities across the country, but the Conservatives have failed it. Dozens of sawmills have closed, throwing thousands out of work. Now the Conservatives are embroiled in another trade dispute, this time with China, over pulp that will further damage this important sector.

Government should resolve issues with major trade partners before they erupt into disputes that hurt businesses and throw workers out of their jobs. Why did the minister fail to sort this issue out before it became a full-blown trade dispute?

**Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, this government has taken this issue to the World Trade Organization, where we will be pursuing Canadian interests standing up for our industry. However, there is no government that has done more for the forestry industry than this Conservative government.

[Translation]

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Fortress Cellulose is the victim of predatory and discriminatory tariffs imposed by China on its dissolving pulp.

Despite the company's investments, there have been more layoffs in Thurso. The Conservatives did bring this before the WTO, but it has been dragging on for years and there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

*Oral Questions*

What will the minister do to quickly address the situation and reassure our workers?

[English]

**Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I already mentioned, this government took the step of taking this dispute to the World Trade Organization, where we believe we will prevail.

This government stands up for the dissolving pulp industry as it does for the forestry industry more broadly. I will repeat again that there is no government that has done more for the forestry industry than this Conservative government.

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**CBC/RADIO-CANADA**

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister told a private radio station that “a lot” of Radio-Canada employees “hate” Conservative values”. Recently, his spokesman also wrote that it was difficult for him not to conclude that his “worst suspicions about Radio-Canada held true”.

We have seen in the past what happens to those who do not agree with Conservative politics. Why does the Prime Minister believe that CBC employees have to stick to Conservative values?

[Translation]

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister gave this interview, he was talking about the people of Quebec.

I travel around Quebec regularly and I can say that what Quebeckers want is more money in their pockets so they can take care of their families, sound and careful management of public money and a balanced budget, the end of sentencing discounts for criminals who abuse victims, and the safety of our communities and our homes.

That is what Quebeckers want.

**Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister dared to say yesterday that CBC employees detest the Conservatives.

We know very well that he clearly would prefer that our public broadcaster become his personal propaganda tool. However, his pathetic statement reminds me of those made by the Minister of National Defence, who previously accused our public broadcaster of lying all the time, and the Prime Minister's press secretary, who said that he had suspicions about the CBC.

Now that their contempt is on public display, will the minister finally confess that she and her government take malicious pleasure in sucking the life out of the CBC?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, that is false. The CBC receives more than \$1.1 billion a year to do its job.

That said, the Prime Minister gave Quebeckers what they wanted: tax relief, direct benefits to families through tax cuts, action to combat jihadists, solid foreign policy and measures placing the rights of victims ahead of the rights of criminals.

They will continue to oppose; we will defend Quebeckers.

\* \* \*

[English]

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives refused for four months to provide Canadians with any information at all about the cost of the Iraq mission, so I asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer for help. According to the PBO, they then illegally “refused all PBO requests for specific data” on this mission.

Yesterday, the minister added insult to this secrecy and deception by slapping down a single cost number—no detail, no analysis, just an end run of the PBO's report released today.

Does the minister not believe Canadians have the right to be respected and to have real cost information on this important mission?

● (1455)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC):** It is an important mission that the Liberal Party opposes, Mr. Speaker.

This government committed from the beginning that we would release the costs in the appropriate and normal parliamentary method, which we have done. It will be tabled this week as part of the supplementary estimates C: \$122 million is incremental cost associated with Operation Impact.

The real issue is why the Liberal Party has turned its back on decades of responsible internationalism, and why a party that used to stand for national security is now standing against our efforts to protect Canadians in opposing the genocidal terrorist organization ISIL.

We are proud of what our men and women in uniform are doing to combat that organization.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for official languages, if there is one in this government. Will this minister ensure that his or her colleagues set an example and comply with the requirement to communicate with the public in both official languages, including electronically?

To help the minister do his or her job, here is the list of ministers who do not respect bilingualism in their communications: the President of the Treasury Board; the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons; the Minister of Finance; the Minister of Industry; the Minister of International Trade; the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration; the Minister of the Environment; the Minister of Health; the Minister of Transport; the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans; the Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women; the Minister of Veterans Affairs; the Minister—

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. Minister of Official Languages.

**Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the opposition member just said is ridiculous. The government routinely communicates in both official languages.

The member is talking about Twitter accounts. However, those are the members' personal accounts.

We take our country's two official languages very seriously.

\* \* \*

#### SENIORS

**Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, following the Delâge report on the tragic fire in L'Isle-Verte, the Quebec government announced that the installation of sprinklers would be mandatory in almost all seniors' residences.

Since the CMHC was involved in building and renovating assisted-living housing for frail senior citizens, could the Minister of Employment and Social Development tell us whether he has read the report and what measures will be taken to help the owners of seniors' residences cover the costs related to sprinkler installation?

These are seniors we are talking about, the most vulnerable members of our society. I would greatly appreciate a relevant answer to my question.

**Hon. Ed Holder (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the provinces and territories have the option of adopting a model code or creating their own code. Ultimately, they are responsible for regulating the construction and fire safety standards under their respective code.

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[English]

#### HEALTH

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives voted to support an NDP motion to compensate thalidomide victims, they promised swift action. Now, months later, as deadlines pass, survivors fear the Conservatives will break their promise. Recently, the spokesperson for the Thalidomide Victims Association said, "Members are starting to fear it was all a façade".

Thalidomide survivors have waited long enough. Will the minister today set a concrete date for delivering financial relief?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I met with Mercedes, the head of the thalidomide survivors

#### Oral Questions

association just last week again. I reassured her and confirmed to her that there will be compensation for the survivors and we are working very hard to deliver that soon.

She knows very clearly that she has my commitment and that we will be there to support them in the long term.

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#### CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, before Bill C-31, CRA officials were inexplicably prohibited from passing along evidence of serious criminal activity, uncovered on the job, to relevant law enforcement agencies. Clearly, this was and is unacceptable.

Can the Minister of National Revenue today please explain to this House why this change was necessary and how it is consistent with our government's commitment to protecting Canadians?

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there have been occasions when CRA officials, in the course of their ordinary duties, have uncovered evidence of drug trafficking, terrorism, child pornography, and even contracts for the commission of murder and have been restricted from conveying this information to law enforcement.

When CRA officials uncover such evidence of serious criminal activity, they should be able to share it with law enforcement. I think that is what everyone expects, and certainly thanks to our government, that will now be the case.

I find it shocking that both the Liberals and NDP voted against this.

\* \* \*

●(1500)

[Translation]

#### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, despite the superhuman efforts made by the Acadian community of Nova Scotia, it is no longer able to do more with less. It has reached a tipping point.

Why is the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages abandoning this community? The minister herself has acknowledged that the Acadian federation has done an exemplary job managing its resources. Can the minister at least commit to finding additional funding to better support Nova Scotia's Acadian community?

**Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, we take official languages and official language minority communities very seriously. That is why we have a roadmap with \$1.1 billion in funding. This is a record investment made by our government.

We will continue to build on these efforts and to support our friends in Canada's francophone communities.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board's failure to respect the French language regarding the energy east project is unacceptable. Last November, the NDP even filed a complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages about this.

It seems that a significant part of the 30,000 pages that TransCanada submitted to the board are still not available in French, even though a large part of the route would go through Quebec. People who own farmland, as well as municipalities in Quebec, feel cheated.

Does the minister find the National Energy Board's contempt for Canada's francophones to be acceptable?

[*English*]

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board has fulfilled its requirements under the Official Languages Act.

Any documents produced by the National Energy Board must be published in both official languages. Questions related to documents filed by the applicant should be directed toward the project proponent.

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**TAXATION**

**Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government understands that Canadian families know best how to spend their money.

This is a fundamental difference between our party and the Liberals and NDP. That is why our government has taken real action to reduce taxes on Canadian families, including family tax cuts and the enhanced universal child care benefit.

Can the Minister of State for Social Development please update this House on our government's initiatives to put more money in the pockets of Canadian families?

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Don Valley East for the good work he is doing to support families in his riding.

Our government is in position for fulfilling our promise to balance the federal budget. We are in a position to now help families balance their own budgets. They are getting ready to file their taxes, and almost two million families will benefit, as they file their income taxes for 2014, from our family tax cut. They are also going to benefit from our expansion to the universal child care benefit.

We are making sure more money is in the pockets of Canadian families. The Liberals and the NDP would reverse that tax cut.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP, the Bloc Québécois is not ambivalent about the TransCanada pipeline project. Again, the

National Assembly of Quebec already voted unanimously on a motion with regard to its environmental jurisdiction over this project.

The environmental aspect of the pipeline is very important to us. All the federalist parties in Ottawa need to understand that Quebec has to be able to decide what goes on in its province. It is Quebec's territory and Quebec assumes all the risks. It is up to Quebec and its regions to decide.

Will the government commit to respecting Quebec's environmental process and the choices of Quebecers?

[*English*]

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have been clear. We do not take positions on specific applications for energy infrastructure until an independent review is complete.

Our government relies on the independent National Energy Board for decisions related to proposals of energy infrastructure, including TransCanada's energy east proposal.

We look forward to receiving the result of the rigorous, thorough, and independent review. Our government has been clear: proposals will only be approved if they are safe for Canadians and safe for the environment.

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● (1505)

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I have asked the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness this question. I have asked the Minister of Justice. I would like the Prime Minister to perhaps give me an actual answer.

Under Bill C-51, the new secret police powers are broad and extensive but have been said to limit those areas of lawful protest and advocacy. My question is about those activities that are by definition not lawful but that are peaceful, such as when Conservative MPs refused to fill out the long gun registry or when Green Party members blockade Kinder Morgan pipelines.

Will non-violent, peaceful activities be exempted from this act?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think it is very well known that the anti-terrorism act, 2015, is designed to deal with the promotion and actual execution of terrorist activities, and not other lawful activities.

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**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[*Translation*]

**DRUG-FREE PRISONS ACT**

The House proceeded to consideration of Bill C-12, the Drug-Free Prisons Act, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

**The Speaker:** There is one motion in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-12.

*Government Orders*

[English]

The sponsor has indicated that she will not be proceeding with her motion. Consequently, there will be no motions at report stage. The House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question to concur in the bill at report stage.

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC)** moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Speaker:** When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now?

[Translation]

**Hon. Steven Blaney** moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak this afternoon to Bill C-12, which seeks to eradicate drugs from our federal penitentiaries.

From the outset, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security for studying and adopting this legislative measure. It is an important measure for fighting the use and presence of illicit drugs in our federal penitentiaries and holding offenders responsible for their actions. I am pleased to see that the committee recognized the importance of moving forward with this legislative measure.

[English]

Drug use and abuse in our federal prisons is a serious and pervasive problem, one that cannot be solved overnight. It may seem logical that prisons ought to be free from drugs, but unfortunately this is not the case. The reality is that 75% of offenders are entering Canadian federal prisons with a substance abuse problem. Moreover, almost half of all federal offenders are serving sentences for crimes that are directly related to their substance abuse, so the reality is that when offenders enter our federal penitentiaries, they have a serious drug addiction problem. Rehabilitation helps those offenders to get rid of their drug addictions. That is why Correctional Service of Canada launched a program to eliminate and eradicate drugs in prisons. It has been in place since in 2008.

[Translation]

When Correctional Service Canada launched its transformation program in 2008, one of its priorities was to eliminate drugs in its institutions.

The goal is simple: put an end to drug smuggling in federal penitentiaries. There are two benefits to getting drugs out of our federal penitentiaries: It will make penitentiaries safer for the staff and, of course, it will help our inmates in their rehabilitation.

• (1510)

[English]

Drugs and other contraband in our federal prisons cause a serious security problem for our correctional officers. Offenders who are often under the influence of drugs are more erratic, unpredictable, and often violent toward correctional officers, themselves, and other

inmates. This destabilizes the institutions and puts the men and women on the front lines at risk.

Drug paraphernalia causes another layer of risk. Needles in the hands of prisoners simply give another weapon to prisoners seeking to harm our front-line personnel. If I may digress for a moment, this shows just how foolhardy an approach the NDP has taken by seeking to establish a needle exchange in prisons. Is it naïveté or hubris that the NDP believes these easily concealed needles would not cause a risk to front-line staff?

[Translation]

Our correctional officers play a key role in the correctional system. They maintain the safety of our federal penitentiaries while monitoring the offenders, supervising them and interacting with them. Regardless of the nature of their clients, the inmates, and their place of work, correctional officers deserve to work in a safe place where their integrity will not be not adversely affected and where they will feel safe.

Removing drugs from our federal prisons contributes to that goal and by so doing, we are also helping offenders successfully reintegrate into society. Some of them have to take a drug treatment program as part of their correctional plan. If they do not have access to drugs when they are incarcerated, their chances of success are greatly increased. This helps reduce the demand for drugs and ensures that these offenders are making progress toward a successful rehabilitation.

As in a legitimate economy, when demand drops, so does supply. Supply adapts to demand. This formula also works in our federal prisons. By putting an end to drug smuggling in these institutions, we can ensure that offenders are successful in their drug treatment program. Success in these programs will result in a lower demand for drugs and, therefore, a drop in supply.

[English]

Ultimately, removing drugs from our federal prisons will help keep Canadians safe. With this goal in mind, our Conservative government has implemented a number of measures to directly target drugs inside our prison walls. We have seen great progress on a number of fronts, progress that has been recognized by the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in its report following its 2012 study on drugs in federal prisons.

[Translation]

For example, Correctional Service Canada adopted a consistent approach to manage all of the main entrances and vehicle service entrances, which provide access to penitentiaries.

Correctional Service Canada has increased the number of teams of sniffer dogs. We have also brought in new equipment to improve scanning for visitors and other people who go in and out of federal prisons every day.

Correctional Service Canada has also developed a national database for monitoring and tracking visitors. These are practical tools to control the movement of people and goods entering penitentiaries to keep drugs out.

*Government Orders*

•(1515)

[English]

Correctional Service of Canada has also expanded its random urinalysis testing of offenders to reduce the availability and consumption of drugs inside institutions. In fact, since 2013 CSC has been carrying out random urinalysis testing on 10% of offenders every month, increasing the chances that all offenders will be subject to a random test each year.

[Translation]

All of these measures directly support the efforts made to make prisons a secure environment in which corrections staff are safer and in which offenders can focus on rehabilitation. The Drug-Free Prisons Act is another step towards achieving that objective.

Earlier I mentioned that Correctional Service Canada was increasingly using random urine sample screenings to effectively target offenders over the course of a year. The measure we are implementing is based on that work. It will amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to give Correctional Service Canada and the Parole Board of Canada new powers so that they can use data taken from the urine sample screenings to hold offenders responsible for their actions.

Essentially, if an inmate's urine sample tests positive for the presence of drugs, there will be consequences with both Correctional Service Canada and the parole process, since this inmate is clearly not ready to reintegrate into society.

[English]

Under the legislation, the Parole Board would have the explicit authority to cancel an offender's parole if the offender fails a urine test between the time at which he or she is granted parole and the time he or she physically leaves the penitentiary.

It is important to note that any offender who refuses to take a urine test during this time is considered to have failed the test. In this way, there is no loophole that an offender could slip through. The onus falls fully on the shoulders of the offender to ensure that he or she stays clear of drugs in order to be released on parole.

The bill would also stipulate the Parole Board's authority to set specific conditions for an offender as part of his or her parole in relation to an offender's use of drugs or alcohol. In other words, it could impose a condition that the offender must completely abstain from all drug or alcohol use while on parole.

[Translation]

These two amendments will strongly encourage inmates and former inmates to make better decisions and to abstain from drugs over the course of their incarceration and parole. This is all part of the objective of making Canadians safer.

[English]

Ultimately, the concept of the bill is simple. By providing drug-free prisons, we would be helping offenders work toward successful paroles and reducing recidivism, and ultimately there would be fewer drugs on our streets.

I appeared in front of the committee on public safety and was pleased to see the bill receive positive support, so I hope the bill can proceed quickly at report stage and pass without further amendment so that we can take another step towards freeing our penitentiaries of drugs by providing tools to the Correctional Service of Canada so that it can move in that direction.

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his remarks. It is true that the NDP has supported the bill.

I want to ask the minister if he will admit that the only thing the bill would really do is put into law the practices of the Parole Board of removing parole from those who fail drug tests and of applying conditions about drug use to parole. In other words, there would be no real change here. In fact, the discretion would remain with the Parole Board.

In addition to the fact that there would be no real change, although it is positive to make things explicit, what else is there in this bill about drug-free prisons? It is actually a false title on the bill. It is really a bill about entrenching Parole Board practices for dealing with failed drug tests and setting parole conditions. It really has nothing to do with drug-free prisons.

•(1520)

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, there is one fundamental principle underlying the bill, which is that we want to empower offenders to take responsibility for their behaviour both in prison and during their statutory release.

One has to note that almost 95% of offenders who are seeking rehabilitation in our facilities are being provided with services. Correctional Service of Canada has also implemented an early detection system, so that whenever an offender is entering a facility, CSC is able to evaluate if there is a need to provide some support resources.

In that sense, the bill would provide more tools for offenders to be responsible for their behaviour so that they can free themselves of their addiction. The tools are provided within the facilities and are part of a successful rehabilitation.

One thing the bill would help prevent is offenders continuing to have a drug addiction while serving a sentence. We believe this is not the ideal condition for these individuals, and it also represents a threat to society, since these drug addictions may encourage criminal behaviour.

We are proud to bring forward a bill that would impose consequences on offenders who are not drug-free and who are still using drugs, whether in prison or during their statutory release.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, like the critic from the NDP, I too wondered if the minister was really talking about a different bill than Bill C-12, in the way he basically painted it all out of proportion. The bill's title shows the kind of deception that comes forth from the government. The drug-free prisons bill is not going to make prisons drug free.



*Government Orders*

The minister, in answer to a question, said that the bill was to empower the offender to get free of drugs. The Correctional Investigator, in his 2011-12 annual report, said the following, which I think is the way one empowers an offender:

...a comprehensive and integrated drug strategy should include a balance of measures—prevention, treatment, harm reduction and interdiction.

Will the minister come forward with a program in this area? Does the minister not agree that to really make prisons drug free, these are the kinds of programs that we need, rather than just more punishment, that we really need a drug strategy in prisons to assist people to get off drugs, rather than just penalties?

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member that the bill is part of an ongoing strategy brought forward by our government over the course of the last year, in which we have invested more than \$100 million. We have invested in stopping the revolving door of drugs into our prisons. This is an issue that all modern countries are facing, but we are dealing with the issue by including drug detector dogs, security intelligence capacity, and perimeter security.

We have to go to great lengths to prevent drugs from entering our facilities, but at the same time, I would be remiss if I did not mention the excellent programming for substance abuse offered to offenders in our penitentiaries. Correctional Service Canada provides a range of internationally accredited substance abuse programs to offenders whose substance dependence is related to their criminal behaviour. If the member may recall, in my opening remarks I noted that there are many offenders who enter our penitentiaries with drug addiction related problems. They have an opportunity to take advantage of the great program offered by Correctional Service Canada to get rid of their drug addiction.

In the meantime, we will not tolerate the use of drugs in our facilities. That is why we need to be efficient in the measures we are putting forward to make sure that those who are found using drugs in our facilities will have to face the consequences.

• (1525)

**Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when we studied Bill C-12 in committee, witnesses noted that many individuals who find themselves incarcerated have committed serious crimes, in many cases connected to serious drug addiction and other types of illicit drug abuse. The minister mentioned this at the start of his speech.

In committee, we also heard that it was important that the bill would put the onus back on the offender to really take advantage of some of those programs available, and to ensure that when they are eligible for parole, they leave prison and go back into the community drug free. I think most Canadians would agree that someone who finds himself in jail as a result of crimes or drug addictions should leave the penitentiary, or that system, drug free.

Therefore, my question for the minister is two-fold. The bill would ensure that offenders know that these tests are being done. First, does he feel that informing inmates of the ramifications of continuing use of illicit drugs would change their decisions so they would be eligible for parole and be able to be integrated into society?

Second, if we did not pass legislation like this, if we did not have programs in place but simply turned a blind eye to this type of problem in our penitentiaries, what would be the success rate of offenders being reintegrated into society and capable of holding down jobs and contributing to the economic prosperity of the country?

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for her excellent question. She has given me an opportunity to describe the three-tier approach we have taken in our drug-free prison strategy.

The first tier is controlling and stopping the access to drugs in our facilities. We have invested massively in this area.

In the second tier, we are sending strong signals of deterrence to increase offender accountability and penalties. We want to make sure that we put the onus on the offenders to quit their drug addiction if they want to get back into society more quickly.

The third tier is prevention and treatment. I have interesting statistics here regarding the investment in treatment, which is massive. I also have some statistics here that show that our strategy is working.

Let me just give an example. In 2013-14, 16,500 urine analysis tests were given in penitentiaries, of which 1,000 tested positive for intoxicants and 1,000 tests were refused. That amounts to 6% that tested positive and 7% that were refused. It means that more than 85% of inmates were drug-free.

