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Tuesday, April 21, 2015

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 21, 2015

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in relation to the main estimates, 2015-16.

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PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present.

The first petition is on Bill C-638, an act to amend the Canada Shipping Act. The petitioners outline that derelict and abandoned vessels pose an environmental risk and a navigation hazard, and that regulations must be made to establish measures to be taken for the removal, disposition or destruction by the appropriate authority.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to support Bill C-638, an act to amend the Canada Shipping Act.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is on the fair electoral representation act.

The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to immediately undertake public consultations across Canada to amend

the Canada Elections Act to ensure voters can cast an equal and effective vote to be represented fairly in Parliament regardless of political belief or place of residence, are governed by a fairly elected Parliament where the share of seats held by each political party closely reflects the popular vote, and finally live under legitimate laws approved by a majority of elected parliamentarians representing the majority of voters.

AGRICULTURE

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the final petition, the petitioners call on the Canadian government to ensure that the right of family farmers to use seeds is respected.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present some petitions here.

The first notifies the House that 11-year-old Grace Wynen was tragically killed by a drunk driver, a person who chose to drive while impaired.

Gracie's family was devastated. Families For Justice is a group of Canadians who have lost loved ones to an impaired driver. They believe that Canada's driving laws are much too lenient. They want the crime called what it is, vehicular homicide.

The petitioners are calling on the government to introduce legislation that would require mandatory sentencing for those convicted of impaired driving causing death.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition highlights that over 200 million girls are missing in the world right now. This gender imbalance is called gendercide.

Ninety-two percent of Canadians believe that sex selection is wrong. The petitioners are calling on Parliament to condemn this discrimination against girls.

Government Orders

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of many people from all around Scarborough. They are calling for the creation of a Canada public transit strategy. Canada is the only OECD country that does not have a national public transit strategy. It is estimated that over the next five years there will be an \$18-billion gap in transit infrastructure needs.

The petitioners are calling upon the government to enact a Canada public transit strategy that seeks to provide a permanent investment plan to support public transit; establish federal funding mechanisms for public transit; work together with all levels of government to provide sustainable, predictable, long-term and adequate funding; and establish accountability measures to ensure that all governments work together to increase access to public transit.

I know in my riding of Scarborough—Rouge River, this is very much needed.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present to the House a petition signed by many of my constituents, respecting the right of small-scale family farmers to preserve, exchange and use seeds.

This is a petition that has been actively promoted by an organization called Development and Peace. It calls on the Government of Canada to adopt international aid policies that support small family farmers, especially women, and recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present a petition to the House today with respect to violence against women.

The signatories to this petition want to draw to the attention of the Government of Canada that women are 11 times more likely than men to be victims of sexual offences, that indigenous women in Canada are seven times more likely to be murdered than non-indigenous women, that nearly 1,200 indigenous women have gone missing or have been murdered in Canada, and that Canada has clear domestic and international obligations to address violence against women, including the United Nations call for all countries to have a national action plan to end violence against women.

The signatories are calling upon the Government of Canada to create a coordinated, comprehensive and national action plan to address violence against women, and launch an independent national inquiry into the deaths and disappearance of first nations, Métis and Inuit women.

[Translation]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to table two petitions today.

The first calls for lowering credit card fees, which are too high, capping ATM user fees at 50 cents, and prohibiting additional fees that penalize people who receive their bills online.

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is about respect for the rights of small family farmers to save, exchange and use seeds.

[English]

PROSTITUTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions today. The first is regarding prostitution. The petitioners note that the most recent legislation on prostitution was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court and they call on the House therefore to declare such sex with a woman, man or child to be a criminal offence and that it also be a criminal offence for pimps, madams and others who profit from the proceeds of prostitution.

• (1010)

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from petitioners across the country who request that no genetically modified fish or fish eggs be sold in Canada.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is regarding gender selection abortion. The petitioners note that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation aired a piece that showed that there were ultrasounds being done and if the fetus was found to be female, the female would be aborted. The petitioners call on the Parliament of Canada to condemn discrimination against girls occurring through gender selection pregnancy termination.

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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.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

DRUG-FREE PRISONS ACT

The House resumed from February 17 consideration of the motion that Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, be read the third time and passed.