There is still room for improvement, but when we look at the statistics of those who went into our penitentiaries with a drug addiction, we can see that we are on the right path in helping inmates to get free of their drug addictions. By doing so, they are more successful in their correctional plan for rehabilitation.

This is a demonstration of, and I would say reinforces, the fact that when they go back into society, they will contribute to society and not pose a threat. This increases the safety of Canadians. That is our first and most important objective.

• (1530)

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying that we are supporting this bill at third reading because of its narrowness.

That is not something people would recognize from looking at the title. They would think this bill had sweeping and miraculous provisions allowing Correctional Service Canada to attain drug-free prisons, something that no corrections system anywhere in the world has ever been able to achieve.

*Government Orders*

Instead, all it includes is a very narrow amendment to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that makes it clear in law that the Parole Board may use the positive results from drug tests or refusals to take drug tests in making its decision on parole eligibility, something that is already the practice of the Parole Board. It also makes clear that the Parole Board can impose conditions about drug and alcohol use as a condition of parole, which of course the Parole Board already does.

The discretion, when there is a failed drug test, or a failure when someone on parole gets involved with drugs, remains where it should be, with the Parole Board. For that reason, we support the provisions.

However, what we have trouble with is the misleading title of this bill. I really think the government has engaged in a kind of propaganda exercise here where it wants to go to the public and say that it passed a drug-free prison bill, as if that had some impact on the real world.

What we really need here is something more than the narrow scope of this bill, something that would actually attack the real problem, which is the addiction problem in society in general, particularly among those who end up in the corrections system.

The independent Parole Board is still best placed to judge the individual cases and the consequences of failures of drug tests or failures to meet conditions of parole. Again, we do support this bill because it does not interfere with that.

Let us talk about the Conservatives' real approach here. When they talk about drug-free prisons, we all know that like all zero tolerance policies, these are not policies at all but simply aspirations. A policy has actions that are taken to achieve an objective. The objective here might be drug-free prisons, but what is missing is a policy specifying how we would actually get there.

As I said, no correctional system in the world has ever achieved a drug-free prison system. I heard an hon. parliamentary secretary on the Conservative side posing this as some kind of dichotomy, where we choose either to have drug-free prisons or to do nothing about drugs in prison. I submit, of course, that that is a completely false dichotomy. No one is suggesting that we do nothing to attack the problems of drugs in prisons.

If we look to those who have some expertise in the area, the Correctional Investigator, the John Howard Society, and the Union of Correctional Officers, they all have said that aiming for drug-free prisons is not a realistic goal. In fact, let us have a look at some of the very specific things they have said. I will just quote from the annual report of the Correctional Investigator:

A "zerotolerance" 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.

Again, that is from the Correctional Investigator's 2011-12 report.

The ministers' remark toward the end of his speech that drug offenders have to choose to end their addiction really sets this in a moralistic kind of vein, rather than a health vein. We all know that

addiction is a health problem; it is not a choice problem. People may make bad choices in life that lead to addiction, but once they are an addict, it is a health problem. It is not a moral failing. I think the government quite often reverts to talking about addiction as if were somehow a matter of simple choice for those who have become addicts.

The real problem that we have, of course, is that almost 80% of those who end up in the Canadian prison system come in with a substance abuse problem, either with drugs or alcohol. What is more interesting, again, as the Correctional Investigator has pointed out in numerous reports, is the fact that most of those who have committed crimes—close to two-thirds of offenders, according to his 2011-12 report—were under the influence of an intoxicant when they committed the offence leading to their incarceration. Four out of five offenders, as I mentioned, arrive at that federal institution with that same substance abuse problem.

● (1535)

Therefore, if we are tackling the problem as a drug problem in prison, our focus is far too narrow, because it skips over the reason that most of those people ended up in prison and that their offences were committed while they were under the influence of their addiction.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives' tough on crime approach has actually made this problem worse. By instituting a lot of mandatory minimum sentences, they have ensured that people whose basic problem is addiction and not violence or criminal intent would end up caught in the net that makes sure they are incarcerated. However, if discretion had been left to a judge, in an individual case, the judge might have been able to see that the addiction was the problem and get the individual into diversion programs, such as treatment, which are far more effective than incarceration and cost far less than putting people in prison.

When we are spending more than \$100,000 a year to keep a person in prison, and addiction treatment, yes, can sometimes be very expensive, costing up to \$10,000, we are still talking about something that is 90% cheaper than putting people in jail. Again, this failure to think clearly about what the real problem is here in terms of addiction, and instead responding with punishment to those who have addictions, means that we end up dealing with that problem in our prisons instead of in the community where people can get better treatment programs and better support from their family and communities and where ultimately they would then end up posing much less of a threat to the community as a whole.

As part of the current government's punishment approach and its zero tolerance approach, the government spent over \$122 million on improving drug interdiction in prisons. I think this was over a period of three years, but the amount is significant.

*Government Orders*

The minister liked to talk about numbers. He mentioned the number of people who failed the test, indicating that 85% of the prisoners were drug free. However, what he forgot to mention was that, before the interdiction program, he had the same numbers. Therefore, before we spent \$122 million in our prisons trying to have better interdiction of drugs coming in, 85% of the prisoners were drug free, and at the end of that \$122 million expenditure, 85% of the prisoners were drug free. That is a lot of money being spent for what I would call ideological reasons with very little to show for it in the end.

As well, the minister likes to focus on the fear factor by always talking about injection drugs and by making up policies for the opposition as he goes along. However, in doing so, when he talks about injection drugs, what he fails to mention is that by far the vast majority of those failures of drug tests were for marijuana and not for injection drugs. The minister exaggerates the problem of injection drugs within our prisons to create a climate of fear. Now, I will not minimize at all the threat to the correctional staff of needles in prison, and I think we share on all sides of this House the desire for a safe work environment for correctional officers.

However, this interdiction program had some unintended consequences. When one goes to interdiction, as a result of that, much tougher and stringent policies apply to family visits. We heard from witnesses in the public safety committee that families oftentimes have been intimidated into bringing drugs into prison and therefore chose not to make any prison visits to their family member rather than face the intimidation and the much higher search levels from the interdiction process. In fact, as an unintended consequence, this higher level of interdiction has actually interfered with family visits, which are extremely important in having people successfully kick addictions and successfully reintegrate into their communities.

The other thing that has happened is that it has resulted in far more lockdowns within the prisons as searches are done for drugs and drug paraphernalia within the prison. Now, how could that be a bad thing? Well, lockdowns in a prison take a significant amount of time, and when they take place, rehabilitation programming is suspended for that day. Therefore, this higher level of interdiction, this higher level of searches through the prisons, actually interferes with the very rehabilitation programming that is central to reduce the demand for drugs in prisons.

Again, looking at the real record of the Conservative government when it comes to corrections, what we see is a record of budget cuts. In 2012, the government announced that it intended to cut \$295 million from the corrections budget by 2015, and it has done that. More than 10% of the whole budget of corrections has been cut at a time when the prison population has grown by more than 1,000; from 14,000 to 15,000.

● (1540)

Again, the minister likes to talk about the fact that the prison population did not grow to the extent people projected. That is true. Those projections were wrong. They were not my projections, but they were wrong. In fact, the prison population continued to grow at a time when the budget was shrinking.

As a result of some new construction that had been started earlier, we have had a net addition of 1,600 beds to the prison system, barely enough to keep up with the growth in prison population after the closures of some facilities. When we barely keep pace with growth, it means that we have continued with this very negative situation of extensive double bunking in the prison system. I will come back to that in just a second.

What we have is an increased number of people in the corrections system and less money for programming. I have the exact figures here, but I know that less than 3% of the total budget for Correctional Service Canada is actually spent on programming. Therefore, 97% is spent on warehousing—housing, food, and security of prisons—and less than 3% is spent on programming. What the cuts have meant, along with the increased prison population, is that there is less money per capita for each of those in our system, for things like addiction treatment and training.

This has forced Correctional Service Canada to adopt some new strategies. It has abandoned the very long-standing and proven addiction treatment programs that were offered in Correctional Service Canada. These are programs that were considered models around the world. Members of the public safety committee in the previous Parliament told me many times that when they travelled internationally, particularly to Norway and Britain, people complimented Canada on the model and had adopted the model being used for addiction treatment in Canadian prisons. What the constraint on budgets has done is cause Correctional Service Canada to eliminate that programming and go to a program that offers general treatment for a number of problems in a single program. It has added addictions to things like anger management and life planning, all wrapped together in one course.

I have to say that I sincerely hope this new combined course is as successful as the old addiction treatment program. We have no evidence yet and I have no reason to draw the conclusion it will not be, but I fear it will not be as successful. The reason it was brought about was the government's excessive focus on cutting expenditures in a corrections system that has been growing.

I will now come back to the issue of double bunking that I mentioned a minute ago. We all know that one of the impacts of double bunking is that it increases what we call the temperature in correctional institutions. There have been many examples from across the country. It means there is more conflict within institutions, there is more violence within institutions, and they are less safe for corrections officers.

Double bunking also means space has been lost for programming. Classrooms have been converted for other uses because of the extreme overcrowding in many prisons. Because of the increased temperature, there have been more lockdowns and, just as with the increased drug interdiction activity going on, more lockdowns that are a result of double bunking disrupt programming, including addiction treatment programming.

*Government Orders*

What should we be doing instead? The bill is called the drug-free prisons bill. The first thing that was said in committee was that it should not really be called that. It should be called the failure of drug tests and Parole Board bill. That is what it is really about. Instead, it is still called the drug-free prisons bill. In a previous Parliament in 2010, the public safety committee, which I serve on in this Parliament, produced a report, which I have with me today. That report is called “Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Addiction in the Federal Correctional System: Report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security”. This was tabled in December of 2010.

In this report, there are 71 recommendations on how to attack the problem of drugs in prison. What did the government do? It decided on an interdiction program instead of the 71 recommendations from the committee. Very few of these have been implemented. Why is that? I submit it is because the recommendations actually treat addiction as a health problem instead of a moral crisis or a moral failure of those who are addicts. Instead of promising more punishment for addicts, these 71 recommendations made practical suggestions on how the demand for drugs in prison could be reduced.

● (1545)

Human ingenuity being what it is, we probably can never eliminate drugs from prisons, no matter how much interdiction we do. However, if we applied the health model in which addictions are treated, we would reduce the demand for drugs in prisons. Of course, successful treatment means more successful rehabilitation and more success when people return to the community.

I want to focus on one of these 71 recommendations, and that is recommendation 11. It says:

That Correctional Services Canada (CSC) review its current mental health and addictions programming to ensure that it meets the cultural and religious needs of Aboriginal offenders, who make up a disproportionate percentage of the Canadian inmate population, and a disproportionate percentage of inmates facing mental health and addiction issues; that CSC implement, together with local Aboriginal communities, more mental health and addiction programs addressing the specific needs of Aboriginal offenders. In addition to contributing to the development of these programs, local Aboriginal communities should also contribute to the delivery of these programs [within prisons] to ensure maximum success.

That is the end of that very long recommendation. Nothing has happened to it. We do not have more programs dealing with addiction from an aboriginal cultural perspective. We do not have more aboriginal communities involved in the prison system, offering culturally appropriate programming to meet the addiction problems. Instead what we have is more mandatory minimum sentences that result in more people with addictions, from aboriginal communities, ending up with longer prison sentences. The government has taken exactly the wrong approach. Even its own members on the public safety committee in the previous Parliament recommended a different approach to this addiction problem than the one adopted by the current government.

I just want to go back and summarize where we are with the Conservatives on the corrections system. What we have, again, is a relentless emphasis on punishment as the solution to our crime and addiction problems in this country, when we all know that is not the approach that works.

The NDP has long called for better addiction treatment programs, more money for programming, and in particular, again with the increase in the prison population, more worthwhile things for people to do in prison. The head of Correctional Service told us today in committee that CSC does not actually keep statistics on wait lists, that everybody is accommodated for programming. However, when we talked to people from the John Howard Society and the Elizabeth Fry Society and to correctional officers, they all told us that is simply not true. They said that many people have significant delays in accessing the program they need, whether it is addiction programming, anger management, or life skills; and that many of those people get to the end of their sentences without completing the correction plan, through no fault of their own but through a lack of resources and opportunity within the corrections system.

Do I say this because I think we are failing the inmates? Yes, I do. However, I also think we are failing Canadians in general, because all of these people will come out of the corrections system where they have failed to complete the corrections plan through no fault or personal decision of their own, and they then will have a much lower possibility of successfully reintegrating into society, getting a job, supporting their families, and being a success in the same manner that all Canadians would like to be. It is a fundamentally flawed approach again from the government.

In this bill we have a propagandistic title, drug-free prisons, and the Conservatives will announce to Canadians after this bill passes that we now have drug-free prisons because they passed a law.

In fact, going back to the reason we are supporting the bill, what we would have done is preserve the discretion of the Parole Board in dealing with those who fail drug tests in prison just before they are paroled or who fail conditions of parole. We are putting this into law. There is nothing wrong with that at all. That is why we are voting for this bill.

We did make an attempt to get the title changed to something more appropriate, but as anyone who listened to the minister's speech can see, there was no interest in actually talking about what happens in the bill; there is an interest in saying that the Conservatives have done something to create drug-free prisons and have done that through tough laws, through interdiction, and through all the things that we know, if we actually look at the evidence, have not worked in our prison system and will not work in our prison system.

What we need is an approach that recognizes addiction as a health problem and provides the addiction treatment that is needed within our prisons. That is the way we will get closer to drug-free prisons.

● (1550)

**Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for those remarks. However, there was a hodgepodge of comments not necessarily related to the bill at hand, a number of which I wrote down as not completely the truth. There were a couple I wrote down explicitly. One was the double-bunking issue—

*Government Orders*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Order, please. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the rules of the House are clear with respect to not casting aspersions on whether other members are being truthful in their presentations to the House, and I would ask the parliamentary secretary to withdraw those remarks.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Order, please. I thank the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca for his intervention. Indeed, when we characterize other commentary in the House as being untruthful, or as I think the parliamentary secretary referenced, not completely the truth, it gets into an area of speech that is really considered unparliamentary. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary might wish to rephrase her comments in that respect.

**Ms. Roxanne James:** Mr. Speaker, I will retract that particular comment and rephrase it slightly differently.

The member seemed to imply that double-bunking was somewhat responsible for violent acts occurring in prisons. That is absolutely not the case. Don Head, the commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada, has stated that. There was a thorough study on it. There is absolutely no correlation between double-bunking and violence in prisons. That just goes to speak to the fact that the NDP fails to recognize that federal penitentiaries do not make offenders violent, but certainly violent criminals do end up in them.

The member opposite talked specifically about the question I asked the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. He seemed to imply that when I talked about turning a blind eye to drug problems within our prisons I was somehow inferring that the opposition does that, and that is not the case.

It is interesting to note that the member opposite and the opposition parties voted against investments of over \$100 million to beef up detection measures in our institutions. The member opposite said that those investments have done absolutely no good, or similar terms. Can I say that this is not the truth? In 2013 and 2014 we saw over 2,400 drug-related seizures in our federal prisons. That number has gone up and continues to grow under our Conservative government. We are stopping the illicit drugs from getting into our prisons.

The member also mentioned that certain family members may choose not to visit their incarcerated family members for fear of being searched. I take the plane quite often to come to Ottawa. I have to put my bags through the scanner. Sometimes I have had to go into the X-ray machine. I do that, because I have nothing to hide. I am not quite sure why the member thinks we should simply turn a blind eye to family members who refuse to have that type of search done before entering the prison system.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Mr. Speaker, with respect, I disagree with the hon. member on double-bunking. If she looked at any of the independent evidence, not the government's own evaluations of itself on double-bunking but those from experts in corrections, it will show that double-bunking has a negative impact on levels of violence and conflict in prisons. That is 100% without dispute, except for the government's own reports on itself. It is the same thing if one talks to corrections officers. If one actually talks to the people

who work in the institutions, they will talk very clearly about the impact of double-bunking.

When the member talks about families not wanting to come in because of the interdiction methods and being placed under severe pressure by those outside, she should talk to the families of inmates. They will tell her how they feel. It is not about how she feels about flying. It is about how they feel about the obstacles that are being set up and the pressure they are under that sometimes interferes with their family visits.

I will tell members another story. I met with an aboriginal elder who travelled several hundred miles to appear at a federal prison and was turned away because of a lockdown over a prison search because of the interdiction measures that were going on. He was unable to provide the counselling he wished to provide because of the interdiction lockdown. He was not compensated in any way for the hundreds of miles he travelled or for his time. He was unable to make his positive contribution within the institution specifically because of the increased interdiction measures.

The member talked about the great success and how many people they find and how many things they seize. What I was talking about, which she calls untrue, is the fact that the rate of positive tests and refusals has not changed since the beginning of the interdiction program.

• (1555)

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca on his remarks. I think they were honest and to the point. One thing I have found about the member is that his research is good. It is evidence-based research, not the kind of lines we get from the government. There is good research there.

There are many concerns. I hear them too. They are about double bunking and about families fearful of the kind of search they may have to go through when visiting prisons. There are lots of problems the government fails to recognize, so I appreciate it when the member puts those concerns forward. A government that was doing its job instead of attacking those with concerns would try to learn from them.

The bill is called the drug-free prisons act. What would the member recommend we do to make prisons drug free? What needs to be done? We know this act will not do it. It is an act of deception. What really needs to happen to assist inmates to become more drug free?

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Mr. Speaker, I enjoy sitting parallel with the hon. member as the Liberal critic at the public safety committee. I think he is as committed as I am to looking at the actual evidence when it comes to the problem of drug addiction within prisons.

*Government Orders*

As I said in my remarks and will say again, the first thing that has to happen is that there has to be a recognition of addiction as a health problem and not a moral failing. Once we recognize addiction as a health problem, we have to provide people with the opportunities to get treatment for that addiction problem. What we have now is an increasing prison population, a shrinking budget, and extremely narrow opportunities being presented to people to actually deal with their addictions while they are in prison. Unfortunately, too many return to the community without adequate supports and end up in their old lifestyles, where addiction drove their criminal behaviour.

How do we do it? It is a health problem. We provide adequate treatment and support when people return to the community so that they can once again become productive members of society.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is often said that prisons are like universities where you could go and get a master's degree or a doctorate in crime and where you become an even worse criminal. Why send people to prison if they are becoming even worse offenders?

The goal is to reintegrate these people into society once they are released. However, achieving this requires certain conditions. It is not enough to lock people up and pay for guards or big machines to detect drugs. Are there really educators who will take charge of these people to help them enjoy life again and help them understand that they can become useful members of society? Will there be the resources required to allow social services to treat addiction as an illness and to help these people really get their lives in order and become productive members of society again?

If the only thing we do is set up controls to see if drugs are being smuggled into prison, we are not really doing a proper job. In fact, on the inside, they are still going to use drugs; they are going to manage one way or another.

What we are not doing here, but what is being done in Quebec, is reintegrating people and giving them a chance to return to the workforce after five or seven years in prison. They need to be able to say that they have a trade, that they are going to be able to work and that they can become good citizens.

I do not know whether my colleague agrees with that.

[*English*]

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question reminds me of two things I need to say. One is that nothing in our remarks about family visits and the addiction problem was meant to imply that families are the main source of drugs in prison. They are not. The second is the question of mandatory minimum sentences, which the government has pursued with a vengeance.

We on this side support mandatory minimums only for the most severe crimes. They are appropriate for those, but the result has been that many more people whose basic problem was addiction end up with a long prison sentence, and as the member said, they become perhaps better criminals as a result of that rather than having their addiction treated while they are in custody.

•(1600)

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-12, the drug-free prisons act. The place to

begin is to acknowledge a straightforward fact, which is that the bill will have hardly any consequence in ensuring that prisons are drug free. It is a much bigger issue than that. Even one of the members, one of the backbench Conservative members who was there for one meeting, in discussing the bill at committee, indicated as much himself. It is a name; it is not action in terms of this particular bill.

I am always amazed, and I have said this before, at the deception of the government. They think that if it can name a bill a certain way, it will happen. It will leave the perception in the public that the Conservatives are actually doing something, but they are not. What is really required is action.

The government somehow believes that if we can treat addictions by threatening those who suffer from addiction we are actually doing something. Research has shown that on the drug issue, threats alone are not enough.

The previous member who spoke talked about drug addiction as being a health problem. Somewhere around 75% to 80% of the people who go into prison actually go in with either a drug or alcohol addiction, and many of them have mental issues as well, so there has to be treatment beyond the penalties the government is talking about imposing.

The government somehow believes that it will achieve drug-free prisons if it coerces even further those offenders about to qualify for parole. There will be some people who do not achieve parole as a result of this decision. Is that the right thing to do? Is there a better way of handling that? Those are issues that need to be looked at.

Somehow the public is to believe that this legislation will actually accomplish something new. It really will not, and that became clear from the evidence presented at committee.

The title of the bill is misleading in the extreme, while the contents of the legislation actually add little, if anything, to the situation relative to those inmates on parole. I will come to that in a little bit.

Bill C-12 is another in a long line of government legislation, some of it private members' bills from the Conservative side as well, that use victims and offenders for their ideological ends.

The first point is this: Does the bill actually bring forward new policy related to the issue of drug use and those applying for parole? The answer is a simple no. Bill C-12 actually adds nothing to the parole process that does not already exist.

In direct answer to a question I posed to the chair of the Parole Board with respect to the Parole Board being able to exercise its full discretion as it has so far, the chair responded, "That is right". Let me rephrase that. What I was really asking the chair of the Parole Board was whether this bill would take discretion away from the chair, and it does not. The Parole Board would still have the discretion it has always had, although the bill tries to make it look otherwise.

*Government Orders*

The Conservatives have said that there was a substantial change in that regard. The fact is, Bill C-12 does not alter the ability of the Parole Board to do the job it has been doing all along. The chair of the Parole Board actually went even further when asked whether any new requirements in this legislation will add anything to the current practices of the board.

●(1605)

I will quote his answer. He stated:

The new information that will be provided with the legislation will trigger a review by the board, as is currently the case when any new information regarding an offender is provided to the Parole Board of Canada prior to an offender's release, which we obtain from CSC.

Again, what is contained in Bill C-12 is already in practice. It has been the practice of the Parole Board.

That is why the bill is more perception. In my view, it is not just perception, but the way the government named this bill, the drug-free prisons act, is deception to the very core when it has very little to do with that and does not deal with the real issue of drugs in prisons.

If we are to stop drugs in prisons, we have to stop the market. If we are to get people off drugs, penalties are will not do it alone. It requires programming, treatment and constant follow up. That is the only way to get people off these addictions. There is no question that people face drug and alcohol addictions. Some people do small break and enters and some get into greater crimes as they get hooked on drugs. It is a serious problem and we have to reduce the market both in prisons and in Canadian society.

I will tell a story about the correctional system. I will give the government some credit for maintaining some of the programs that were started years ago to get people off drugs.

A constituent of mine had a son who was terribly addicted to drugs, got caught doing a small crime, and was going to be sentenced to two years less a day. That parent came to me to see if I could advise her in any way on how to get her son committed to a federal institution, which is a very tough place to spend time. Of course, there was nothing I could do.

Her concern was that her son would go into a provincial institution for a small crime. Because he was so addicted to drugs, he would commit bigger crimes over time. She felt if she could get him committed to a federal institution for two years or more, maybe her son would be able to take part in the programming to get him off drugs and become a better contributor to Canadian society.

I raise that point to indicate how serious the drug issue is and just imposing penalties, as this bill would try to do based on a urine sample, is certainly not in any way going to make prisons drug free.

When the Correctional Investigator testified before the committee, he too expressed his observation that Bill C-12 added nothing to the process and procedures currently in use with respect to the parole of offenders. He stated:

The window of opportunity targeted by this bill is very narrow....As members might be aware, the parole board already takes into consideration positive urinalysis results or refusal to provide a sample when making parole eligibility decisions. The board also frequently imposes a "do not consume" or "abstain from drugs and

alcohol" prohibition on those on parole or statutory release and temporary absences. Bill C-12 would simply put these practices into legislation.

The Office of the Correctional Investigator, whose specific role is the environment within which federal offenders are maintained and hopefully rehabilitated, has issued report after report with direct reference to the issue of drug use within our federal institutions.

●(1610)

Again, with respect to Bill C-12, the Correctional Investigator was clear about the obvious intent motivating the legislation. He said:

—Bill C-12 contemplates cancelling a parole grant on the basis of a positive drug test regardless of when the drug was ingested. Without condoning drug use, we should be clear-sighted about the consequences of proposed legal measures. This is not about making federal prisons drug-free or treating substance abuse. It is about punishing illicit drug use in prison.

That is a pretty serious charge from the Correctional Investigator. It is about punishment; it is not about cure. We will not make prisons drug-free unless we find ways to establish a cure.

I would remind the government that the objective of drug-free prisons is not something that the legislation before us would even faintly achieve.

In its 2011-12 annual report, the Office of the Correctional Investigator made the following observation with respect to the prevalence of drugs within our federal prisons. It reads:

A "zerotolerance" 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.

According to that same annual report of the Correctional Investigator, "Almost two-thirds of federal offenders report being under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicants when they committed the offence that led to their incarceration". The current population is about 15,000, so that would mean about 10,000 people. However, what is more disturbing is that a very high percentage of the offender population that abuses drugs is also concurrently struggling with mental illness.

My point in raising these facts is that it is a much bigger issue than urine testing. As the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca said earlier, it is a health issue. It is a huge issue in our society and in our prisons. We have to use programming that actually deals with the addiction problem to get to the bottom of this issue.

Yes, these people in prison have committed a crime, but in most cases, they will come out and be on our streets again. How do we give them the best opportunity to become good citizens and contribute to our economy, raise families and live in communities? That is what we should focus on here and not just the punishment aspect that the bill tries to portray.

*Government Orders*

The Correctional Investigator in his 2013-14 annual report was critical of the government's continued refusal to develop a comprehensive program to respond to continued drug use in penitentiaries and to undermining a key program within Correctional Services Canada, CSC, to address the addiction program

With respect to the former, the report found that:

Interdiction and suppression in the absence of a more comprehensive range of treatment, prevention and harm reduction measures will not eliminate the demand (or supply) of contraband drugs or alcohol.

According to the evidence provided to the public safety committee by the commissioner for CSC, upon admission, "about 80% of offenders arrive with 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 that "this dependency does not magically disappear when they arrive at our gates", meaning the prison gates.

Members can see how big the issue really is.

• (1615)

The critical issue then is that of therapy for those incarcerated with substance abuse problems. On this point, the record is clear. Again, the Correctional Investigator confirmed in his testimony before the committee that "We've seen a decrease in the actual dollars being spent on substance abuse programming this year over last year". I want to emphasize that quote because it is something the parliamentary secretary earlier indicated might have been untruthful.

Let us call the bill for what it is. Unless the addiction issue is addressed, a problem acknowledged by public safety itself, titling a bill a drug-free prison act is really an act of fraud. It is deception, deception to the core. A drug-free prison act means nothing. The only way to get drug-free prisons is if we do the programming inside prisons. CSC admits 80% of the people have a drug or alcohol addiction before they come into the prison. That may have been part of the reason why they did the crime that put them there in the first place, or there may have been other background issues.

Yes, they have to do their time and pay the penalty and pay the price to society for the crime that they undertook, but if we are to have a better society as a country, we have to make prisons places of rehabilitation, not universities for crime. Make them places of rehabilitation that these individuals can come out, be gainfully employed and contribute to our society.

I am running out of time, but let me make one last point. I want to emphasize the fact that we will support the bill. The bill will not do any harm because the Parole Board still has discretion at the end of the day, although there will be some pressure on the Parole Board as a result of the legislation maybe to deny parole where it otherwise might not have. However, the bill will not do a whole lot of harm, but it sure as heck will not do a whole lot of good either.

I would encourage the government to do this. Instead of giving bills fancy titles and taking up House and committee time with a bill that really would do very little, it would be better off to come in with rehabilitation programs for individuals, stronger programs, to get off drug and alcohol addiction so when they have done their time, they can contribute to society in a way that will help our economy and communities. The objective ought to be that.

**Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, through Corrections Canada, exactly \$9 million were spent on addiction treatment programs in 2014 alone. When I hear the member opposite say that we have not spent money in this area, that is absolutely false.

Also the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, who delivered remarks earlier, talked about the government's three-tier approach that included: limiting access to drugs or stopping it from getting into prisons; deterrence for offenders and making them be accountable for their actions; and also prevention and treatment. I would like to have that figure on the record.

At committee and in debate now, we have heard that the reasons why offenders were committing crimes may be related to serious drug addictions. It is the Conservative government that passed laws against selling marijuana near schools and moved to end grow ops in residential neighbourhoods. Yet the leader of the Liberal Party wants to make smoking marijuana a normal, everyday activity for Canadians.

Does the Liberal member believe that only law-abiding Canadians outside of the penitentiary system should be able to smoke marijuana, or should we also give it to offenders?

• (1620)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, is the parliamentary secretary ever into deception today. We hear that all the time from government backbench members. I make the mistake of calling them "government backbenchers"; the government is really those members who sit in the front row. The others are members of the governing party, but they seem to take their direction from the front row, if we could say that, and their talking points from the PMO.

In any event, the leader of the Liberal Party is not, absolutely not, promoting marijuana. He is not promoting that at all. That is the deception they try to go with over there.

The fact of the matter is that our current drug laws is working in this country. Are marijuana laws is working in this country. Does it make sense to arrest somebody who smokes one toke and then cannot cross the border to the United States? Are police authorities today arresting people they find with marijuana? No, they are not, because they know the current law does not make any sense.

In my view, we should legalize the product, as was done with alcohol; put in place programming to keep people from consuming too much alcohol, drugs, and marijuana; and establish a program whereby marijuana is sold legally and appropriately, rather than, as the current government is doing, ensuring that all the profits go to the criminal trade and not doing anything about addictions.



*Government Orders*

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this last exchange really illustrates to me the problem with these wild titles that are assigned for essentially propagandistic purposes and lead us to debate a topic that is really irrelevant to what is before us in the House today instead of talking about what is actually in the bill.

I was pleased to hear the member point out that while the government likes to cite large numbers like \$9 million and get us to agree that it is a big number, in fact it does not tell us anything about what has happened with drug programming. The Correctional Investigator pointed out that because of the change in programming, it is very difficult to see whether there has been an increase or a decrease, but his conclusion was that there has been a decrease both in the amount being spent and in the availability of drug treatment programs.

I would like to know if that is also the conclusion of the member for Malpeque.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, the \$9 million figure that the parliamentary secretary indicated they are spending on these issues is, I would expect, correct, but \$9 million of what? How does it relate to the year before?

We cannot get any real numbers from the government, no matter how hard we try. Even the Parliamentary Budget Officer cannot get the numbers from the current government, because if there is anything it does not want to believe, whether it is about marijuana or prisons or anything else, it does not want to get into evidence-based research that might tell the real facts. I will re-quote what the Correctional Investigator said in his testimony:

We've seen a decrease in the actual dollars being spent on substance abuse programming this year over last year.

That is what is important. The Correctional Investigator is telling us that the Conservative government is not spending the dollars it ought to be in dealing with the drug addiction problems within our prison system.

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the core of all this is the refusal by the government to accept scientific evidence.

We all witnessed, over the years, how the current government got rid of the long form census, despite the fact that hundreds of organizations have said this census provides useful scientific evidence upon which to base policy. We have seen how the current government muzzles scientists when they may say something the government does not want to listen to. We have seen the current government get rid of its responsibility with respect to the Experimental Lakes Area. We have seen the current government get rid of the PEARL facility in the high Arctic, which is responsible for doing research, among other things, on the depleting ozone layer above our country.

In the case of this particular bill, we are talking about the fact that the current government, because of its ideology, does not want to recognize that treating the addiction while the person is serving his or her sentence is an essential element in trying to reduce the incidence of drug addiction.

I would like to hear my colleague on that particular subject.

• (1625)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. He made the point himself that in so many areas that the government operates in, it really does not look at evidence-based research in its approach to policy. It has an ideology and goes with that. It will cost us substantially down the road.

In fact, when we compare the Conservatives' tough-on-crime agenda with being smart on crime, we are seeing them going in the opposite direction from some of the states in the United States. They realized that punishment and penalties alone are not the answer and that they have to get offenders into rehabilitation.

In direct answer to the member's question, the Correctional Investigator has said time and time again that there needs to be money for programming, but the money has been reduced. Research shows that it is programming, not penalties, that actually gets people off their addictions and makes the prison population safer as a result. It also gives those people a better opportunity to become contributors to Canadian society when they get out of prison.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. However, I clearly heard him state that the title of the bill had nothing to do with its content and that it was misleading Canadians.

Everyone agrees that this bill is a step in the right direction. However, it has a fundamental flaw: it does not provide for care for people with mental health issues. This problem, which was brought to my attention in committee, also existed when the member was in government.

Why is it so difficult to deal with this issue?

[*English*]

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, prisons are certainly not the place to deal with serious mental illnesses or mental problems. There is always a cause and effect aspect to alcohol and drug addictions. They add to the problem. It is an issue that has come up increasingly in recent years, and that is a good thing. There has to be a really comprehensive strategy to deal with mental health issues across the country, a strategy that incorporates policy from the federal and provincial levels. It is a health care issue.

There is no question that if people commit a crime, they have to pay a penalty for having committed that crime, but we have to recognize in all reality that there are mental health issues out there and that too many of these people end up in prison. We have to do a better job as a society of assisting those people with mental health issues of any kind. Number one, we need to prevent them from getting into prison in the first place. Number two, we need to assist them in becoming happy and productive citizens in our society.

• (1630)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before we resume debate, 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 Trinity—Spadina, Intergovernmental Affairs.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

*Government Orders*

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to this bill. I have heard my hon. colleagues from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca and Malpeque, and I agree with much of what they said. I will try to avoid repeating the good points that they made and focus in on why I agree that this bill is so very lacking.

The essential difficulty goes beyond the fact that the bill does not address the serious problems within our prisons or the issue of drugs and addiction in any way that would make a meaningful difference. The essential difficulty—and this is something that bears repeating—is that as with so many bills in this place, the legislation coming at us has not been designed through the lens of someone who wants to improve public policy in an area for which the federal government has jurisdiction but rather through the lens of someone designing a brochure for the next election campaign. The titles are whiz-bang, the claims are extravagant, and the bills themselves are, in some cases, wide-ranging and disastrous, as in the case of the omnibus budget bill, Bill C-38.

In the case of this bill, it has an overreaching title. Of course, who would not agree that it would be a good thing to have drug-free prisons? The title of the bill is the drug-free prisons act. In a grand total of five clauses, one of which is “This Act may be cited as the Drug-Free Prisons Act”, we have a regime that would require an offender who has already been granted parole to be subjected to a request for a urine analysis. If they refuse or test positive, the bill would then have this information referred to the Parole Board to determine whether the parole should still be granted.

There are a lot of things wrong with this idea just as a practical matter. For one thing, the Parole Board already has the power to take into consideration whether an offender is currently drug-addicted or has substance abuse issues that would affect whether they will reoffend.

The nature of urinalysis testing is that some drugs will be detected for quite a long time after the offender's use of that drug, whereas other drugs could be in and out of the offender's system rather quickly. For instance, we could have an offender in prison who was a cannabis user. That drug would still show up a long time after the last use. However, if the offender had been using cocaine, it would disappear within two days. The bill does not actually address the question of whether we are releasing someone who has a drug addiction onto the streets; rather, it answers the question of particular drugs.

As it has been pointed out by witnesses before the committee, the bill would certainly do nothing about someone with an alcohol abuse problem. In terms of the percentage of dangerous offences committed by somebody misusing alcohol versus using cannabis, I cannot tell members how often I have talked to RCMP officers who tend to relax when they approach a house and are told to be very careful because someone in there has been smoking marijuana. I have heard this story from so many of them. However, if they are told to be careful because someone in the house has been drinking heavily, they worry, because the tendency is a violent reaction.

I am not encouraging marijuana use, but when we talk about violent criminal acts, alcohol is a serious problem. This bill would do

absolutely nothing to determine if this is someone who might reoffend because of a substance abuse issue that relates to alcohol.

Let us talk about the state of our prisons. We have had some claims made so far in the debate today, but I found statistics online from the Correctional Service of Canada and from the Correctional Investigator's report that were not in recent evidence before the committee, and they indicate that between 1997 and 2008, the percentage of offenders in Canadian prisons who were dealing with mental health issues doubled. The issue of mental health in the prison population is more prevalent today than it was in 1997.

Substance abuse issues are often linked to mental health issues. This point has been made, including in the debate today. The problem with substance abuse and people with mental health issues who self-medicate to try to deal with their own demons in the absence of counselling and help is that they turn to drug addiction.

● (1635)

Quite a significant proportion of people in the prison system were really in need of mental health assistance, support, counselling, and treatment before they entered the prison population, and are still in need of it as they leave the prison population. Some of those people are also, as an aspect of their mental health issues, dealing with substance abuse and addiction.

We have heard it claimed here today by the parliamentary secretary that we should be extremely satisfied to hear that \$9 million was spent this year on addiction counselling for substance abuse in Canadian prisons. I am happy to accept the \$9 million figure, but if we go online and look up Correctional Service Canada, we see that \$11 million was spent on substance abuse in 2008-09. From the testimony of Conservative members of Parliament, we know that \$2 million less is being spent this year than four years ago, and we also know that the prison population has been growing in that time. We also know from earlier statistics that the trend lines show that more offenders in our prison system have mental health and addiction issues than a decade ago.

I could speculate as to why that is. We do know that cutbacks, which I lament and which I know a lot of Conservative members of Parliament have raised while I have been here as a member of Parliament, to kill the deficit back in the 1990s, the cuts to transfers to provinces, downloaded a lot of problems on provincial governments, including cuts to a lot of mental health services. We transferred a lot of social problems from mental health services at the provincial level to the people who were essentially living on the streets, which I think has contributed to the fact that the offender population with mental health issues has gone up.

What on earth would this bill do to improve the situation? The answer is absolutely nothing. Not one more dime will go to mental health treatment or addiction counselling. Nothing will improve the situation for either the offender population or public safety under this bill. This bill pretends that we are doing something about drugs in prison, because it will make a good brochure for the next election campaign. It does nothing for the prison population. It does nothing for public safety.

*Government Orders*

To confirm that point, I turn to the evidence of Howard Sapers, the Correctional Investigator of Canada, before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. I know that some of Mr. Sapers' testimony has already been referenced by members of the official opposition and the Liberal Party, but I do want to draw attention to a number of his conclusions. He points out the following:

Four out of five offenders arrive at a federal institution with a past history of substance abuse and dependency. The use of alcohol and drugs is a criminal risk factor for a significant proportion of the offender population; however, urinalysis testing is ineffectual in monitoring or reducing the risk linked to alcohol use and dependency.

I want to underscore this. This remedy this bill puts forward will not create drug-free prisons—and the text of the bill in fact makes no pretence to having anything to do with drug-free prisons but rather punishing someone at the point of parole who might test positive—and will do nothing about one of the largest criminal risk factors, which is alcohol dependency.

When looking at this issue, we know that we need an integrated, coordinated program throughout Correctional Service Canada to redouble our efforts. This ties into another issue that has been raised recently, that some of the prison population can be radicalized to terrorist ideology when they are in prison. These are people in desperate need of mental health services and addiction counselling.

Specifically, the shooter who broke in here on October 22 had earlier begged a judge back in 2012 in a Vancouver courtroom to send him for addiction counselling, to send him to a place that could help him with mental health counselling. I believe that if we had had those services in place, we might have saved two lives on that day. Most particularly and most importantly, we could have saved the life of Corporal Nathan Cirillo, had his attacker received the help he desperately needed.

● (1640)

We cannot second guess these things but should be investing in mental health treatment, counselling, addiction services, and in making sure that offenders in our prison system are treated in ways that would allow them to re-enter society as contributing citizens. We should not be finding ways to deny them parole at the last minute.

I close with these words of Howard Sapers:

A better and more cost-effective way to prevent crime is to put more of our limited resources into addiction treatment and prevention programs. Zero-tolerance or punitive-based approaches to drug use and abuse and addiction simply do not work in prison.

Let us be smart. Let us do what needs to be done. Drug-free prisons are a fine goal, but the bill is a fraud on the goals the Canadian public will be told that the bill serves.

**Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I reject some of what the member said.

Specifically, I would like to talk for a moment about the \$9 million that is spent in substance abuse programs. Commissioner Don Head has spoken at our committee many times. He talked about the actual programming and the fact that 95% of offenders, before they reintegrate into society, have completed one nationally accepted program, if not two or three, before they actually leave the system.

We are doing that. We have talked about a multi-prong approach to dealing with this.

I reject the comments the member opposite made with regard to our pulling the rug out from underneath an offender. She feels that in the final hour before someone is released on parole, we are somehow pulling the rug out from underneath that individual and then forcing him or her to stay behind bars. That is not the case. As I indicated, we do offer programs and we expect offenders in federal penitentiaries to participate in those programs, whether they be for substance abuse or whatever.

If someone were to test positive, someone who has maybe not participated in some of the programs available, is the member insinuating that we should just release the individual on parole and turn the other cheek?

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** I think “turn the other cheek” is an interesting current phrase, Mr. Speaker. We were told to turn the other cheek by a source of advice that some of us accept.