Government Orders

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure, today, to rise to speak in support of Bill C-12, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, as it has been labelled, the drug-free prisons act, though I am often confused how the bill would make our prisons drug free. However, at the same time, we are supporting it.

At this time, I would like to take a minute to acknowledge the amazing work being done by the critic in this area; that is, the member of Parliament for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, who has done an absolutely thorough and very detailed analysis of this piece of legislation, and the work done at the committee to try to strengthen the legislation so that it would actually do what it purports it would. As we know, our colleagues across the way are not really up to listening to any experts or advice as to how to improve bills. In any event, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, on this whole file of public safety, has put in, I would say, a gargantuan amount of work in order to deal with real issues for Canadians and to ensure Canadians' safety in a real way.

It is interesting that we are debating the bill on the day the budget will be presented. We know that the budget has been delayed. I do not know if it has been delayed because the minister just did not know what to put in the budget or whether they were busy developing their communications or free advertising plan on the tax dollars, but the budget has been delayed. In any event, we look forward to seeing it today. I really hope that when we look at the budget today we will see a significant investment in what the current government purports its agenda to be.

My colleagues across the way often like to see themselves as the champions of public safety but often what we have is a lot of rhetoric with very little funding that goes along with the programs they announced, or lack thereof, or has often been accompanied by cuts as well.

This particular piece of legislation, despite its title, “drug-free prisons act”, I would say is a baby step that we do support. Let me tell members that it would not have the kind of impact that my colleagues across the way seem to think it would because this particular bill would not tackle the real issues that our prisons are facing.

Bill C-12 would add a provision to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that would make it clear that the Parole Board may use positive results from urine tests, or refusals to take urine tests for drugs, in making its decisions on parole eligibility.

Let me assure members that my understanding is this is already being done. Therefore, what we would do is take a practice that is already in play into legislation, and that is a good thing. What it would do is give clear authority to an existing practice, a practice that we do support, but this practice by itself and on its own would not address the serious issues we do have to tackle, which are drug addictions, mental illness and the very fundamentals that lead to more and more people ending up in prisons rather than in treatment.

The title of Bill C-12, as I have mentioned a few times, is misleading. We know the current government has a penchant for coming up with some pretty outrageous, all-encompassing titles for bills, but when we actually dig into the bill we find there is very little

substance. That is what we are finding with this bill. The title sounds great but when we get into the bill, all we have is the government codifying a current practice of the Parole Board.

● (1015)

The Parole Board right now retains its discretion as to what use it makes of this information, which is actually how it would remain.

It always makes me proud to sit on this side of the House with my colleagues, because we have been steadfast in our support for measures that will make our prisons safe, while the Conservative government has ignored recommendations from corrections staff and the Correctional Investigator that would decrease violence, gang activity, and drug use in our prisons.

We are not the only ones. We know that the current government is allergic to data and experts. However, most of us know that when we are dealing with the complexities of drug addiction, we have to pay attention to what we know and to the knowledge acquired by the experts in this area. The stakeholders agree with the NDP that this bill would have a minimal impact on drugs in prisons.

This bill is about granting parole and what the Parole Board would take into consideration. It has very little to do with what is actually going to be happening inside the prisons. Once again, the Conservative government is using legislation to create an opportunity to pander to its base and to pretend that it is doing something with no real solutions to the issue of drugs and gangs in our prisons. I would go so far as to say that the government is actually making our prisons less safe by cutting funding to correctional programs, such as for substance abuse, and by increasing the use of double-bunking, which leads to more violence. Our priority as parliamentarians should be ensuring community safety by preparing offenders to reintegrate into society once released, addiction-free and less likely to reoffend.

I looked very carefully at this legislation, because as a mother and now a grandmother and as a life-long teacher and counsellor in a high school and for the school district, I know what a difficult task we have ahead of us as a society as we try to tackle drug addictions. There are no simple solutions.

In my city of Surrey, in beautiful British Columbia, in the last 38 days we have had 23 shootings. On Sunday, what we all feared happened: a fatality, with a 22-year-old losing his life. People in my community of Surrey, like in other communities across Canada, care very deeply about addressing the issues of violence, gangs and drugs. No parents out there want to see their young daughter or sons engaged in the use of drugs or involved in any kind of criminal activity. When these kinds of tragedies happen in our communities, it shakes us to the core and makes us want to hug those around us. Right now, my heart goes out to the family—the parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, brothers, sisters—but also to the whole community as it deals with this latest round of gun violence.