In any event, regarding what the parliamentary secretary put forward, it is clear from the evidence given at committee. I look at the evidence of Catherine Latimer from the John Howard Society. She pointed to the risk of keeping people with addiction problems in custody until their warrant expiry without benefit of the graduated and supported release programs that offenders get with parole programs and supported re-entry programs. She pointed out the following:

If you have someone with an addiction, and if the response to that is simply punitive and you're keeping them in correctional facilities until the end of their sentences, they may not get the support they would need, which might ultimately reduce community risk.

As I said before, from the evidence given before committee, urine analysis is completely ineffective. It does not help someone who has an alcohol addiction problem. It does not help people who are using drugs such as crack cocaine, which is associated with more violent behaviour than, say, the THC that stays longer in the system of someone within the prison walls who smokes marijuana.

Addiction problems are serious and when combined with mental health issues, they are even more serious. In this case, deciding not to grant someone parole because of residual THC in their system is one factor among many for consideration. The important thing is to reintegrate people who have served their time and to help them, through support programs, to be accepted in Canadian society as contributing citizens.

In answer to the member's question, under certain circumstances people should absolutely still get parole even if they have residuals of some substances in their system. The urine analysis is irrelevant to determining far more dangerous substances.

*Government Orders*

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her remarks on Bill C-12, a Conservative government bill.

The parliamentary secretary indicated that 95% of inmates complete at least one program during their time in prison. That is what we heard at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. However, I want to pick up on that, because she forgot to mention that these were general programs, not drug treatment programs, a subject that Bill C-12 does not really address. I hope that she will set the record straight when she has the opportunity to speak again in the House. I will come back to this point, when I have the opportunity to give a speech.

I would just like to make an observation regarding the speech given by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. I really appreciated her speech since I share many of her views. As she said, as a society, we do not want people to be constantly returning to prison and reoffending. I agree. That is why we need to give them the right tools.

Could my colleague give a few examples of the right tools that we could provide to our correctional system in order to help drug addicts and people struggling with mental health problems successfully reintegrate and become good citizens, and put a stop to this cycle of returning to the prison system?

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to provide examples of other programs that work for the common good.

[*English*]

One thing I wish we had not lost was the prison farm system. It made a real difference for offenders, and helped them restore—and not just restore, but for some offenders, made them feel for the first time in their lives—the belief that they could perform a meaningful role in society and gave them a sense of well-being and value.

In the fight to keep the prison farm in Kingston, Ontario, I became much better acquainted with how many offenders for the first time were working outdoors, planting something and letting it grow. A lot of my friends on the Conservative benches have experience as farmers. There are some things that actually change lives in a meaningful way.

We know that a lot of people who were offenders sometimes found religion within the prison walls, but anything that allows an individual who has never felt worthy in their whole life to find a reason to believe that they can contribute to society is useful, and one of the most proven beneficial programs Canada had, which this Conservative administration killed, was the prison farm system. I wish we would bring it back.

We need drug addiction counselling, yes. We need mental health programs, yes, but people who are lost to us in society, everyone who is lost, must have a chance to be found. I will not break into *Amazing Grace*, Mr. Speaker, but I think you see where I am going.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know the exact percentage, but I understand that somewhere

just over 50% of individuals going into our federal penitentiaries have serious addiction issues. It begs the question of how important it is that we have effective programs.

Often, when we hear about these effective programs, people instantly think of the prisoner, quite understandably. I would think of the prisoner too, but there are also safety elements that are a part of having good, solid, effective programs. One only needs to talk to some of our correctional officers. They have a much better understanding of the need for solid programs that will assist our prisoners to have the opportunity to stay away from the medications or the drugs.

The hon. member might want to provide some comment on our making sure that we have the resources necessary to support effective programs that would make a difference.

• (1650)

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** Mr. Speaker, the cost of the prison system for Canada is not cheap. It is up to about \$3 billion a year. It has been going up for the last number of years. We are now seeing overcrowding in prisons and problems with double bunking. The tendency of the current Conservative administration to pass legislation that includes mandatory minimums is creating some overcrowding problems.

The advice from the Canadian Criminal Justice Association to the committee is worth referencing. It said that when an offender has a mental health issue combined with a drug addiction issue, it is primarily a public health issue. The criminal response, of course, is that people who commit crimes should be punished, but in some cases the Canadian Criminal Justice Association suggests there would be better protection for public safety in providing addiction counselling right away, putting people into programs where they could get off drugs and immediately become more useful members of society.

Parole helps do that. Getting people into parole helps them begin to get back on that road. Each case is going to be different. Although the bill, I have to admit, does not tie the hands of the Parole Board, it would require it to take a second look at someone who is about to be released on parole.

If we want to find solutions, we have to look at the fact that 80% of the inmate population enters prison with addiction problems. There is no evidence that the use of drugs in Canadian prisons is going up. That is also in committee evidence. We need to address problems where they exist and be much more creative in allocating funds. Since we are spending \$3 billion on prisons, would it not be a good idea to spend it on keeping people out of prison?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-12, an Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. I find the short title of the bill slightly more interesting. The Conservative government chose to call it the drug-free prisons act.

Clearly, when we saw that title, we were very curious to find out what this promised drug-free prisons act was going to contain.

*Government Orders*

I was relatively surprised in one sense, but not in another, to see that the bill had nothing to do with drug-free prisons. Bill C-12 adds a provision to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that makes clear that, when deciding whether someone is eligible for parole, the Parole Board can take into account the fact that the offender tested positive for drugs in a urinalysis or refused to provide a urine sample for a drug test. That is already happening. The Parole Board has already been using this practice for quite some time.

We support this provision, but we realize that it has to do with the Parole Board. It has nothing to do with the inmates in our federal prisons right now.

Therefore, this title is unfortunately a bit flawed. It is sad that the government is trying to make Canadians believe that it wants to address the drug addiction problem in our federal prisons, when it is actually trying to use this bill to simply say that what the Parole Board is doing is fine and that it needs to keep doing it.

Bill C-12 therefore has a relatively misleading title. We tried to amend it at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. The NDP introduced an amendment to change the short title to better describe Bill C-12. The title we proposed was the drug test failures and parole act, which I think better reflects the bill.

I point this out because many witnesses said that Bill C-12 was not really doing what the short title suggested. The bill is not bad. I would like to tell that to everyone in the House. In committee, we all agreed that this is not a bad bill as such. However, the title was really an irritant whenever we had to discuss this bill. The short title has nothing to do with the bill. The bill is not bad, but it will not lead to drug-free prisons.

I would like to quote the member for Yukon. Replacing the parliamentary secretary, he attended the meetings of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security on Bill C-12. He himself admitted that the short title was probably going a bit too far. We were able to see that, even among the Conservatives, not everyone was really comfortable with the short title of this bill.

I hope that the Conservatives will do their homework next time and present us with a bill whose short title will actually reflect its content.

That being said, I will not dwell on the fact that the Conservatives often play politics with their short titles or bills. The titles do not always reflect the bills they go with, but they seem very nice when they are presented to the public and Canadians see them without reading the actual bills.

We in the NDP have very clear positions when it comes to the prison population, prisons and the eradication of drug addiction. We have always supported measures that seek to make our prisons safer. However, the Conservative government continues to ignore the recommendations of correctional staff and the Correctional Investigator, in particular, that would help reduce violence, street gang activities and drug use in our prisons. Virtually all stakeholders agree that this bill will have little impact on drug use in our prisons. Almost all of us agree that there will be no impact on drug use in our prisons.

●(1655)

Once again, the government is going to use this bill as an opportunity to cater to the wishes of its base, without actually proposing real solutions to the problems of drugs and gangs in prisons. I am enormously disappointed in this aspect of the Conservative government's strategy on such an important issue.

As I said, Bill C-12 is not necessarily a solution to a real problem and we are all—especially the members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security—aware of that. Members of the House, who have examined a number of bills, are at least partly aware of the situation in our prisons. We know that there are mental health, addiction and gang-related problems. There are therefore a number of problems and things to fix in our correctional system. Again, this bill could have been a good example of the sort of work we can do together as parliamentarians, but unfortunately we were not able to do it.

I would like to talk about what the bill should perhaps have included and about the eradication of addiction in our prisons. In 2012, a Public Safety Canada study confirmed that it is not very realistic to think that drug-free prisons can be created. I know that may be a shocking thing to hear, but the problem of eliminating drugs in prisons is extremely complex, for a number of reasons. The government should take a leadership role in this matter but, as parliamentarians, our work is to ensure that drugs are reduced as much as possible and to take steps in that direction.

The government, however, is reacting to sensational headlines in the media and trying to say that such a thing is possible. Correctional Service Canada has invested a great deal of money. Since 2008 the Conservatives have spent, for example, \$112 million on purchasing technology to stop the entry of drugs into prisons. Nevertheless, this has not reduced drug use in prison. Therefore, the Conservatives' approach is not working at all.

First, the government has a clearly unrealistic goal, but one we all strive toward—we can agree on that—and second, it is not using its money appropriately. It has invested in technology and not solved the problem at all. I have some details and figures to give you later, but I can say that the Conservative government has made deep cuts to the budgets of many departments. It has reduced Correctional Service Canada's budget by 10% and made cuts in many programs, although the prison population is currently growing. It has reduced the money set aside for programming, particularly addiction programs. The government's explanation is all doublespeak.

*Government Orders*

Correctional Service Canada's funding for basic correctional programs such as addiction treatment has been reduced. Moreover, the Conservative government has closed the treatment centres for inmates with serious mental health problems. We cannot ignore the fact that mental health issues are very common in our prisons. That is one of the main points to keep in mind. Many witnesses told us that people who have addiction problems often have mental health issues as well, and we must not forget that.

In order to really tackle the addiction problem in our prisons, we believe that Correctional Service Canada must create an initial assessment system that would make it possible to correctly measure an inmate's degree of addiction so that suitable programs could be offered to the offenders who need them. If the addiction is not treated, it is more difficult to educate and return the individual to society, which is what our society chooses to do with inmates. At Correctional Service Canada, the system works in levels. An offender comes into the system at the maximum or medium level and makes his way down through the levels as part of the prison population until, at the end of his sentence, he is in a minimum security institution. Still within the correctional system, he will have contact with the general public. The offender will begin working and visiting outside the prison, and will begin his return to society.

If we do not want prisons to have revolving doors, we must provide good programs for education and social rehabilitation. That is a societal choice we have made and we must take it seriously.

● (1700)

Taking this choice seriously will be much less costly to taxpayers in the end, in terms of public safety, hospitals and society in general.

Inmates who are neglected in terms of education and social reinsertion are liable to reoffend and fall back into a life of crime. Many studies have proven this. The correctional investigator has mentioned it often in his reports and appearances before the committee. The experts know what is happening on the ground. They include the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and the John Howard Society of Canada. I should also mention the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers whose members see former inmates returning to prison. I talked with Mr. Grabowsky, the union's national president, last week. I will not mention his age, but he has over 35 years of experience at Correctional Service Canada. He told me that during his career he has seen many former inmates return, as if prisons had revolving doors, because there are no social reintegration programs or other suitable programs for inmates. That is a sad state of affairs.

As a society, seeking to make our communities extremely safe is a wise choice. When I am walking down the street, I want to be safe, I want my daughter to be safe, and I want my friends and colleagues to be safe. For that to happen, we have to make sure that these offenders do not fall back into the cycle of crime. We must try to eradicate as much crime as possible from our society. Both sides of the House would probably agree that that is a very difficult thing to do. However, we have radically differing visions of how to do it. I will have more to say about that later in my speech.

A number of stakeholders support our position. One of them is the Correctional Investigator, who stated in numerous reports that the corrections system could face unintended consequences when

simplistic solutions are applied to complex problems, such as addiction, in our penitentiaries. He suggested measures such as assessment of prisoners at intake into correctional programs to identify their addiction problems. The NDP fully supports that. He also suggested giving prisoners better access to rehabilitation programs, which would help reduce drug use and gang activity in prison.

When I was asking my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands a question earlier, I said that I would come back to what the parliamentary secretary said. She quoted something that, if I am not mistaken, was said by Don Head, the Commissioner of Correctional Service Canada, before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, and that is that 95% of offenders complete at least one program while they are in prison. It is true that 95% of offenders participate in a program at some point in their correctional plan. What the Conservatives failed to mention—and we have spoken about this at length during the debate on Bill C-12—is that this percentage pertains to all programs in general. It could be an anger management program, a program to deal with aggression, Alcoholics Anonymous or a drug treatment program. A variety of programs are offered to inmates. The government seems to be lumping all of these programs together and saying that 95% of inmates participate in a program, implying that these inmates are participating in a drug treatment program. Unfortunately, that is not the case. I want members of the House to be aware of this in the coming debates.

It would be a good idea to give all offenders who need it access to a drug treatment program while they are in prison. That is not currently the case. Four out of five offenders arrive at a federal institution with a past history of substance abuse. As of July 2011, there were 775 inmates enrolled in opiate substitute treatment, representing approximately 5.4% of the total inmate population. That means that only 5.4% of the total inmate population is receiving treatment, when four out of five inmates have a substance abuse problem when they enter the prison system. Unfortunately, a balance has not been reached. That is rather sad.

● (1705)

In the 2012 federal budget, the government made \$295 million in cuts to Correctional Service Canada over two years, which represents about 10% of its budget.

Correctional Service Canada currently spends 2% to 2.7% of its operating budget on basic correctional programs. This includes substance abuse programs, but they do not receive all of that funding.

According to the Office of the Correctional Investigator—I always look forward to its annual reports—the CSC budget for substance abuse programming dropped from \$11 million in 2008-09 to \$9 million in 2010-11, even though the prisoner population continues to grow. Thus, funding for substance abuse programs and access to them is decreasing while the inmate population is increasing. That is sad.

That brings me to the position of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, which works directly in our prisons to ensure our safety. It does fantastic work. I visited a number of prisons in several provinces and we were always well received. The correctional officers clearly explained the work that they do, and they work miracles with very few resources.

Their budgets are cut every year and because of Conservative bills that amended the Canada Labour Code, their safety has also been affected. Take for example the bill that amended the definition of danger, which directly affects correctional officers working on the ground. That is extremely serious for them.

The Conservatives do not have the same vision. I would not say that their policies are harmful, but they are not the right policies for our penitentiaries. For example, as a result of cuts, the Conservatives promised to increase the number of beds and inmates in our prisons. I think it was 2,700 new beds, which is a net addition of about 1,655 beds.

At the same time, the Conservatives closed two extremely important penitentiaries—one in Kingston, Ontario, and the other in Leclerc, Quebec. The latter is in my riding and is now a provincial penitentiary. As a result of these closures, a cell designed for a single person often holds two or three inmates.

According to their assessment on the ground, despite a decrease in double bunking, corrections officers are currently seeing the potential for an increase in double bunking, which creates a serious problem in terms of drug addiction and the safety of corrections officers. These officers never know what will happen when there are several inmates in a single cell. Furthermore, it can be dangerous for the prison population, not to mention the fact that problems with street gangs and drug addiction can get worse if strict corrections plans are not followed.

The Conservatives should have a look at the studies that show what happens when you put several people in a cell designed for a single person. We often hear that it helps save money, but it creates many more problems in the long term.

The NDP wants to ensure that prisons are safe working environments for our corrections officers. That is extremely important. We will not make these workplaces safer by merely giving fancy titles, like the title of Bill C-12, to relatively simple measures without directly addressing the problem of drug addiction. This will only guarantee that inmates will end up back in the prison system.

● (1710)

I hope that the Conservatives will take note of all of this and of what the witnesses told the committee, so that the next time they introduce a bill called the drug-free prisons act, it will actually address the problem it claims to fix.

[English]

**Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way who sits on the public safety committee, as I do, gave some reports as to what was said at committee. Without going line by line as to where she was wrong and turning it in the opposite direction from where it was, I am going to ask the people out there who count, the people of Canada, to go to

### *Government Orders*

the blues of the public safety committee and read what was actually said. It will be remarkably different from what the member said.

The member also says she does not like the title. They wanted to change the title, and that was ruled out of order, just as in the House when something is ruled out of order. They think, if we cannot play the game their way, it is all bad.

She says some of the drug addiction programming was cut back. The evidence was that it was not cut from \$11 million to \$9 million, but that there is actually some \$20 million. We are verifying that. Therefore, Canadians out there should go to the blues. They should not believe any of the talking-head politicians in here. They should go to the blues and read what the witnesses actually said.

The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands was mentioning it. In a previous Parliament, the public safety committee went to other countries. They said Canada has some of the best programs available. We went to Norway. Sixty per cent of the programming in its prisons is from Canada. I ask the hon. member from across the way to read the study into drug addiction and mental illness in our prisons, and she will find some of that evidence.

The member went on and on about the short title. She mentioned double bunking. Actually, the evidence before our committee was that the additional beds going in were reducing the amount of double bunking. She needs to get her story straight.

Therefore, I am just going to suggest to Canadians out there that they go to the blues and actually read them. They will be remarkably different from what she said.

[Translation]

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think that my hon. colleague attended the same committee meetings as I did. I would also suggest that people go check the blues to see what happened in committee.

● (1715)

[English]

Sadly, they realize that sometimes the Conservatives are trying to mislead the House and maybe the public at the same time. Therefore, yes, they should go and read the blues. It would actually be a really good thing.

[Translation]

With respect to the reports I mentioned, many of them are directly from the Department of Public Safety. If my colleague wants, he can go read them now. I will give him the titles. The things I mentioned are in the “2011-12 Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator”, “Drugs and Alcohol in Federal Penitentiaries: an Alarming Problem”, and “Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Addiction in the Federal Correctional System”, which was published in 2010. I also have here another report by the Correctional Investigator, as well as a report by Public Safety Canada and Correctional Service Canada.

*Government Orders*

All of these reports, these facts and these numbers are real, but the government would have me believe that closing prisons and adding beds will not result in double bunking.

There is a penitentiary in my hon. colleague's riding. I think he should go for a visit and have a chat with the corrections officers who work there. They will tell him about double bunking.

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate my colleague. I know she works very hard and is doing great work on the public safety file, so I commend her. She has my full confidence, when it comes to public safety studies.

The Conservatives often present us with nice, shiny solutions that apply to all kinds of situations. However, the situation in the correctional setting is extremely complex. Everyone knows this.

In fact, the Correctional Investigator has said in numerous reports that a simplistic solution would never work, because the problem is so complex.

Some of the reports my colleague mentioned indicate that the best system would have nothing to do with parole—since parole has nothing to do with the inmate population, and my colleague mentioned that—but rather an intake assessment system that would help ensure that programs were adapted to the needs of the people incarcerated in federal institutions.

Could my colleague talk about those kinds of customized solutions, rather than the Conservative solutions—

**An hon. member:** One size fits all.

**Ms. Ève Pécelet:** Yes, the Conservatives' one-size-fits-all solutions.

Would she like to comment on this kind of customized solution, rather than the one-size-fits-all solutions that are supposedly going to solve all the problems in our penitentiaries? That kind of solution does not work.

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île for her question.

If only it was a one-size-fits-all solution, it would already at least be something. However, the solution that Bill C-12 proposes does not even directly affect the drug addiction problem in our current prison populations. It is quite simply something that already exists and is already being applied by the Parole Board of Canada.

I would even have been happier if we were trying to apply a one-size-fits-all solution to see what the Conservative government would have proposed to really tackle this problem, instead of pretending to addressing the problem and simply telling the Parole Board of Canada that what it is doing is very good and giving the board the opportunity to continue doing the same thing. It is relatively good because the Parole Board of Canada is doing very good work. What is interesting about what was proposed in this bill, and what has already been proposed, is that we are not giving the Parole Board the benefit of the doubt, but rather the choice of whether or not to apply the measures.

At least the Parole Board is not necessarily being required to apply the measures that are presented here, depending on the results of the urinalyses, but they have the possibility of playing with them. It is

good that the Parole Board is already doing this. Still, we should not kid ourselves. This is a bill aimed at eradicating drugs in prisons, but nothing here covers that.

**Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to join the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île in congratulating my colleague.

We can see that she is well-versed in this subject and very comfortable with it. She is very thorough. Honestly, I must also say that I very much appreciate her optimism in wanting to co-operate with the government on this bill. There must be a true desire to work together in order to be so positive about this bill, which does not have any real substance but is more about the title and the effect of the first page.

I heard my colleague opposite show utter bad faith when he said that the issue with the title being inappropriate was ruled out of order. That does not make the title an appropriate one. That is the truth. This may have been ruled out of order, but that does not mean that the title is acceptable. It is unacceptable.

Unfortunately, I know the reality of partisan politics, which is to constantly point out what this government has done and the laws it has passed, not to mention this famous drug-free prison act, which is going to work wonders for our prisons.

I am wondering how my colleague can be so optimistic about working with these people when the introduction of this bill once again demonstrates how narrow-minded they are.

● (1720)

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, who also speaks very eloquently in the House.

I would like to come back to something mentioned by my colleague on the other side of the House who, like me, is also a member of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. I must say that, as parliamentarians, it is truly a privilege for us to sit in the House, but it is also a privilege to sit on a committee.

Although we do not always agree on everything, there is nevertheless some degree of collegiality. One might expect the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security to be extremely rigorous, but we are all human beings. We have extremely different views on some topics, and that is normal. That is the beauty of Parliament.

This brings me to co-operation. I will always believe that co-operation is possible with this government, no matter what bill we are talking about. I will never give up on that. It is my job as a parliamentarian to present my views and those of the experts we try to meet, the people who appear before committees and the people I represent. It is our job as parliamentarians to try to work together. I am trying to play along, and I wish the Conservatives would try it more often.



*Government Orders*

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before I recognize the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness in resuming debate, I will let her know that there about seven minutes remaining in the time provided for government orders this afternoon. We will get started with her seven minutes, but of course, she will have the remaining time when the House next resumes debate on the question, the remaining 13 minutes or so, to take her up to her full time allocation.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

**Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would absolutely love to speak for the remaining seven minutes.

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to join this debate on the drug-free prisons act. Let me begin by looking at the scope of the actual problem.

Today we know that upon admission for federal custody, approximately 75% of federal offenders report having engaged in drug or alcohol abuse one year prior to their incarceration. It is clear that tackling drug use and the drug trade in federal prisons can help offender rehabilitation. We actually heard about this at committee. Creating a more positive environment that better encourages positive behavioural change will ensure that prisoners have the opportunity to get the help they need so that they can rejoin society as productive members, often for the first time in their lives. It can also help improve the safety of penitentiaries for both inmates and correctional staff as well as the community as a whole.

Certainly Canada is not alone in facing this particular challenge. Our federal penitentiary system shares the same challenges as other prison systems in addressing drug use and the drug trade. That is why Canada works closely with other jurisdictions to identify and share tools and best practices. These include partners from the correctional front lines, the policing community and research communities, local and federal legislators, and volunteers who actually work in that community.

Taking into consideration the current research and the strategies being employed in prison systems domestically and internationally, our government has moved ahead with an approach to combatting drugs in federal prisons that includes a well balanced mix of treatment and programming, interdiction, offender accountability, and penalties.

Much of the direction for our actions comes from an independent review panel we struck in 2007 to explore ways to improve our federal correctional system and to enhance public safety. Based on the recommendations of that review panel, the Correctional Service of Canada has moved forward with a transformation agenda to help maximize its contributions to public safety over the long term. That progress is rather quite impressive.

The Correctional Service of Canada has implemented many of the recommendations of that review panel, both in terms of addressing the presence of drugs in institutions and in improving many other aspects of the way our correctional system operates. Those efforts

and progress are noted in the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, entitled “Drugs and Alcohol in Federal Penitentiaries: An Alarming Problem”. Released in April 2012, that report noted that while we are making good strides, more work remains and needs to be done.

We continue to face an ever-changing and growing challenge to stop the smuggling of illicit drugs and other prohibited substances into federal correctional institutions. As such, the problem is complex, multi-dimensional, and very difficult to resolve. Efforts to tackle the issue must be multi-dimensional and involve an array of interventions including interdiction, prevention, treatment, and community-based initiatives.

On the interdiction side, our Conservative government invested \$122 million over five years to increase efforts to stop drugs or other contraband products from entering institutions in the first place. These have included increasing the number of drug detector dogs and enhancing the security intelligence capacity and perimeter security at our federal prisons. We are also working to deter drug use through increased offender accountability and penalties.

Through the Safe Streets and Communities Act, we changed the law to include mandatory minimum penalties for trafficking or possession of drugs in a prison or on prison grounds. Further, the Correctional Service of Canada has over the years implemented a number of initiatives to help reduce both violence and illicit drugs in federal correctional institutions. It has put in place routine and random searching by correctional officers of prisoners and the grounds of the prisons, searching of visitors, X-ray baggage scanners, walk-through metal detectors, and body cavity metal detectors.

The commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada, Don Head, noted at the public safety and national security committee that in 2010 there were more than 1,200 drug seizures made in federal institutions. Testing among inmates is now showing fewer positive results for the presence of drugs.

The latest statistics show that in the fiscal year 2013-14, some 2,400 drug-related seizures were made in federal prisons. It is worth noting here as well that the percentage of positive urinalysis tests and refusals has declined.

• (1725)

These indicators show that efforts around seizing drugs are working, and they point to the overall effectiveness of interdiction measures. We believe that this is progress, and it is one reason our government is moving forward to enhance treatment and programming offered to offenders in correctional facilities.

*Private Members' Business*

CSC has also made significant recent investments in streamlining the offender intake process so that they can begin treatment sooner. For example, as of 2012, more correctional plans must be in place within the first 70 or 90 days of when the offender arrives at the institution, depending on the length of his or her sentence. The correctional plan is an essential element in the rehabilitation of federal offenders as it is the tool by which the needs of each offender for substance abuse counselling can be identified and then addressed through enrolment in treatment programs.

A couple of amendments have been proposed in the drug-free prisons act. The bill would create an exclusive authority in law for the Parole Board of Canada to cancel an offender's parole, after being granted parole but prior to release into the community, based on failed or refused testing. It would also give specific authority to the Parole Board to impose a special abstinence condition. Simply put, these amendments would give the Parole Board more legislative teeth to fulfill its mission. This would strengthen the board's ability to make decisions regarding conditional releases, and we believe that this is simply what Canadians want.

I can assure members that our Conservative government remains committed to tackling the issue of drugs in institutions and ensuring that offenders can get the help they need to rejoin society as law-abiding citizens. I ask all members to support the passage of this bill.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The hon. parliamentary secretary will have 13 minutes remaining in her time allowed for her remarks when the House next returns to debate on the question.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

### INTERN PROTECTION ACT

**Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP)** moved that Bill C-636, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (unpaid training), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this evening to debate my Bill C-636, Intern Protection Act. It is a particular honour for me, as one of the youngest MPs in the House, because this issue is very important for the workers of my generation.

According to Statistics Canada, the youth unemployment rate is almost twice the national average. Young workers are increasingly living in a precarious situation and are having a very tough time finding paid work.

More than ever, young Canadians who want to launch their careers feel obliged to take unpaid internships that promise to give them work experience but rarely lead to a permanent job.

Other young graduates are often buried under student debt and feel that they cannot afford to work without getting paid. The average debt for graduating Canadian students is \$28,000, according to Statistics Canada. Debt often cripples young Canadians for life.

It is estimated that there are 300,000 unpaid interns in Canada today. Although some provinces have legislated on this subject, there is no federal law at present governing internships in areas under

federal jurisdiction such as telecommunications, transportation, banks and aviation.

However, Ontario has started to take action against companies that use illegal unpaid internships. Saskatchewan and Alberta have indicated that they were planning to tighten their employment standards governing internships. There is clearly a desire in Canada to protect and have rules for interns.

We cannot talk about unpaid interns in Canada without mentioning the story of Andy Ferguson, a young Edmonton man of 22 who was a broadcasting student. In fact, he would have celebrated his twenty-sixth birthday today, February 17.

Andy lost his life in 2011 when he was driving home after working 16 hours at the radio station where he was completing his internship. The loss of this promising young man brought into stark relief the urgent need for rules that would prevent the abuse of interns, in particular by limiting the hours of work an employer can require of an intern.

A few months ago, I had the honour of meeting Matthew Ferguson, Andy Ferguson's brother, when he came to the House of Commons for the introduction of this bill. He hopes that this bill will prevent other interns from finding themselves in the difficult position Andy Ferguson was in. Matthew Ferguson believes we have to start this discussion in order to prevent more abuse.

There have also been other cases reported in the media of profitable companies that employed unpaid interns to do the work of paid employees. That was the case with Bell Mobility, which recruited hundreds of interns a year under its professional management program. Last year, a former intern tried to get paid after working for Bell Mobility for five weeks under the program.

Torontonian Jainna Patel argued that the internship had no incentive value and she was doing the same work as a paid employee. Ms. Patel's complaint was rejected by a federal labour standards inspector, but she appealed his decision with the help of a Toronto lawyer. The standards that apply to the use of unpaid internships have to be tightened to ensure that young workers like Jainna Patel do not fall into a grey area.

Given the current situation, the federal government has to act to provide rules governing internships in areas under federal jurisdiction. The purpose of my bill is to offer unpaid interns the same protections as paid employees. The first clause of this bill requires that employment standards and protections, such as rights relating to health and safety, be applied to unpaid interns.

That includes the right to be informed of any potential danger, to be properly trained for the work and to refuse to perform a task that constitutes a danger to the intern or to others. Other protections that would apply to interns include measures relating to reasonable hours of work.

Bill C-636 will also limit hours of work so that the employer may require a maximum of 48 hours' work per week. In addition, the measures that protect employees against sexual harassment will apply to unpaid interns. Every intern will therefore have the right to be protected against any conduct, comment, gesture or contact of a sexual nature that is likely to cause offence or humiliation.

• (1735)

These are protections that everyone deserves to have in their workplace.

My bill contains a second element that sets rules for the use of unpaid internships. Unpaid internships often replace "bottom of the ladder" jobs, and with companies tightening their belts, young workers are the ones who pay the price. The Intern Protection Act would limit abuses by ensuring that the internship is similar to training given at a vocational training centre. Moreover, the intern must benefit substantially from the training and the employer must derive little or no profit from it. The bill will also ensure that interns cannot replace paid employees.

Lastly, the bill requires that the employer inform the intern of the terms of their internship and keep a record of the hours worked by the intern.

I am proud to announce that this bill has received the support of major organizations representing interns, students and young workers, including the Canadian Intern Association, the Canadian Federation of Students, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec and other major union organizations, including the CLC and Unifor.

In addition, Career Edge, a not-for-profit organization that helps create paid internships in numerous federally regulated industries, has called this bill a huge and positive step forward. The bill has also received the support of Andy Ferguson's family.

Incidentally, I would also like to mention the impact of this bill on gender equality. A University of Victoria study of interns found that women are overrepresented in the industrial sectors that use the largest number of unpaid internships. Clearly, Bill C-636 is a step forward for equality between men and women in the workplace.

However, it must be noted that my bill is in reality an essential first step toward protection for interns, and also that we must do more. For example, at present, it is difficult to estimate how many interns there are in Canada, whether paid or not. Statistics Canada and federal and provincial government departments do not compile information about internships. The federal government needs to instruct Statistics Canada to do this, in order to obtain data about the number and types of internships in Canada. This is the only way to get a comprehensive picture of youth unemployment and underemployment. The federal government also needs to strengthen enforcement of the standards to take action against employers that exploit unpaid interns.

Also, Canadians deserve a government that addresses the issue of youth employment. Over 280,000 young people lost their jobs during the recession, and very few of those jobs have since been recovered. The NDP has proposed a number of measures to help young workers in urban centres. The NDP previously proposed a tax credit for businesses that hire young Canadians in order to offset the

### *Private Members' Business*

high unemployment rate. Why not give our young people a country with the future prospects they deserve? We should give our young people the same opportunities their parents had and the same ability to progress through the important stages of life, such as buying a first home or being able to provide for their families.

To conclude, I urge my colleagues on all sides of the House to support this bill so that Canadian interns receive the appropriate protections they so desperately need. I will point out that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance has recently published a report that recommends the following:

That the federal government collect data on unpaid internships in Canada and work with the provinces and territories to ensure the appropriate protections under relevant labour codes.

In the same recommendation of last year's report, the members of the committee said:

Moreover, the government should study the impacts of unpaid internships.

Although the NDP emphasized in a dissenting report the importance of stricter additional measures, including changes to the Canada Labour Code, the work of the Standing Committee on Finance showed that the protection of interns goes beyond partisanship. I was actually very encouraged to hear a few weeks ago that Bill C-636 had prompted the federal government to hold consultations regarding the situation of interns in federally regulated industries.

• (1740)

We have to show Canadians that we can work together on these issues that are so crucial for young workers. It is time to take action by passing Bill C-636.

I would add that this bill will not cost the federal government a penny. We have to provide this protection for young workers immediately because too many of them are being marginalized in their workplaces.

I can also talk about my colleagues and people I went to school with, who are currently looking for work. Young workers often go from contract to contract or do several unpaid internships in a row before they get a job offer. I think that is a deplorable situation for young workers in Canada.

I would add that, as I said, the youth unemployment rate is twice the national average: it is close to 14%. That means young workers in Canada are quite unlikely to find paid work.

When witnesses came to testify before the Standing Committee on Finance about youth unemployment, we noted that the rate of youth underemployment was very high. The experts told us that one in three young workers in Canada are currently underemployed. Since they cannot find a job in their field, they are required to accept part-time positions, go back to school or accept unpaid internships.

I would like to come back to the fact that the current federal legislation on interns is vague. We heard the government say in the House that it was not aware of this issue. Basically, part II of the Canada Labour Code applies to occupational health and safety, and part III concerns the hours an employer may ask employees to work.

*Private Members' Business*

Unfortunately, we have not yet had a response from this government in the House about the protection of unpaid internships. We can see that the government is not grasping the magnitude of this phenomenon and that it does not understand how widespread the problem is.

Basically, my bill would ensure that the standards for hours of work and occupational health and safety would also apply to unpaid interns.

We have to say that this issue has been in the news in recent months, especially with respect to harassment. All workers in Canada deserve to have a safe workplace and to enjoy basic protections, whether or not they are paid. We heard terrible stories about interns who were exploited in their workplace and had no recourse under the Canada Labour Code.

Unfortunately, we have no data on the numbers of unpaid internships in Canada at this time. The federal government must also require Statistics Canada to collect data on the extent of this phenomenon in Canada.

The underlying premise of this private member's bill is that every Canadian who does the work of an employee who is usually paid must also be paid. That is the intent of my bill. It will ensure that employers provide remuneration to anyone doing the same work as a paid employee.

I encourage all members of parliament to take action on this issue that is so urgent for young workers and to support Bill C-636.

● (1745)

[English]

**Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles for her comments and for putting forth the bill.

Having been part of the finance committee when it studied youth employment, I know that this has been a persistent issue for several decades now and that in the last number of years that rate has come down from what it was from 1993 to 2005, but I have a couple specific questions about her bill, and one is a clarification.

I think there are many cases where people will pursue, and want to pursue, an unpaid internship. I do not think she is saying that is a problem. It can go ahead, as long as these people are protected. I see that proposed subsection 178.1(2) in her bill, under “written notification”, seems to cover that, so I just want her to clarify that she is not saying that there should be no unpaid internships, just that there should be protection for these employees.

The second thing I want to ask her about is proposed paragraph 178.1(1)(a), which states:

the training is approved by a secondary or post-secondary educational institution or vocational school and the completion of the training contributes to a degree or diploma.

What about a situation where a person maybe pursues an internship to expand his or her capability or to go into another area? That might not necessarily be approved by a school. I wonder what the protection is for the student who wants to pursue that.

[Translation]

**Ms. Laurin Liu:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. He seems to be quite familiar with the content of the bill.

He talked about how the bill does not eliminate unpaid internships. This bill simply provides guidelines for unpaid internships. It would prevent paid positions from being converted into unpaid internship positions. Industries can therefore continue to use unpaid internships as long as they are primarily for the benefit of the intern, not the employer.

My colleague also asked about the fact that my bill would require unpaid internships to be equivalent to training offered by an educational institution. This bill is inspired in large part by a law in place in Ontario that requires unpaid internships to be equivalent to training offered by an educational institution. The conditions in this bill are the same as those in the Ontario law.

[English]

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up with a question for my colleague from Tobique—Mactaquac and perhaps remind him and the House that this is one of the reasons why the member's bill is so important because we actually need accurate statistics.

In 2012, the youth unemployment rate of those 18 to 25 year old was 12%. In April 2014, it was 14%, and rising. So I am not sure where the member for Tobique—Mactaquac got his numbers in saying it has been on the decline. In fact, it has not. It has been on the increase over the last several years.

I would like to congratulate the member as well for the thoroughness she has brought to the bill, because not only does it show the need for statistics and perhaps the reintroduction of the long form census so we can rely on accurate statistics, but it also calls for the implementation and the need for standards—the need for standardization, for that matter.

In my own riding of Ottawa South right here in the city in the national capital, I have a very high youth unemployment rate, particularly because I have such a multicultural Canadian population in the riding, where there are 82 languages spoken and people from 146 countries.

Would she perhaps help us understand how her bill would help deal with the new normal in Canadian society, which is the diversity I was referring to in my own riding of Ottawa South?

● (1750)

[Translation]

**Ms. Laurin Liu:** Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, my bill will help marginalized workers. It will help female workers who are under-represented in sectors that offer unpaid internships. As my colleague mentioned, it will also help immigrants, newcomers to Canada, the workers who reflect Canadian diversity. My bill will do so much to help protect workers who belong to these distinct and sometimes marginalized groups.

*Private Members' Business*

[English]

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to address Bill C-636, proposed by the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles regarding unpaid internships.

Let me be very clear that the government places a high priority on safe, fair, and productive workplaces. These are an essential part of Canada's continued economic growth and prosperity, our number one priority, and internships play an essential role when it comes to providing Canadians with opportunities to gain the skills and experience they need to join that workforce.

There are currently estimated to be several hundred thousand interns in Canadian workplaces, many of whom are working toward degrees or diplomas through secondary or post-secondary educational institutions, but not all of them. There are also new Canadians, recent graduates, and people pursuing a career change or looking to return to the workforce after a period of absence, among others. I think we can all agree that no one wants to see them exploited or left unprotected.

However, the bill could put serious limits on prospective interns. Unpaid internships would be available only to current secondary, post-secondary, or vocational students who are receiving the training as part of their degree or diploma program. This change could leave in the dark prospective unpaid interns who fall outside these limitations, or anyone not involved in an education program with an internship component. Those trying to transition to future studies or employment, like new Canadians, recent graduates, or those looking for a mid-career change could lose an invaluable stepping stone to meeting those goals.

I am sure that prospective interns would have serious concerns about the number of meaningful internship opportunities available to them. The bill also does not define training, which is very much an issue of concern.

The bill could have the unintended consequence, for example, of making it easier for employers to withhold pay from their existing employees who are involved in workplace training.

Another issue is that Bill C-636 is somewhat inconsistent in that it would provide all interns with labour standard protections, except the minimum wage in some cases. This means that labour standards like paid overtime and paid holidays would apply to interns receiving wages, but also to unpaid interns.

There is real potential for confusion about the obligations of employers and the expectations of interns. I am sure we could all agree that internships, whether paid or unpaid, can be extremely valuable. Our government has been saying for some time now that we want to ensure that young Canadians continue to have access to the on-the-job training they need, and internships are an important part of that training.

At the end of January, my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, consulted the stakeholders in cities across Canada and across industries to gain a deeper understanding of how we can best support interns. Those meetings will help inform the current environment and help us better understand how best to protect interns in the workplace.

We are talking about balanced measures to make sure that Canadians continue to have the opportunity to get the skills and experience they need, including through internships, and to make sure that all interns are protected while doing so. We are investing \$40 million to support up to 3,000 paid internships in these high-demand fields, and \$15 million annually to support up to 1,000 paid internships in small and medium-size enterprises.

That's not all we're doing to support young workers. We also provide a number of programs to help our young people learn and develop necessary skills for their future careers, including Canada student loans and grants for post-secondary students, and the new Canada apprentice loan for apprentices.

Our government is committed to providing Canadians with the workplace experience and skills they need to find jobs and succeed in the job market.

This brings me to the point in my speech where I will talk a little bit about my personal experiences when it comes to internship programs. A little while ago, when I was chair of the Canada-Poland Parliamentary Friendship Group, I had the notion brought forward to me by young people in Canada, primarily of Polish ancestry.

Our institution has a great history when it comes to internships. We have the internship program on Parliament Hill, where young people from Canada come here to work in MPs' and senators' offices. We have internship programs, such as the Ukrainian internship program, where young Ukrainians come here to work in our Parliament. It is regrettable that we do not have reciprocity on that particular issue with Ukraine, wherein young Canadians could also go to do the same thing. We also have the Jewish internship program here on the Hill. That is part of a community that participates in these internships.

• (1755)

Some of these internships are paid, some of these internships are unpaid. It is happening right here, all around us, in all of our offices.

I am wondering what the effect of this legislative change might be. The member of Parliament sponsoring the bill never mentioned once any of the potential consequences of the legislation when it comes to these kinds of internship programs

Each political party has the ability to have its own internship programs. We have a Conservative internship program and I am sure the other political parties have ones as well. I do not know what the other parties do. They do not pick up the phone and tell me what they do behind their closed doors, which is unfortunate. I do not know why they do not do that.

These are some of the concerns that we have.

Trinity Western University has an internship program here as well. I do not remember the exact name of it, but young people from that university are also coming here.

*Private Members' Business*

This prompted me to reach out to the Polish community a few years ago and create Canada's first ever bilateral internship program. The problem that I see with all of these other internship programs here on the Hill is that they are all unilateral. They are all one-way. Through my ability to get the Polish community involved, we have created a society and an agreement with the Polish parliament, and at this point in time we have had a number of young Poles come over and intern in offices here in our Parliament. Young Canadians of Polish heritage have had the same opportunity to do internships in the chancellery, the Polish parliament, as well.