Government Orders

It is because we want real solutions that we want to tackle the real issues. We want to start looking at the underlying issues.

● (1020)

We need a real strategy and action on mental health, not just talk, that happens in a multi-faceted way. Many people will say that it has nothing to do with this topic. We know that the majority of people in our prisons are there because they were convicted of crimes related to drugs and many of them because they suffer from mental health issues. Unless we start tackling mental health issues in a serious way, I do not think this baby step is going to help us achieve a safer society or make our prisons any safer.

It is like the current government wants to see how many more people it can put into prisons, even if it has to double-bunk them, and the mandatory sentencing has led to more people being sent to prison. I absolutely believe that we need policies that mete out punishments that fit the crimes, but we also need to make sure that there is rehabilitation.

Before we even talk about crimes and people ending up in prison, we need to look at our communities, school systems, and the kind of programming needed. When I look at the public school system, I would say that it has been under attack for many years. When I look specifically at British Columbia, a lot of the preventive work that used to be done on drug addictions in high schools is very difficult to do today, because a number of counsellors have been removed and a lot of the money that used to be available for prevention is no longer there. I look at Surrey and the kind of support system for youth in our community. I look at how many students per counsellor there are today compared to when I came to B.C., when there were 250 students to a counsellor in my district Nanaimo. Now I am hearing that the number can be as high as 800 to 1,000 per counsellor.

If we look at all the pressures on our children through social media and the Internet, and we know, because we have dealt with many pieces of legislation in the House, at the very same time that is happening, they are cutting a lot of the support systems that used to be available. In my school district in B.C., we used to have some of the most progressive, stellar programs to engage youth in a positive way. One was called action Nanaimo. There was also a steps to maturity program, which actually dealt with kids' self-esteem, communication skills, and the issue of bullying and how to deal with that. None of those programs exist today.

This is where we have to have all levels of government and communities working together to provide young people with the kind of supports they need so that they do not end up getting into trouble, whether it is due to mental health or drugs, and do not end up joining gangs and engaging in trafficking drugs. We need to make sure that youth have the scaffolding they need to steer through the many challenges they face in our society today.

I would say that the same is true of those people who are in our prisons today. It is very easy to sentence people to prison, but if once they are in prison we do not provide them with rehabilitation, we are not doing a service to society.

● (1025)

Let me throw out a figure that will be absolutely shocking to most people. The cost to send a person to prison and keep him or her in

confinement has risen to about \$80,000 to \$90,000 a year. We are prepared to spend that as a society. On the other hand, we are not prepared to put even 10% or 20% of that money into education and prevention programs so that our young people do not end up in prison.

If mandatory sentences and putting more people into prisons would get rid of drugs and crime, then the U.S. would have no crime and no drug problem. What we are good at, under the government across the way, is following examples that we know are not good. Instead of looking at evidence, we would rather just blindly copy the U.S. and keep putting people in prison, while the U.S. is sending experts up here to learn about rehabilitation from us.

Once people are in prison, we do not provide them with the resources they need to not reoffend. I find it quite outrageous to sit in this House and listen to the rhetoric of the government across the way when it has failed. It has not only failed to increase funding, it has cut funding to programs that would provide support for those in prison, and in hospitals too. I have a 90-year-old mother who I was recently visiting in hospital. Despite the amazing work being done by the staff at the hospital, I would say that they are facing major challenges as well.

To truly address the issue of drug use in prisons, we need to do a proper intake assessment of an inmate's addiction and then provide the proper correctional programming for that offender. Without treatment, education, and proper integration upon release, a prisoner will likely return to a criminal lifestyle and possibly create more victims. What we have then is what has come to be known as the revolving door.

With mandatory minimums, our prison population is increasing while at the same time both federal and provincial governments are closing institutions. It is quite disconcerting how mental health services are being impacted.

Correctional Service Canada's directive 55, which establishes procedures to normalize double-bunking, is kind of weird to me. When I was young and I went to youth hostels, double-bunking was kind of fun, but I cannot imagine double-bunking in prison.

Let me once again say that we support this. It is a baby step. However, without investments in prevention, education, treatment, and rehabilitation, all we have are words. Our communities deserve far more. I hope that in the budget presented today we will see a real infusion of funds to address prevention, education, mental health issues, rehabilitation, and real support for an effective reintegration policy that will make a real difference and lead to safer communities.

● (1030)

I would say there is no better investment than in the education of our children. I urge governments at the provincial level to please make it a top priority, because our children are our future and they are worth every penny we invest.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will focus my question on the member's priority throughout her speech, which is education.

Government Orders

I agree in many ways how important education is. The leader of the Liberal Party, a teacher by profession, has talked a great deal about the importance of education. For example, he talked about the importance of looking at how we fund first nations education, and that we need to provide a lot more resources.

Earlier today I met with representatives, including Paul Olson, the president of the Manitoba Teachers' Society. We talked about the importance of education. If we do not recognize how important education is to the children of our country, then we will sell short their potential. Many will end up on the wrong side of the law if we are not more proactive in encouraging our provinces, which have the administrative responsibility for education. We also need to recognize the important role that the national government can play. We need to ensure there is a sense of equity across the country in dealing with education as well as issues such as mental health. We need to ensure there is programming that allows for the nutritional well-being of young children even before they enter the education system.

If we had a proactive national government dealing with those types of issues, we could actually prevent more people from going into prisons.

Perhaps the member could comment on those points.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, there are areas in which the federal government plays a key role in education, such as in the education for our first nations people and aboriginal communities. A very large percentage of the people in prison are from our aboriginal communities.

There is a lot of preventative initiatives that could be happening, such as investing in early childhood education, quality education, nutrition, prevention and education programs, and truly in strong and inclusive community building. It is always easy to say that this is not our mandate, as I have sometimes heard my colleagues across the way say. However, once people are in prison, it is our mandate.

Here is an amazing figure from seven institutions surveyed in February 2012: only 12.5% of the total offenders were enrolled in a core correctional program, and there is a waiting list to access these programs exceeding 35%.

They say we should start at home and fix what we can fix, but we have a government that has made cut after cut to services in rehabilitation and education. What we are seeing now is that only 12.5% access services, and there is a wait list for people in prison who want to get away from drugs and take the rehabilitation and education programs, but the Conservative government has made so many cuts that they are being denied rehabilitation. That is disgraceful.

• (1035)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the member has pointed out, the NDP is supporting Bill C-12.

However, there is a misnomer in the title. The short title is “drug-free prisons act”, but in the annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator for 2011-12, it was pointed out that a zero tolerance stance to drugs in prison is an aspiration rather than an effective policy. It simply does not accord with the facts on crime and addiction in Canada or elsewhere in the world. As the report

states. “Harm reduction measures within a public health and treatment orientation offer a far more promising, cost-effective and sustainable approach to reducing subsequent crime and victimization.”

The member raised the issues around the need for rehabilitation in her speech. I wonder if she could comment on that statement.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I always like to relate some of the big issues to what happens in our families and how we raise our kids. If parents telling their kids that they must do not do drugs would alone get rid of the drug problem in the world, we would not have that issue in Canada today. I know how hard parents work, and zero tolerance is a great aspiration to have, but until we achieve that, we have to have real expert advice from those who deal with these issues, based on the research and what works. We have to have a multifaceted approach.

Just telling people not to do drugs, hitting them on the head with a baseball bat and sending them to prison is not going to get rid of the drug problem. What is going to get rid of the drug problem is investment in education, rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoulu, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Newton—North Delta for her very sensitive speech that got right to the heart of the problem: how to prevent and address the challenges of incarceration. The important thing is not to create more problems, which is what the government is doing, unfortunately.

During the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security's brief study, the Correctional Investigator was very critical. He condemned the lack of resources to prevent drug use in our prisons. We can try to limit supply, but all of the credible witnesses said that focusing solely on supply is unrealistic. We also need to tackle demand.

That means we have to support inmates coping with addiction. We have to identify them at intake and provide good programs so they can progress and make choices with comprehensive support.

Would my colleague like to comment further on the Correctional Investigator's recommendation?