We have a lot of knowledge on the Hill about the impact of these internship programs and how valuable they are and how unique each one is in its structure and how they are set up. While I understand the sponsor's intent with the bill, we have to be careful if we start to tinker with some of these things.

While the protection is nice, and no one would disagree with that, if we do not get it absolutely right, any legislative changes that would deny young people an opportunity to participate in a parliamentary internship program, or to create a bilateral parliamentary program between parliaments, or to give young Canadians an opportunity not only to intern here but also to intern anywhere in the world as part of those bilateral exchanges, is not something we would want to do.

Canada is a great country. It is a land of opportunity and hope. Internship is just a part of that. It is a rite of passage for many young people so they can get the valuable skills and experience they need, and get those first references on their resumé when it comes to moving on and advancing their careers. We have cooperatives and internship placements and all kinds of other things emanating from our public education institutions. However, we have to be careful.

I will reserve judgement on the member's bill until we have had an opportunity to discuss it further, but at this particular point in time, while I do not question the member's motive, I do question the unintended consequences as we see so many times from legislation from the NDP.

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to speak to Bill C-636, which seeks to clarify the law regarding unpaid internships.

[*Translation*]

I would like to begin by thanking my colleague, the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, for introducing this bill and giving us a chance to discuss the issue of unpaid interns.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Too many Canadians, particularly young Canadians, are caught in a vicious cycle of not being able to get a job because they do not have work experience and are not able to get work experience because they do not have a job. It is that catch-22 that we are hearing more and more about in our communities and our own families.

At the same time, many areas of Canada do not appear to have clear laws regarding unpaid internships. This legal ambiguity, combined with a weak labour market for young Canadians, places unpaid interns in a vulnerable position. The concern is that in many

cases employers are using this ambiguity as a loophole around minimum wage laws.

[*Translation*]

More and more vulnerable Canadians are forced to accept unpaid work simply in order to gain work experience. The situation facing unpaid interns appears to have gotten worse since the recent financial crisis, because young Canadians are finding it harder to land their first job in their field of study.

[*English*]

I say that it appears to have grown since the financial crisis, because we do not know how many unpaid interns there are in Canada and we cannot manage what we do not measure, as the saying goes.

Unpaid interns are not included in the labour force survey. They are not counted as employees because they do not receive a wage. They do not count as unemployed unless they are available and actively seeking work, which they cannot do if they are already committed to a full-time internship. Therefore, we do not have good data on unpaid internships.

[*Translation*]

We do not know exactly where unpaid interns are working. We do not know if there are more of them in certain provinces or industries, but we do know that young Canadians are facing a huge unemployment rate.

[*English*]

Statistics Canada recently revised its employment data going back to 2001. The revised numbers reveal a number of problems with the job market, particularly for young Canadians. The fact is that young Canadians face huge challenges in today's workforce.

For example, compared to before the downturn, more Canadians now fall into the category of the long-term unemployed, those who have been unemployed for over a year. The number of Canadians who do not have a job and have been actively seeking and searching for work for at least a year is twice that of 2008.

The situation is worse for young Canadians. The percentage of young Canadians with paying jobs has fallen from 60% to 56%. There are 160,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians today than in 2008. There are now three times as many unemployed young Canadians who have been looking for work for over a year.

Young Canadians and the long-term unemployed are desperate for new work experiences, which makes them vulnerable to being pressured into unpaid work.

[*Translation*]

Last June, the Standing Committee on Finance released a report on youth employment in Canada. As part of our study, we heard testimony on the issue of unpaid internships.

I wish to thank Claire Seaborn and her colleagues with the Canadian Intern Association for their extraordinary contribution to public information on this problem.

*Private Members' Business*

[English]

At committee, we heard from both employers and prospective employees about the need to clarify the law, particularly when it comes to student placements that are part of an academic program. Witnesses told the committee that we should look to British Columbia and Ontario as provinces that have best practices in terms of providing clarity on the definition of what is an acceptable internship, what is an exploitative internship, and protection for Canadians.

For example, in Ontario, an intern is considered an employee and is entitled to minimum wage unless all of the following six conditions are met: one, the training is similar to that given in a vocational school; two, the training is for the benefit of the intern, who receives some benefit from the training, such as new knowledge or skills; three, the employer derives little if any benefit from the activity of the intern while he or she is being trained; four, the training does not take somebody else's job; five, the employer is not promising a job at the end of the training; and six, the intern has been told he or she will not be paid for his or her time.

After hearing the evidence, the finance committee recommended the following:

That the federal government collect data on unpaid internships in Canada and work with the provinces and territories to ensure the appropriate protections [are taken] under relevant labour codes. Moreover, the government should study the impacts of unpaid internships.

Unfortunately, we have not seen any progress from the government since then. It has not directed Statistics Canada to start collecting data on unpaid internships.

We have heard from some organizations, and the Canadian Federation of Students I think said that there were 300,000 unpaid interns in Canada, and we know anecdotally that the numbers have grown. We know from our own families and communities and a number of colleagues and friends whose children are working as unpaid interns. However, we do not actually have good data on this. Therefore, number one, we need to have Statistics Canada measure the number of unpaid interns on an ongoing basis, so that we understand the scale of the problem.

Bill C-636 appears to emulate many of the conditions set out by the Province of Ontario, which is something that, on the surface, we would support. However, we do have some concerns.

The Liberals were the first party to call for greater protection of unpaid interns, but this is something that the New Democrats have also been raising. We recognize that the federal labour law system is complex. It is built on a delicate balance between the interests of labour and management. We also recognize the potential for unintended consequences when we are changing the Canada Labour Code and labour laws of the country through private members' bills. This is something that is always a concern, and it is unfortunate that the government does not move forward with something in terms of a government bill.

One concern we hear over and over again is that young Canadians are desperate for work experience. While there is a greater need for protection, it is critical that we do not regulate away legitimate programs that help vulnerable young Canadians enter the job market.

There is a risk that clause 4 of Bill C-636 might in fact do that. For example, there are risks of excluding programs run by community groups to help vulnerable Canadians gain work experience, and not all these programs are linked to an academic program.

During the current Parliament, a number of MPs on the opposition side have expressed concerns about amending the Canada Labour Code through a private member's bill. I would like to quote the member for Trois-Rivières who said:

As far as I know, changes to labour relations legislation have never been introduced via a private member's bill...

In the past, changes to the Canada Labour Code have come about following discussions between employers and workers, not when an MP stands up to say that he has made the discovery of the century.

Therefore, when it comes to amending complex laws, a government bill is generally preferable, because under the rules of the House, it is subject to greater debate and analysis in Parliament.

That being the case, I will be supporting the bill before us because I think it is an important debate. It is one that we should have as a Parliament. We should at least let the bill move forward so that we can dig deeper into this issue and ultimately provide the government with more pressure to actually take action in addressing this important issue of unpaid internships in Canada, which reflects the general malaise we have for youth employment in this country.

• (1805)

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this place on behalf of the good people of Davenport in the great city of Toronto to speak on this very important bill, Bill C-636, the intern protection act.

It is important to say at the outset that all workers deserve workplace protection and that they deserve to be paid for the work they do. However, today we are seeing more and more young people working for free as unpaid interns.

Let us put this into some context. Youth unemployment is twice the national average. Young people are carrying unprecedented student debt. At the same time, young people are finding it more and more difficult to find entry level positions in the field for which they trained. Entry level positions are increasingly becoming unpaid positions.

It is one thing for a young person to not be paid. It is another thing if they do not even have the same rights and protections as employees, because unpaid interns are not part of the definition of an employee in the Canada Labour Code. This bill, the intern protection act, would change that.

*Private Members' Business*

What members of the House must really ask themselves tonight is whether they think it is fair and fine that an unpaid intern does not have the same rights to workplace health and safety protections as other workers. Is it fair and right that an unpaid intern does not have the same protection as other workers from sexual harassment in the workplace? Is it fair and acceptable that unpaid workers, most of whom are young workers, women, racialized, and immigrant, do not have the same rights as other workers to refuse unsafe work, to be trained how to handle unsafe work, or to have a cap on the number of hours they work?

Finally, is it acceptable that so many of our young workers are being forced to work for free, delaying their own ability to launch as independent adults? They are held back from becoming fully contributing members of our economy and society. As a consequence, many of these workers are also delaying moving out of their parents' home, starting families, and buying their first home.

Today, I stand here in this place on the 26th birthday of Andy Ferguson, a young Albertan who, after working two back-to-back extended shifts, was killed in a car accident after falling asleep at the wheel on his way home in the early hours of the morning. Mr. Ferguson's brother reached out to me, and we talked on several occasions about how we could turn this tragedy into a bill that would help young workers right across the country who are in a cycle of unpaid work that they have no control over, no agency in, and no protection from.

This bill would be a historic bill that would extend the same workplace protections that all workers expect to have, and most do under the Canada Labour Code. However, unpaid interns do not have them, because they are not included in the definition of what an employee is.

It is important for the government members tonight to realize that the Brad Wall government of Saskatchewan announced new rules prohibiting the use of non-educational unpaid interns. The labour minister, Don Morgan, said:

We've said, interns, you're going to get paid. Ones that would not get paid would be a student learner, where it's part of their course....

The finance committee did a study on youth employment, starting in March 2014. Among the recommendations, recommendation 9 was to tighten the rules around unpaid interns to bring them greater protections.

As many have pointed out tonight, there may be upward of 300,000 people working as unpaid interns in the Canadian economy.

● (1810)

As well, it is important to clarify tonight that we are talking about interns in federally regulated sectors, including telecommunications, broadcasting, banking, financial, transportation and crown corporations.

In the bill we ask for the same rights and protections that other workers have. Is it fair that all workers get the same rights in a workplace protected under the Canada Labour Code? That is not what is happening. It is really up to us to change that, to make it right.

I look at the members in the House, and I know many of them have adult children and many of them have constituents for whom this is a burning issue. How, in our economy, can we expect young people to work for free?

Many would like to conflate or blur the issue around good internships and important training opportunities for young people. We have seen and heard the stories of quite profitable, powerful private companies, corporations, public companies availing themselves of free labour in this current economic situation in which young people find themselves.

The bill would ensure that internships would be for educational purposes, that they would be the primary benefit of the intern and that they would not replace paid employees. Some will say that means they will not have an opportunity.

We are saying that we need to ensure, especially in companies that can afford to pay young workers, these unpaid internship entry-level positions should be paid positions, as they have been for generations upon generations. I do not think anyone in this place would disagree with the fairness of that.

We know there are many well-run internship programs. Some of my colleagues tonight have referenced some of them. However, we also know that there is abuse in the system. We need to step in as a responsible Parliament and take a look at the things we can do to protect young workers, to encourage the economy to invest in young workers and to stabilize the economy for young workers.

This is an important step in the right direction to see that all workers, all young people, have the same protections as everybody else in the economy and that they get paid. If we are building an economy where we increasingly are encouraging a system and an economy where young people are forced to work for free, we are not doing what we need to do to shrink the income inequality gap and we are gaming the system for those who have the opportunities and the capacity to spend sometimes several years working for free, while others cannot afford that same opportunity.

We need to look at ways in which we can ensure that as many young people as possible can gain access to the economy, can have safety and the knowledge that they are protected in their workplace, to have that agency. We have heard stories and seen examples where that just simply is not the case.

In honour of the memory of Andy Ferguson and the good work his family has done to try to bring this issue to the fore, I urge all my colleagues in the House to really take a look at the bill and to ask themselves whether the way we have set this table for young workers is fair. I am sure when they ask that question in an honest way, they will discover that indeed unpaid interns deserve the same protections and the same rights as employees under the Labour Code.

● (1815)

**Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to the issue of internships in Canada. As we have heard already this evening, there are many examples of the good work that is being done through internships, and we must protect that the best we can.



*Private Members' Business*

The government certainly remains focused on jobs, economic growth and prosperity for all Canadians. As we have heard over and over tonight, internships play an essential role in helping to meet this goal. They help Canadians develop the knowledge and skills they need to participate in the job market and to fill possible labour shortages.

We also believe that providing certain protections for interns is vitally important, especially given that it is estimated that there are several hundred thousand interns in Canadian workplaces. What we need to carefully consider is how we go about it.

Many interns are working toward degrees or diplomas through secondary or post-secondary educational institutions. Other interns include recent immigrants looking for meaningful Canadian job experiences, people re-entering the workforce or looking to make a career transition.

Our government has been saying for some time now that we want to ensure that Canadians continue to have access to the on-the-job training they need. Internships are a very important part of that training. The hands-on experience that interns gain is invaluable. The benefit to them cannot be overstated. This is why we are investing \$40 million to support up to 3,000 paid internships in these high demand fields and \$15 million annually to support up to 1,000 paid internships in small and medium-sized enterprises.

In addition to that, our government every year invests over \$10 billion to support post-secondary education and programs for first nations and Inuit students. This includes financial assistance through Canada's student loans and grants. We have seen great success through these initiatives.

However, this is not all we are doing to support young workers. We are also working to better protect them in the workplace.

The government is working with our partners to promote safe, fair and productive workplaces for youth, including interns. For example, and this has been alluded to in some of the previous speeches, at the end of January my colleague, the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, the former parliamentary secretary to the minister of labour, met with stakeholders from across Canada and across industries to gain a deeper understanding of how we could better support interns. At the last meeting of the federal, provincial and territorial ministers of labour this past September, our Minister of Labour, the member for Simcoe—Grey, and her colleagues agreed to keep on working closely to better protect youth in the workplace and to use new approaches to connect with them.

One example is by going out to places like colleges, universities and high schools with interactive presentations and one-on-one discussions to ensure students have the knowledge and the resources they need to stay safe on the job. Also, the popular "It's Your Job" video contest challenges high school students across Canada to create videos to educate other young people on the importance of workplace safety and their rights.

However, it is not just physical safety with which our government is concerned. More and more we are also learning that mental injury, while invisible, is just as real and serious as physical injury and affects all aspects of an individual's life, at home and in the

workplace. In fact, it is estimated that up to 20,000 of Canadian youth are affected by a mental illness or disorder.

The mental health and well-being of Canadians is very important to our government. That is why, with support from the federal government, the Mental Health Commission of Canada launched the national standard for psychological health and safety in the workplace in 2013. It is also why the minister and parliamentary secretary met and consulted with federally regulated employers, provincial workers, compensation boards and mental health organizations to discuss improving mental health in the workplace.

It is clear that we fully support initiatives that protect our workers, including young people.

• (1820)

Let us take a look at the bill that is being proposed today. It would place restrictions on prospective unpaid interns since employers could no longer be able to offer an unpaid internship to anyone other than secondary, post-secondary, or vocational students who were receiving training as part of their degree or diploma programs.

The bill also does not define what is meant by training or provide a regulatory power to do so. There could be a risk of confusion among employers on what constitutes training and could create unintended consequences. For example, this could make it easier for employers to withhold pay for their existing employees who were involved in workplace training.

What is also unclear is the bill's intention to extend labour standard protections to all interns, except for minimum wage in some cases. That could mean that labour standards like paid overtime and paid holidays could apply to both paid and unpaid interns. It is important to our government that we are clear about how interns are protected in our workplaces.

Our government is committed to ensuring safe, fair and productive workplaces. We have made it a priority to provide Canadians with the workplace experience and skills necessary to find jobs and succeed in the job market. The government is committed to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity, and we will continue to work hard to support all Canadian workers.

As has been stated many times tonight, we know there are good intentions in the bill. We know that there are also questions that need to be answered. We do not want to be creating unintended consequences that will not be beneficial for interns and young people. Therefore, we will continue to follow this closely as it continues on through the process.

*Private Members' Business*

● (1825)

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to say in the strongest possible terms how pleased I am and how strongly I support the bill introduced by my colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

In my judgment, this is a long overdue bill. It is really quite shocking to think we have none of the standards in the Canada Labour Code to deal with interns, even though jurisdictions like Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia all have rules of varying kinds to address the problems that this bill would address.

There are some good internship programs, and they have been discussed, but there are some abuses that need to be addressed. We have heard about the sad fate of Mr. Andy Ferguson who, working back-to-back shifts at an Edmonton radio station, was in a car accident after falling asleep. Perhaps if members of the House rose together as one to support this initiative, we might actually call this the Andy Ferguson bill, today being his birthday.

It seems to me this is something that many people in my constituency have told me needs to be addressed. We do not have statistics, but, intuitively, we all know there are a lot more unpaid internships out there. People ask me how this can be and how they can get a rung on the ladder to obtain employment if we do not address these problems.

I know I only have a couple of minutes and cannot, therefore, go through the bill in any detail, except to say that I was pleased to be part of the finance committee, which, in March of 2014, reported on youth employment. Recommendation 9 said:

That the federal government collect data on unpaid internships in Canada and work with the provinces and territories to ensure the appropriate protections under relevant labour codes.

This is entirely within the spirit of the recommendations of that unanimous report. Therefore, I believe it is incumbent on the House to send this to committee where some of the deficiencies that no doubt exist can be addressed.

My colleague across the way talked about the lack of definition of training. That is a simple thing to rectify if members, in good faith, would sit down and try to figure out how to make this law work. If it can be done at the provincial level, there are almost a million people in the federally regulated private sector that would be covered by this. It seems to me it is appropriate that we address that part of the workforce, unpaid interns, to ensure they have protections of the kind we take for granted in other jurisdictions.

There is a gap in the federal law. This bill would address it. It can be dealt with effectively at committee. I suggest that we get on with it and work together across the House to figure out how to make this a reality for young Canadian workers.

● (1830)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The time provided for the consideration of this item on private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

The hon. member for Victoria will have seven minutes when this matter is next before the House.

\* \* \*

**MARINE MAMMAL REGULATIONS**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-555, An Act respecting the Marine Mammal Regulations (seal fishery observation licence), as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Pursuant to Standing Order 37, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Bill C-555.

There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

**Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC)** moved that the bill be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Greg Kerr** moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank members who have participated in Bill C-555, an act respecting the Marine Mammal Regulations (seal fishery observation licence), commonly referred as the triple nickel bill. I am pleased that the bill is at this stage, because it shows, first of all, continuing interest in and support of safety in the seal hunt. It also shows the government's recognition of the seal harvest as a legitimate livelihood.

For more than 300 years, Canadians have relied on the sealing industry to support their families, and today I am really pleased that we are continuing the support for this important industry.

Many members may have enjoyed in recent days the Seal Day held on Parliament Hill. A number of aboriginal representatives from northern Canada showed how important sealing is to the culture and the economy of their communities. I am particularly pleased that the Minister of the Environment and the member for Yukon led the way in that. For those who enjoyed it, certainly they saw some great food, entertainment, and wonderful clothing made from seal skins.

I am glad that members from both sides have been supportive of the bill thus far, as most have been. This whole process is to make sure that we look at legitimate safety within a legal industry. The bill would simply create a larger zone of safety around the sealing expedition. It would go from one-half to a full nautical mile.

When we reflect on the need for the bill, an obvious question comes to mind: why is it that some people are prepared to endanger sealers and those around them and those who are protecting the public? One example stands out. In 2008, the *Sea Shepherd* irresponsibly and illegally endangered not only the sealers but licensed observers, and it caused considerable damage to a Coast Guard vessel.

*Private Members' Business*

We think this continues because of three basic misconceptions that keep cropping up. One, of course, is that the seal hunt is inhumane. Many years have gone by. With the 50th anniversary of the Seal Protection Regulations, many changes have taken place. The sealers are very responsible and very much aware of making sure they do things right. We think it is time for that myth to go, because it is a humane industry and a humane harvest that takes place.

The second myth that kicks around is the sense that this is unsustainable, which may have been possibly a concern back in the fifties and sixties, but today there are over seven million harp seals. They have almost exploded in population and indeed have become a threat to other fish, particularly cod. It is way overdue that we let that myth go by, because not only is it sustainable but it is done in a most efficient manner. Maintaining a healthy sea population is to the benefit of all sealers, and certainly it is to their advantage to make sure it continues.

The third myth is that the seal harvest is not thoroughly regulated, and that is absolutely incorrect. Fisheries and Oceans officials have worked hard over the past decades to make sure that sealers are well educated, well informed, and well regulated, and they certainly do their industry in the most productive and most supportive manner. These regulations make sure that in collaboration with the Coast Guard, policing authorities, provincial authorities, and so on, they are followed. It is important that the officials ensure not only safety but that the proper methods are followed.

It is unacceptable to let the critics simply spread misinformation, but it has been part of almost a worldwide effort for some time. It has been easy for some on the sidelines to make these very incorrect accusations. Today we know that we have not only a sustainable and a very well-regulated industry but an industry that remains incredibly important to the Inuit and the northern population and certainly to many communities in Atlantic Canada. Violations are taken very seriously, with fines, and the process is followed very closely by authorities as well.