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, whenever I talk about drugs in our communities or our prisons, I am always amazed how people want simplistic solutions. It is as if all of us are looking for a magic pill that would suddenly get rid of the impact of drugs on our families, our communities and our society as a whole.

Government Orders

The Correctional Investigator has stated and there have been numerous reports that the corrections system risks unintended consequences when simplistic solutions are applied to the complex issue of drugs in prisons. They talk about the need for a proper assessment of prisoners on intake. For instance, when someone has gotten into problems and has been sentenced to prison, let us do an assessment of what got them there. Do they have mental health issues? Are drugs involved? When did the drugs kick in? We have to take into account all of those things.

We have to start looking at some of the causes at that time. Our prison system is not a one-way street. It is supposed to be one where we believe in rehabilitation. That is the kind of penal system we have. There has to be a proper assessment. Then we have to identify the specific problems that can be targeted. Then we need to have rehabilitation programs so that people can be better reintegrated into society. Once they are released from prison we need to have a reintegration process that is scaffolded with a multitude of services so that the likelihood to reoffend is reduced.

Once again, there is no simple pill. This is a complex issue. It is going to take investment and resources. Every dollar we invest will bring us back thousands of dollars in savings.

● (1040)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Beauport—Limouilou.

As the House has heard from other members of the official opposition, we will support Bill C-12. We will support it because the measures in this bill are not bad. Nonetheless, will this bill really change anything? Some doubt remains in that regard. We will support it, in any case, but I really do not believe this bill will have the desired effect.

The bill's short title refers to making prisons drug-free. This title is a little misleading, however, because it is rather unrealistic to think that a bill that contains just five clauses, the first of which is the short title, and fits on a single double-sided sheet of paper could successfully eliminate drugs from prisons with four clauses to amend Canada's laws.

Moreover, this bill is rather redundant, and it legally confirms the common practice and what already exists in Canada's laws. When members of the Parole Board of Canada are deciding whether an inmate can be released on parole, they already have the discretion to take into account the results of urine testing or the fact that an inmate refuses to provide a urine sample.

Parole board members already have the power, albeit discretionary, to consider those factors in their decisions. Even if those members do eventually take drug testing into account, that is not how we are going to eliminate drugs from prisons.

It is important to understand that in order to be effective, the government needs to invest money and act on the reports that the Correctional Investigator and the federal ombudsman have published over the years. However, there is nothing in the bill to suggest that the government is listening to the experts. I highly doubt that this

afternoon's budget will contain any additional funds to tackle addiction problems in prisons.

In summary, the bill just legally confirms rules that are already in use. The member for Victoria clearly pointed that out in his speech last December when he referred to the National Parole Board document entitled "Decision-Making Policy Manual for Board Members".

Section 8 of that manual, "Assessing Criminal, Social and Conditional Release History", reads:

8. Information considered when assessing criminal, social and conditional release history includes:...

e. any documented occurrence of drug use, positive urinalysis results or failures or refusals to provide a sample while on conditional release;

Clearly, these factors are already being considered in the decision-making process. The crisis in our prisons involves substance abuse, rampant gang activity and the recruitment of gang members within the prison population. Some of these problems could be eradicated if we were to apply the measures that were proposed by some of the witnesses when this bill was examined in committee.

In short, resources for rehabilitation are wanting, and the budgets of correctional organizations and the many cuts the Conservatives have made over the years are not at all consistent with the logic they are trying to establish in this bill.

● (1045)

If we want to eliminate drugs in prisons, we need to combat drug addiction there with the help of resources and stakeholders, which we do not have right now.

Even though drug addicts are well aware that they risk delaying their parole by taking drugs in prison, they will continue to do so because addictions are difficult to overcome. We therefore need to take action on the ground and establish real substance abuse treatment programs.

In the civilian world, people can get help and services from professionals. However, in prison, inmates who admit that they have a drug addiction are shooting themselves in the foot. It is better for them to hide their addiction in order to avoid the consequences.

This is a complex issue. We need specialized addictions counsellors who understand the prison system to help on the ground. However, these counsellors need the government to invest in prisons.