● (1835)

This bill, as I said, would double the zone of safety. There is a very thorough process with regard to becoming a licensed observer, and the bill would make sure that both observers and sealers are protected. It would ensure that this legal and legitimate industry is allowed to pursue its course of action and harvest in a safe and thoughtful way and that those who simply want to protest and cause disruption are not allowed to interfere with this legal ongoing industry.

The end result of the effort here is to bring about improvements. We realize there will be more to come. There are certainly more things that should be considered and looked at in this very important industry.

I want to end by saying that we in the House, the government, and I think the general population, in taking the time to understand what this bill is about, realize that sealing is very much a part of both the culture, the background, and the economy of many communities. We want to ensure that it becomes a bit safer, and that is what this bill would do. I appreciate the support of the House and I hope we get this bill moved forward.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask my hon. colleague some questions.

The bill is certainly worthy of our support. I think it is important that we support hunters, fishers and people who are getting by in eastern Canada and the far north.

The negotiation of the European free trade agreement was a golden opportunity to increase the economic opportunities for seal hunt products in the European market. Why did the Conservatives not take this golden opportunity to give an economic boost to this industry that is struggling, as we all know?

[*English*]

**Mr. Greg Kerr:** Mr. Speaker, that is an activity that obviously goes beyond just a private member's bill. It would require the government standing up and making those points very clear.

In fact, the government has repeatedly made it clear and has gained some ground with respect to some of the European market. As the member knows, it is a tough market to defeat and bring onside, but we feel that we must continue the information and education process that is particularly necessary in the European market.

Canada has been very clear that we will do everything we can to support this industry, to make sure it is done correctly, and to recognize its important role in the economy of our country.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a brief comment and a question.

This is a important issue. I listened to the member and, having had the opportunity to be here the first time around when the bill came out at second reading, I know that there individuals from my caucus, such as the member for Labrador and other Atlantic representatives, who are keen on the whole seal issue. However, it is obvious that Canadians from all regions of the country are also concerned about the issue.

There is a great deal of economic benefit, but there is also a heritage component to sealing. The member never really made any reference to heritage or culture, although sealing has been happening for many years. Perhaps he might want to take the opportunity to comment not only on the importance of the industry but also on the cultural or heritage aspect of it.

● (1840)

**Mr. Greg Kerr:** Mr. Speaker, I did mention the Seal Days on the Hill as being one of the efforts to recognize the importance of sealing to both the culture, the livelihood, and the economies of northern communities. I agree with the member that it is important to keep putting sealing forward. I also indicated that this industry has been under way for some 300 years in our country and has made great strides and great improvements over the years. However, we must remain vigilant and continue to support it. It is part of how our country was developed. I certainly agree that anything we do to keep promoting it is a positive thing to do.

*Private Members' Business*

**Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was pleased and honoured to support my friend with respect to this bill coming to the House. It appears that we will have unanimous approval for it. I think it is worthy of that, and I applaud the member.

In part of his speech he referred to the importance of sealing to our aboriginal community. I know he has had communication with the Minister of the Environment, and I am sure she has advised him as to how important it is. I wonder if he could talk about how important this industry is to not only those who are on the eastern coast of our great country but also to the aboriginal community here in Canada.

**Mr. Greg Kerr:** Mr. Speaker, we did not quite get unanimous support. One member could not quite come with us. However, we have had great support across the—

**An hon. member:** So close.

**Mr. Greg Kerr:** It was that close, you are right.

Mr. Speaker, we had great support from the various parties and very positive input. For those who were at the Seal Day that took place in the Speaker's quarters inside, when we were talking to the native folks who were here, we heard what they had to say and how incredibly dedicated they are to doing it right and how important it has been to their actual survival. It is the income that in many cases provides the food on the table and provides the opportunity to look after families. They, I think, sometimes are puzzled as to how the uninformed or misinformed people can be so negative about what this achieves within their community and their culture. Anything we can do to keep supporting it and making sure it is done correctly I think is a very important thing, and we in the House can make sure that it happens.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to thank my colleague for presenting this very important bill. It brings clarity to a problem we are all aware of, namely that there are obstacles, problems and even safety issues in the marine environment, on the ice, for the fishers who hunt seals. This can be a very dangerous undertaking. If we wish to improve conditions for fishers, it is an admirable idea to propose a measure such as we have here today, which will probably help them. Once again, I would like to thank the member who introduced this bill.

On the other hand, let us be clear that what the bill is changing is that people with a seal fishery observation licence will not be able to approach a seal-fishing site closer than one mile, rather than a half-mile. In itself, it does not change much, but it is certainly a step in the right direction.

The real issue is to determine how well we can ensure the safety of our fishers involved in the seal hunt, whether in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the north Atlantic or the far north. Communities that depend on the income from seal hunting deserve even more support than they will get through this bill. It is a step in the right direction but we really must take it further.

Not all the fishers asked for this bill as the first step. There were really a lot of discussions. The Senate did a study on grey seals and on the fact that their numbers are increasing dramatically. There are

30 times more grey seals now than there were 30 years ago. Their population is growing rapidly, probably because their predators have been eliminated. The region's ecosystem is out of balance, and all the governments involved and the members of this House must do something to restore this balance.

There is still a moratorium on cod fishing; it was once the major source of income for most fishers in the region. However, they still cannot fish for cod in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence. That is very worrisome and many fishers wonder why. Even 20 years after the moratorium was imposed, is the population explosion among grey and harp seals the reason the cod population is not increasing? This question really needs to be asked.

Once again, I will refer to the Senate report. Unfortunately the senators were not able to determine exactly what measures should be taken. They proposed several measures on a trial basis, to see whether the species imbalance problem in the region could be solved. Even after its study, the Senate was unable to make any practical suggestions that everyone could agree on. I hope that we will continue to have a much sounder, more intensive debate on this issue.

However, let us not forget that first nations have been hunting seal for hundreds of years. Depending on the community, European settlers in Canada have been hunting seal for decades or hundreds of years. In my riding, in the Magdalen Islands, the seal hunt adds to people's winter income. There are not very many ways to earn money during this period. In winter, very few industries operate in my region. The tourism industry is in full swing in the summer, but almost non-existent in winter. People cannot fish for groundfish in the dead of winter. The Gulf of St. Lawrence is mostly frozen over and is not accessible. The seal hunt is an alternative. It is a way to earn extra money. That has always been the case in the Magdalen Islands.

● (1845)

That is the case in Newfoundland and the far north, where people try to find revenue where they can. This government should work with the people in my region, who are now being denied employment insurance, which was a source of income for the winter. They are having significant financial difficulty and need a lot more assistance.

If the government really wants to help the people of eastern Canada, it should think about the seasonal industries in that region, particularly seal hunting, which is paired with the groundfish fishery. It would have been worthwhile to commercialize the seal hunt, but nothing was done.

*Private Members' Business*

As for European free trade, we should have forced a debate with the Europeans. They wanted to open their market for other commodities to Canada, which would have been a golden opportunity to remedy the fact that the European market closed its doors to seal products. There are even barriers between provinces in Canada. People cannot transport seal products, including oil containing omega-3s, because there are a lot of interprovincial barriers. We should have this debate and help people in eastern Canada earn money in the winter.

This bill helps us keep our fishers safe, but it has to be profitable for fishers to go out on the ice. We can safeguard our fishers all we want, but if there is no market for their products, they will not fish. Fisheries and Oceans Canada allows the hunting of thousands of seals each year, but since it is not profitable, only hundreds are hunted. Licences are useless because the product cannot be marketed.

We must remember that sales of this product grew quickly because of European seal hunts. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Europeans hunted thousands of seals and were more numerous than sealers from eastern Canada. With the resurgence of the issue of cruelty to animals, a hotly debated topic, people hesitate to hunt seals.

I believe that people have good reason to be concerned about this, but it is the reason the Europeans abandoned us and stopped hunting large numbers of seals. Once again, they were the ones who took large numbers of seals, not us. Animal rights activists should be criticizing the Europeans, not us, for seal hunting. We have always believed in sustainable hunting. Unfortunately, the Europeans abandoned us by closing their market. The seal hunt has a bleak economic future because there are no markets for this product. We need to find ways to help the sealers in eastern Canada and the far north market the product, but the bill is silent on that.

Keeping sealers safe is very commendable. Let us work on that. We have to find ways to help them. However, the government closed the marine rescue sub-centre in St. John's, Newfoundland, it wants to close the maritime search and rescue centre in Quebec City, it wants to cut positions at the vessel traffic management centres throughout eastern Canada, and it cut the Canadian Coast Guard's budget. How can we say we are going to improve the safety of our sealers when they do not have the tools they need?

Even if their safety during the seal hunt were guaranteed, we still need to find a market for the product. Unfortunately, the bill before us today does not address these issues. Let us go ahead and improve the safety of our sealers, but let us find the economic tools to help them. That should be the next step.

• (1850)

[English]

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here today, speaking on Bill C-555, an act respecting the marine mammal regulations, introduced by my hon. colleague from West Nova. Originally, the member for Cardigan was going to speak on this, but he is stuck in a snowstorm blizzard in P.E.I. He is shovelling snow, and he has sealskin cap on as he is doing it. He would love to be here, but I am taking his place.

I would like to thank my hon. colleague for introducing this bill. He is well aware that I and the Liberal Party of Canada will be fully supportive of the Canadian seal hunt and the sealing industry. It is an industry that is so important to so many rural and coastal communities in our country.

The nature of the bill is to increase the safety of all those who are involved in the seal fishery, whether they are the fishers, the observers, or the enforcement officers. The safety of all those involved in the seal hunt must always be the top priority. We have to do everything we can to help those involved in the seal fishery industry and to keep it secure.

We know that, here in Canada, we practise a sustainable and humane seal fishery. In fact, it is one of the best run and monitored seal fisheries in the entire world. The Canadian seal hunt is a tradition that provides so much value to so many rural, northern, and Atlantic coastal communities.

We have to do everything we can to make sure that everyone involved is safe and secure when they are carrying out their livelihoods. The seal hunt on our shores dates back thousands of years and to this day remains such an important part of our history, culture, and economy of communities right across Atlantic Canada, in Quebec, and in the north, as an hon. member mentioned.

Over those thousands of years, many have lost their lives out there, hunting seals. It is usually in the spring, when people are quite far out on the ice. One of the books that I read left a big impression on me. It is called *Death On The Ice: The Great Newfoundland Sealing Disaster Of 1914*. It is a true story about the Newfoundland and Labradorian men and their sons who were out. They used to go out on the ships and they would be sent out to get the seals. All of the ships got lost, and they were out on the ice in a storm overnight. Many perished during the couple of nights out there, hunting seals.

As I said, many families in rural and remote communities make between \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year or less. When they can make between \$2,000 and \$5,000 more for seals, it is big for their families, especially in these rural areas where there is no other income, and especially during that time of year, March and April.

In addition to the economic and cultural importance of the seal industry, seals provide a wide variety of great products, including meat, pelts, and oil, which is very high in omega-3 fatty acids.

Seals are the biggest consumers of fish. They are very competitive, and with the population explosion that we have seen, they are competing with our commercial fishermen for fish in the water. When I go out on the boat with my friends off of Bird Islands in Cape Breton, I can see all of the seals there. They are really cleaning up on the fish.

*Private Members' Business*

My friend from Cape Breton, Robert Courtney, is a sealer. He and some of his buddies from Neil's Harbour in northern Cape Breton go sealing. It is a short season, so it is a very serious issue. My colleagues know that they are fishermen and getting seals to make a living. Their livelihood is being hurt by the massive population explosion off our coasts. These seals are eating a lot of fish, and a lot of them carry parasites that go into other fish.

There is quite an imbalance out there, so it is a great thing if we can get a livelihood and cull these seals at the same time. This is one of the reasons why we need to ensure the safest possible hunt every year. We need the government to do more to open markets, because we can sell more of these products. It is a healthy product.

There is a lot of talk and activity from wealthy people, these Hollywood celebrities and others, who live thousands of miles away from our communities. They do not realize or understand how we live in these rural communities. They do not understand how much fish the seals are eating. They know nothing about the Canadian seal hunt or the sealing industry. They prey on people who believe the misinformation in their campaigns. They raise money and use their efforts to try to disrupt the seal industry with their pictures and propaganda.

It is hard to believe the kind of misinformation that these people use, and it is hard to believe that they would ever try to stop our seal hunt.

• (1855)

If they were successful in stopping our sustainable and humane seal hunt, where else would they go? They would then move on to maybe the slaughtering of our cows, chickens, or pigs. It would not stop there. They just do not believe in this balance we have with nature and the nutritious products we get from it.

That is why I wish the government would take these well-funded campaigns of misinformation more seriously and do more to combat them to fight the spread of this misinformation. We should never bow to the pressure from other countries or interest groups when it comes to this humane and sustainable practice that provides jobs and food in a traditional way for so many people. That is also why the EU ban on our Canadian seal products, and the recent WTO ruling in its favour, is particularly troubling. The reason given was public morals. It is so unfortunate that the Conservative government left those discussions to the WTO, when it knew very well that this would happen.

Only two short years ago, the Prime Minister and the fisheries minister went on a trip to China. Before they left, the Prime Minister was speaking to *The Globe and Mail* and said that he was going to open up the large Chinese market to help our sealing industry. We have not seen that market open. We have not seen any amount of seal products going to that Chinese market.

In fact, much more needs to be done to promote all our seafood products in China and Asia. We need to let our Asian customers know about the importance and quality of our Canadian fish and seafood products, including, of course, our seal products. I was in Taiwan last year on a trade mission. It is big market. They love the way we manage our fisheries and how good our product is. It is a big

market for us, and we have to be on it all the time, or others will take it.

It is also sad to see that the Conservative government has let down our sealing industry by not fighting harder for it.

People in the fishery struggle every day. It is very hard to be out there with the elements. They have to ship their product far away to markets. It is a struggle every day, and I commend them for going out in the springtime and being on the ice. Springtime in Montreal or Ottawa is quite different from springtime off Newfoundland or Cape Breton. It is all ice. It is cold out there. It is still as dangerous as ever, but they go out there for the seal hunt.

The hunters and fishers do not need these outside forces tormenting them and endangering their lives. It is a hard living, and every dollar counts. That is why the government needs to do more for Canadian sealers and the seal industry.

I think the private member's bill is a good start, and I commend the hon. member for doing that. However, the bill comes down to safety, which is so important. The safety of our sealers and those involved in the seal hunt has to be the number one concern. I believe that this is a good bill that would help increase the safety of all those involved in the hunt.

I would like to thank my hon. colleague once again for introducing the bill. We will truly miss him when he does not come back to the House in the next term.

• (1900)

**Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak in support of Bill C-555, an act respecting the Marine Mammal Regulations (seal fishery observation licence), both as a concerned member of Parliament and also as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Let me begin by commending the member for West Nova for his initiative with this legislation. The bill is quite short, but the member has demonstrated that one does not have to have a long bill to make an important contribution to Canada.

Doubling the safety zone between seal harvesters and unlicensed observers is a sensible proposition that would help improve the safety of many. Given that the bill received all-party support at second reading and passed committee without amendments, clearly my colleagues agree.

On paper, the bill is about protecting seal harvesters from unlicensed observers who may disrupt the seal hunt and put sealers' safety at risk, but on a deeper level the bill is also an opportunity for the House to validate once again the legitimacy of the seal harvest. It is humane, sustainable, and well-regulated, and seal harvesters deserve to carry out their work without being harassed and endangered.

In my time today I would like to begin by putting the issue of the safety of seal harvesters into context.

Harvesting seals has never been for the faint of heart. In the 19th century, for example, sealers ran the risk of having their wooden steamships wedged in the ice while chasing seals. In these conditions the mere movement of the ice could crush the hull. Meanwhile, harvesters working away from the ship could have easily been stranded as well. It would be prudent here to remember the men who were lost in the 1914 sealing disaster on the SS *Newfoundland* and SS *Southern Cross*.

In our modern era, better vessel designs and more sophisticated technology have helped protect ships from the ravages of ice, although for the sealers themselves, the job has become more dangerous in some new ways.

Hundreds of years ago, sealers only had to contend with the forces of mother nature. If the ice shifted or cracked beneath their feet, it was largely outside their control. Today, sealers have to be mindful not only of the dynamic environment, but also of onlookers who seek to disrupt their work.

I respect the rights of Canadians to protest the seal harvest even if I do not agree with threatening the livelihoods of hard-working Canadians from rural, coastal, and aboriginal communities. When such dissent puts the very lives of harvesters at risk, we as elected officials must take action.

If a protest ship gets too close to harvesters, it can crack and break up ice flows. Even a mild shift in the ice can disrupt the balance or concentration of a seal harvester. Given that almost all harvesters are using high-powered rifles or shotguns, the result could be fatal.

We have a responsibility to our constituents and to Canadians to ensure that they are able to provide for their families in a safe and secure work environment. Whether they work in an office, in a factory, on a boat, or anywhere else, Canadians deserve to know that all safety risks are at a minimum.

According to existing regulations, unlicensed observers must stay at least one-half nautical mile away from seal harvesters. This legislation proposes to double the distance to a full nautical mile. That would result in a buffer of 6,000 feet, or about 1,800 metres. This extra distance would ensure the integrity of the ice under the sealer's feet and give DFO enforcement personnel more time to react if a protest vessel breaches the distance requirement. This increased buffer would give additional assurance to sealers that DFO and the Coast Guard will be able to intervene if necessary to protect sealers whose safety may be put at risk by such reckless action.

Our seal harvest is humane, sustainable, and well-regulated. Our sealers are trained in the use of the three-step process for humanely dispatching a seal. Sustainability is assured thanks to thorough

### *Private Members' Business*

regulations and good stock management. In fact, the population of the harp seal has more than tripled in size since the early 1970s and the grey seal population has increased by 30 times. Some would say that we have managed the population too well, with the seal population now having a major effect on fish mortality in Atlantic Canada.

● (1905)

The government thoroughly monitors the industry's compliance with regulations to ensure that the harvest continues to meet these high standards.

We recognize that misinformation continues to circulate, provided by radical groups committed to the abolition of this traditional seal hunt. This is particularly true around the type of seals that are harvested. It has been more than 30 years since Canada allowed the commercial harvest of unweaned harp seals, often referred to as whitecoat seals, and young hooded seals, known as bluebacks. However, some critics continue to use outdated photos to malign the nature of today's harvest and to market their campaign against the industry.

Despite the misinformation, Canada seal products are in demand around the world. Between 2005 and 2011, Canada exported \$70 million worth of seal pelts, value added garments and edible seal products, such as oil and meat, to more than 35 countries.

There is no denying, however, that the European Union's ban on the import and sale of seal products and other bans which followed it have hurt this proud and historic industry. That is why our government has been relentless in its effort to end this ban, and last fall we had a major breakthrough.

Members may recall the ban exempted certain types of seal products, including those related to indigenous hunts. This is an important recognition of the social, cultural and economic value of the seal hunt to Inuit and aboriginal communities.

However, it was never entirely clear how this exemption would work. For example, in some cases, Inuit rely on suppliers in southern Canada to support them. Some thought the involvement of non-indigenous people should disqualify these products from the exemption.

In October, Canada and the European Union announced a joint statement regarding the operationalization of the indigenous exemption. It includes a provision to allow non-indigenous Canadians and groups to process, manufacture and market seal products harvested by indigenous Canadians. This is good news for Inuit and aboriginal seal harvesters, for their partners and for greater future market access in Europe.

In the meantime, our government continues to vigorously defend the commercial seal industry as humane, sustainable and well-regulated. By approving the bill, the House can complement our government's efforts.

*Private Members' Business*

To summarize, the bill demonstrates to both sealers and our trading partners that Canada believes in the legitimacy of the seal harvest. On a practical level, it helps to protect the safety of seal harvesters while they are at work.

An act respecting the marine mammal regulations is strong legislation that received all-party support at second reading, and it deserves the full support of this House at third reading.

• (1910)

**Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I begin this speech on one of the most controversial of Canadian topics, the seal hunt, with one of the country's most controversial commentators, Don Cherry.

Don Cherry, who has made his career on and around the ice, recently took a shot at the Newfoundland and Labrador ice industry, our seal hunt. It was a Saturday night earlier this month on *Hockey Night in Canada*. Don Cherry was doing his usual *Coach's Corner*, with his CBC sidekick, Ron MacLean. MacLean was actually in St. John's, Newfoundland, for *Rogers Hometown Hockey*, and he mentioned during the segment how he had eaten a seal burger for lunch that day. The seal burger was prepared by Chef Todd Perrin of Mallard Cottage in Quidi Vidi Village in east end St. John's, one of our finest restaurants. Indeed, we have some of the finest restaurants in Canada.

Don Cherry's immediate reaction to the mention of a seal burger was disgust. That is what I saw in his face. "Imagine eating a baby seal", Cherry said, before questioning whether MacLean was a savage or a barbarian. It was hard to tell whether Don Cherry was serious, or whether he was just ribbing MacLean, which is what he often does. However, the immediate reaction in Newfoundland and Labrador to Don Cherry's comments was not good. To slight the seal hunt is to slight Newfoundland and Labrador, more so than any other slight, from "Newfie" on down. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians take any criticism of the seal hunt as a direct personal attack, not just against us and who we are as a people, but also against our forefathers and our very outpoured souls. To attack the seal hunt is to attack Newfoundland and Labrador. To attack the seal hunt is to poke the bear that is the fighting Newfoundlander. One does not joke about the seal hunt. We are not ready for that yet. The constant attacks on the hunt have left a wound that is still much too raw. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are sensitive, and for good reason.

In the words of Bernie Halloran, the owner of a small outerwear shop in downtown St. John's that has been selling seal products for 30 years, sealing is the most bullied industry on the planet. Bernie Halloran said that in a letter he wrote to Don Cherry.

Don Cherry later issued what was more of a clarification than an apology. He said he had no problem with people who hunt seals and no problem with seal meat, but also said, "I do however find it very unusual, in my world, that a person would go into a restaurant and order a seal burger for lunch." That may be unusual to Don Cherry in Don Cherry's world, but it is not unusual in my world. Flipper pie is a true Newfoundland and Labrador delicacy, and the best meat by far that I have ever eaten is seal tenderloin fried on a cast iron pan with butter, salt, and pepper and left for 15 minutes. It is heaven on a plate.

Don Cherry may know hockey, but he does not know Newfoundland and Labrador. He does not know our people. He does not know our cultural industry. At what point did Don Cherry become soft? To quote a constituent, "Go buy Rock 'Em Sock 'Em 97, where grown men punch the face off each other for two hours". Is that not barbaric?

To quote another Newfoundlander, "I wonder what the wings and ribs at Don Cherry's restaurant are made of?" Is that not hypocritical: beef, chicken, seal? The sealing industry has been vilified.

To once again quote Bernie Halloran, owner of that seal shop in downtown St. John's, "...my opinion, if sealing is wrong, the whole world is wrong".

That brings us to the bill before the House today. Her Majesty's official opposition, the New Democratic Party of Canada, supports Bill C-555, the seal fishery observation licence.

• (1915)

This bill would increase the distance that an unofficial observer—a seal protestor, for example—must keep from sealing. Right now, it is against the law for an unofficial observer to come within a half nautical mile of the hunt. Bill C-555 would increase that buffer zone to a full nautical mile. It would increase from a half nautical mile to a full nautical mile.

When I spoke on this bill in March 2014, almost a year ago, I called this bill a charade, to make it appear that the Conservative government is actually doing something for the hunt, for sealing. This bill is a sham, to make it appear that the government is defending the seal hunt. It is an illusion, to make it appear that the government is a champion of the seal hunt.

Changing the distance that unofficial seal hunt observers can approach the hunt from a half mile to a full nautical mile means absolutely nothing when the half mile zone that is there now is not enforced.

Sealers on the ground in my province of Newfoundland and Labrador say that this is a good idea, but they do not see how it would change anything. The east coast seal hunt has seen the biggest collapse of seal markets in its history under the Conservative government. That is a fact.

Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Taiwan, the European Union, and all of its member countries have banned the importation of Canadian seal products while the Conservative government has sat idly by, touting its undying support, for all the good it has done.

The anti-seal hunt groups have been very effective, incredibly effective, in pounding our industry. I recently travelled to Taiwan with a parliamentary delegation. I was curious to ask the Taiwanese first hand why they banned Canadian seal products in 2013, because that is the way it was sold over here: yet another country has lined up against the Canadian seal hunt.



However, what I learned was that the Taiwanese ban on the export or sale of marine mammal products had solely to do with Japanese whaling and the Japanese dolphin hunt. It had nothing to do with Canadian seal products. The seal hunt is not an issue in Taiwan. This is a country where people eat barbecued squid on a stick. Taiwan and Asian countries like it are seafood meccas.

The Conservative government has to do more to educate people around the world about our sustainable and humane seal hunt. The government is not doing enough to spread the word. The Taiwanese quote Greenpeace and the International Fund for Animal Welfare as gospel, as the last word on the seal hunt, when they should not be quoted at all.

To wrap up, my party supports this bill on extending the seal fishery observation licence, but that will not change a thing with the hunt. It will not reopen closed markets. It will not lift the ban on seal products in so many countries around the world. This bill will not stop people like Don Cherry from describing those who eat seal burgers as barbarians or savages. Joking or not, such comments do nothing to promote our sealing industry. The comments sting.

I just attended the 10-day Mount Pearl Frosty Festival in my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl. Mount Pearl is a city alongside St. John's, a city that I describe as a land-locked outpost. People there are first-, second-, or third-generation baymen. Baymen means that they come from rural Newfoundland and Labrador, meaning sealing is in their blood.

The seal fashion that I took in during the Frosty Festival—the sealskin boots, jackets, and coats, mostly on the women—was absolutely lovely. Besides sending a note to Don Cherry, Bernie Halloran of St. John's mailed him three seal ties, including a blue one in memory of Don Cherry's late dog, Blue. How nice was that? That is who we are.

The best thing that could happen to the seal hunt is if someone like Don Cherry, with his unique fashion sense, embraced our industry, embraced our fine fashion sense and melded it with his own.

Don Cherry in a sealskin jacket and tie would get two minutes for looking so good.

• (1920)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

*Adjournment Proceedings*

## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to try to get clarification to a question I asked not so long ago involving infrastructure and in particular housing.

At that time I asked for the government's response to the information that close to 5,000 seniors in the city of Winnipeg and in the province of Manitoba were going to lose their housing because of the government's failure—in fact, its deliberate choice—not to renew housing agreements and sustain subsidies. Many of these house seniors in particular in Manitoba. The response I got back was, “Don't worry; everything is okay. We are renewing housing agreements.” Those housing agreements do not, will not, and have not sustained or secured those seniors' future. In fact, it has all been put at risk, and that is wrong.

My question also talked about the fact that infrastructure dollars, which amounted to \$2 billion just a few years ago, have been reduced to about \$210 million over the last calendar year. This constitutes a 90% cut to infrastructure spending in this country, in particular for municipalities.

I was on a television panel with the Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, who said, “No, that's not true. Money is being delivered.” However, I was on that panel with six other mayors across Canada—the mayors of Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Mississauga—and they all confirmed that their infrastructure allotment from the federal government last year was zero dollars. In fact, the parliamentary secretary's own riding, which contains the city of Kitchener, not only received zero dollars in 2014 but also received zero dollars in 2013 as well, and because of the delay in the budget, it is now in a position to get zero dollars this year. The government is missing in action.

As I said, the response I got back from the minister of social development at the time was that a federal project in a part of my riding that I used to represent on city council went over budget. Somehow she blamed a local councillor for a federal program going over budget when it was her department that allocated the money and signed off on the budget allocation. How that happened is beyond me. Her department spends money, and I get blamed because her department does not do due diligence and check its books. That is a new kind of accountability model, I guess, in Canada: the federal government chooses how to spend the money and then blames local politicians when things go wrong, as opposed to taking responsibility.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

On the infrastructure file, it is absolutely clear that the current government has cut infrastructure spending for municipalities by 90% this year. It was \$2 billion two years ago and it is \$210 million this year. While the Conservatives talk about an extended program over 10 years and the fact that it is the largest in Canada, what they do not explain to Canadians is that it is back-end loaded, which means that there was no money last year and, because the budget has been delayed even as city councils across the country are setting their own budgets, there is no money this year. When we couple that with the fact that they have pulled out of housing agreements across this country, people in Winnipeg and Toronto are looking at waiting lists that are growing longer and repair bills that are getting higher, and they do not have a federal government as a partner.

My question is a very simple one. Will the government commit to renewing the housing agreements and the subsidies for people in Manitoba and will it increase infrastructure spending in this year's budget?

**Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina is calling for the government to both renew long-term social housing agreements and provide new funding for housing, and I am pleased to explain our position on both of these matters.

The social housing agreements to which the hon. member referred were signed many years ago, in some cases close to 50 years ago. The end date has been known since those agreements were signed and typically coincides with the final payout of the mortgages on these properties. As I noted in the House some time ago, Canadians understand that when their mortgage expires they stop paying the bank.

That is essentially what is happening here. As the agreements end and as they mature, housing providers will find themselves with a valuable real estate asset and reduced operating expenses that can be used to continue to offer affordable housing to the clients. The fact is that most non-profit co-operative housing projects are expected to be financially viable when the agreements come to an end and the federal subsidies stop.

For those who may experience difficulty, CMHC has been actively working with them to help them prepare for the end of these operating agreements. For example, CMHC's affordable housing centre offers a range of tools to assist housing providers, such as a project viability calculator, capital planning tools, and project profiles. Our government has also created more flexibility in some housing programs administered by CMHC to give eligible housing providers better access to funding for capital repairs and renovations.

Hon. members will recall that in economic action plan 2009, we provided more than \$1 billion to renovate and retrofit existing social housing so it could continue to be available for Canadian individuals and families in need. Close to 15,000 social housing projects were completed across Canada, everything from replacing roofs and windows to upgrading plumbing and electrical systems.

As for new funding for housing, I would remind the hon. member that economic action plan 2013 renewed the investment in affordable housing for five years, with an additional federal funding of \$1.25

billion. This brings the total federal commitment under this initiative to close to \$2 billion over the previous eight years.

This funding is delivered and cost-matched by the provinces and territories, which are best positioned to identify and address local housing needs. Depending on their priorities, provinces and territories can also opt to use the investment in affordable housing funds to support projects whose operating agreements have matured, or for other purposes such as new construction or renovation projects, shelter allowances, or assistance toward home ownership.

I am pleased to advise the hon. member that the renewal agreements have now been signed with almost all provinces and territories. The governments of Canada and Ontario, for example, signed a renewal agreement last August that provides for a joint investment of more than \$800 million over five years.

The investment in affordable housing is doing exactly what the hon. member has asked for. It is reducing the number of Canadians in housing need. Looking specifically at Ontario, our government has invested some \$5.7 billion in housing in that province since 2006. This includes more than \$240 million under the investment in affordable housing—funding that means almost 18,000 households in that province are no longer in housing need.

However, there is more to be done. That is why we have renewed the investment in affordable housing and why, again this year, our government will continue to invest about \$2 billion in housing across Canada.

Make no mistake: action is being taken. Working with the provinces and territories, we are ensuring that the housing needs of Canadians are being met.

● (1925)

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite has just described is the status quo. The status quo is failing, and it is failing everywhere across this country.

The agreement the member just spoke to, the \$800 million renewal, in Toronto means that 60 new units of housing will be built this year, and 60 units a year for the next five years. We have a waiting list of 92,000 families waiting for housing. What the member opposite has just described to us is effectively a 1,500-year wait list. While that wait list is not being met by the current government's inaction and support of the status quo, the idea that the mortgage will run out and suddenly they will be able to subsidize their neighbour with their rent is ridiculous. That money is now needed for repairs for the housing that he himself describes as 50 to 60 years old. The math just does not add up.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The question is very clear. Is the government going to renew the subsidy agreements? Are they going to be renewed? If they are not going to be renewed, what does the member tell the 5,000 seniors in Winnipeg who are facing eviction because of his government's policies?

**Mr. Scott Armstrong:** Mr. Speaker, as I said, Canadians understand that when the mortgage is paid off, they stop paying the bank. These agreements are coming to an end.

We are continuing to invest large sums of money in housing across the country. We are working with our provincial and territorial partners to ensure they have the resources necessary to continue to deliver housing to the most needy across Canada. We have signed agreements with almost every provincial and territorial government in the country. We are getting the job done when it comes to housing,

when it comes to infrastructure, when it comes to supporting Canadians to get the shelter they need, the most in need Canadians.

What would not help them is the Liberal policy to increase taxes, implement a carbon tax, which would kill jobs and force more Canadians into poverty and which would increase the need for housing across Canada. That is a plan that will not work.

● (1930)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:31 p.m.)

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# CONTENTS

Tuesday, February 17, 2015

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### Chief Electoral Officer of Canada

The Speaker ..... 11263

### Committees of the House

#### Procedure and House Affairs

Mr. Preston ..... 11263  
Ms. Young (Vancouver South) ..... 11263  
Motion for concurrence ..... 11263  
(Motion agreed to) ..... 11263

### Petitions

#### International Trade

Ms. May ..... 11263

#### Justice

Ms. May ..... 11263

#### Canada Post

Ms. Quach ..... 11263

#### CBC/Radio-Canada

Ms. Quach ..... 11264

#### Student Loans

Mr. Hyer ..... 11264

#### Citizenship and Immigration

Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) ..... 11264

#### International Trade

Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) ..... 11264

#### The Environment

Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) ..... 11264

#### Dementia

Mr. Rankin ..... 11264

#### Anaphylaxis

Ms. Mathysen ..... 11264

### Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lukiwski ..... 11264

### Privilege

#### Questions on the Order Paper—Speaker's Ruling

The Speaker ..... 11264

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

### Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act

Mr. Alexander ..... 11265  
Bill S-7. Second reading ..... 11265  
Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe ..... 11268  
Mr. Casey ..... 11269  
Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe ..... 11269  
Mr. Alexander ..... 11272  
Mr. McCallum ..... 11272  
Mr. Angus ..... 11272  
Mr. Menegakis ..... 11273  
Mr. McCallum ..... 11273  
Mr. Menegakis ..... 11274  
Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe ..... 11274  
Mr. Casey ..... 11275

Mr. Angus ..... 11276  
Ms. Quach ..... 11276  
Ms. Leitch ..... 11277  
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona) ..... 11279  
Mr. Casey ..... 11279  
Mr. Menegakis ..... 11279  
Ms. Freeman ..... 11279  
Ms. Freeman ..... 11280  
Mr. Menegakis ..... 11282  
Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue) ..... 11283  
Mr. Menegakis ..... 11284  
Mr. Angus ..... 11286  
Mr. Casey ..... 11286  
Mrs. Ablonczy ..... 11287  
Ms. Quach ..... 11287  
Mr. Sandhu ..... 11287  
Mr. Wallace ..... 11289  
Mr. Lamoureux ..... 11289  
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona) ..... 11289  
Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue) ..... 11291  
Mr. Menegakis ..... 11291  
Mrs. Truppe ..... 11291  
Mr. Lamoureux ..... 11293  
Ms. Boutin-Sweet ..... 11293  
Mr. Menegakis ..... 11293  
Mr. Wallace ..... 11293

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

### Seniors

Mr. Adler ..... 11294

### Arts and Culture

Ms. Nash ..... 11295

### Assisted Suicide

Mr. Fletcher ..... 11295

### Education

Ms. Murray ..... 11295

### Michael Green

Ms. Crockatt ..... 11295

### Education

Mr. Harris (Scarborough Southwest) ..... 11296

### Civic Achievement

Mr. Chisu ..... 11296

### 2015 Canada Winter Games

Mr. Zimmer ..... 11296

### “Passe Rondelle” Hockey Tournaments

Ms. Papillon ..... 11296

### Taxation

Mr. Eglinski ..... 11296

<b>CBC/Radio-Canada</b>	
Ms. Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue) .....	11297
<b>Taxation</b>	
Mr. Maguire .....	11297
<b>Mark Goldblatt</b>	
Mr. Bélanger .....	11297
<b>Taxation</b>	
Mr. Dykstra .....	11297
<b>CBC/Radio-Canada</b>	
Mr. Boulerice .....	11297
<b>Taxation</b>	
Mr. Gourde .....	11298

## ORAL QUESTIONS

<b>National Defence</b>	
Mr. Mulcair .....	11298
Mr. Harper .....	11298
Mr. Mulcair .....	11298
Mr. Harper .....	11298
<b>Public Safety</b>	
Mr. Mulcair .....	11298
Mr. Harper .....	11298
Mr. Mulcair .....	11298
Mr. Harper .....	11298
<b>CBC/Radio-Canada</b>	
Mr. Mulcair .....	11299
Mr. Harper .....	11299
Mr. Trudeau .....	11299
Mr. Harper .....	11299
<b>Health</b>	
Mr. Trudeau .....	11299
Mr. Harper .....	11299
Mr. Trudeau .....	11299
Mr. Harper .....	11299
<b>Public Safety</b>	
Ms. Doré Lefebvre .....	11299
Mr. Blaney .....	11300
Mr. Garrison .....	11300
Mr. Blaney .....	11300
Mr. Garrison .....	11300
Mr. Blaney .....	11300
<b>Employment Insurance</b>	
Mr. Aubin .....	11300
Mr. Poilievre .....	11300
Ms. Mathyssen .....	11300
Mr. Poilievre .....	11300
<b>Child Care</b>	
Ms. Mathyssen .....	11300
Ms. Bergen .....	11301
Mrs. Groguhé .....	11301
Ms. Bergen .....	11301
<b>Taxation</b>	
Ms. Nash .....	11301

Ms. Findlay .....	11301
Mr. Dionne Labelle .....	11301
Ms. Findlay .....	11301
<b>The Economy</b>	
Ms. Freeland .....	11301
Mr. Sorenson .....	11302
<b>Infrastructure</b>	
Ms. Sgro .....	11302
Mr. Lebel .....	11302
Mr. Lamoureux .....	11302
Mr. Lebel .....	11302
<b>National Defence</b>	
Mr. Chicoine .....	11302
Mr. Kenney .....	11302
Ms. Michaud .....	11302
Mr. Kenney .....	11302
Mr. Rafferty .....	11303
Mr. Kenney .....	11303
<b>Veterans Affairs</b>	
Mr. Stoffer .....	11303
Mr. O'Toole .....	11303
<b>Foreign Affairs</b>	
Mr. Toet .....	11303
Mr. Nicholson .....	11303
<b>Forestry Industry</b>	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) .....	11303
Mr. Fast .....	11303
Ms. Freeman .....	11303
Mr. Fast .....	11304
<b>CBC/Radio-Canada</b>	
Ms. Sitsabaiesan .....	11304
Mr. Lebel .....	11304
Mr. Nantel .....	11304
Mr. Lebel .....	11304
<b>National Defence</b>	
Ms. Murray .....	11304
Mr. Kenney .....	11304
<b>Official Languages</b>	
Mr. Dion .....	11304
Mrs. Glover .....	11305
<b>Seniors</b>	
Mr. Lapointe .....	11305
Mr. Holder .....	11305
<b>Health</b>	
Mr. Rankin .....	11305
Ms. Ambrose .....	11305
<b>Canada Revenue Agency</b>	
Mr. Kramp .....	11305
Ms. Findlay .....	11305
<b>Official Languages</b>	
Mr. Regan .....	11305
Mrs. Glover .....	11305
Mr. Caron .....	11306

Mrs. Block .....	11306
<b>Taxation</b>	
Mr. Daniel .....	11306
Ms. Bergen .....	11306
<b>The Environment</b>	
Mr. Plamondon .....	11306
Mrs. Block .....	11306
<b>Public Safety</b>	
Ms. May .....	11306
Mr. Harper .....	11306

### GOVERNMENT ORDERS

<b>Drug-Free Prisons Act</b>	
Bill C-12. Report stage .....	11306
Mr. Blaney .....	11307
Motion for Concurrence .....	11307
(Motion agreed to) .....	11307
Bill C-12. Third reading .....	11307
Mr. Garrison .....	11308
Mr. Easter .....	11308
Ms. James .....	11309
Mr. Garrison .....	11309
Ms. James .....	11312
Mr. Easter .....	11313
Ms. Ayala .....	11314
Mr. Easter .....	11314
Ms. James .....	11316
Mr. Garrison .....	11317
Mr. Garneau .....	11317
Mr. Nantel .....	11317
Ms. May .....	11318
Ms. James .....	11319
Ms. Doré Lefebvre .....	11320
Mr. Lamoureux .....	11320
Ms. Doré Lefebvre .....	11320

Mr. Norlock .....	11323
Ms. Péclet .....	11324
Mr. Nantel .....	11324
Ms. James .....	11325

### PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

<b>Intern Protection Act</b>	
Ms. Liu .....	11326
Bill C-636. Second reading .....	11326
Mr. Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac) .....	11328
Mr. McGuinty .....	11328
Mr. Calkins .....	11329
Mr. Brison .....	11330
Mr. Cash .....	11331
Mrs. Davidson .....	11332
Mr. Rankin .....	11334

### Marine Mammal Regulations

Bill C-555. Report stage .....	11334
Mr. Kerr .....	11334
Motion for concurrence .....	11334
(Motion agreed to) .....	11334
Bill C-555. Third reading .....	11334
Mr. Toone .....	11335
Mr. Lamoureux .....	11335
Mr. Norlock .....	11336
Mr. Toone .....	11336
Mr. Eyking .....	11337
Mr. Kamp .....	11338
Mr. Cleary .....	11340
(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed) ..	11341

### ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

<b>Intergovernmental Affairs</b>	
Mr. Vaughan .....	11341
Mr. Armstrong .....	11342

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