The Correctional Service of Canada has admitted that \$122 million of Conservative spending on interdiction tools and technology to stop drugs from entering prisons since 2008 has not produced any results. How come nothing has been done in light of that shocking statistic? Why have there been no policy reviews or the like? We know that a very high percentage of Canada's offender population abuses drugs.

The report entitled "Substance abuse—The perspective of a National Parole Board member", by Michael Crowley, an NPB member from Ontario, begins as follows:

Government Orders

It is clear that alcohol and other drug problems constitute a major problem for both incarcerated offenders and those who are on some form of conditional release. It is estimated that about 70% of offenders have substance abuse problems that are in need of treatment, and that more than 50% of their crimes are linked with substance use and abuse.

We know that the vast majority of offenders, unfortunately, abuse drugs and that criminals often have a history of substance abuse. Inmates who are added to the prison system often already have substance abuse problems.

These figures are rather shocking and indicative of the government's dire lack of investment in rehabilitation programs for inmates that would address this problem. Furthermore, the prison population in Canada has skyrocketed because of the infamous minimum mandatory sentences, even though the crime rate has been steadily declining.

In closing, I would like to say that mental health issues are also part of the problem. This is a growing problem that, together with inmates' addictions, exacerbates the situation. Inmates with mental health problems sometimes tend to self-medicate with drugs available on the prison market. That is a rather explosive combination.

If we really want to eliminate drugs in prison, we have to be realistic. We have to be prepared to make the required investments, put resources in place and understand that the drug problem in prisons will not be fixed by a bill with four clauses.

● (1050)

Yes, we support these clauses, because they confirm an existing informal practice. We realize and openly admit that Bill C-12 does little to make prisons drug-free, and it is going to take a lot more than that to solve this problem.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech on Bill C-12. As is the case with many bills, this bill's title is surprising because it is an impressive title about fixing a serious problem. I have a hard time believing that the clauses in this bill will truly do what the title implies they will, which is to make our prisons drug-free.

Could the member tell us what she thinks about the titles this government loves to give its bills? The titles are misleading, because at the end of the day the bills do not achieve what the titles imply they will. Could she give us her opinion on how the Conservative government gives its bills nice titles that do not pan out?

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the Conservatives have a habit of always trying to fool the public. They talk about a bill with a title that implies it will fix everything, when in fact that is not the case, since the bill is missing a lot of clauses or it will create other problems. The government often tries to make Canadians believe that it has managed a problem by introducing a bill—in this case on drug-free prisons—but in fact, the bill is not comprehensive enough to fix the problem. People who may not be able to understand the bill, read through the legal terminology and understand its impact will think that the Conservatives took action, when in reality that is not the case. This government has a bad habit of trying to fool Canadians. It is being intellectually dishonest with the people it is supposed to represent.

● (1055)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have a government that is willing to spend \$80,000 to \$90,000 a year incarcerating prisoners. We see that it spent over \$100 million already in trying to stop drugs getting into prisons and has failed. The problem is a lack of vision in terms of how to deal with the serious issue of drugs that are affecting our communities.

In the city of Timmins we have set up a fentanyl task force to deal with the heavy impacts of the abuse of fentanyl, and one of the key things that has come forward is the need to be able to track the fentanyl patches. These are opiate patches. My colleague is a nurse, so she would know very well about fentanyl, but without a bar code or a serial number put on by Health Canada, the police are unable to track the source of the patches.

If we have patches of 100 mcg coming into the city of Timmins, these are very lucrative for gangs, but we need to be able to take the preventive approach to stop this kind of heavy duty opiate being brought into our communities and then affecting people who may not have otherwise gotten into drugs. I know some wonderful young people who had their lives ahead of them who have been affected by fentanyl, and people who have died from it.

What does my colleague think about the need for these coherent, grass roots, preventive approaches, first, to prevent these kinds of drugs coming into our communities and keep people from getting involved in the drug trade, and also to be able to stop it by going after the gangs who are trading in fentanyl patches?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, illicit drug use certainly exists, but many people abuse prescription drugs. Unfortunately, sometimes people go through grandma's medicine cabinet looking for interesting things. Those are tragic situations. In many cases, community approaches are more successful than criminalization and repression.

Keeping people from engaging in these bad habits by making positive activities available often has an impact on drug use among youth. When they have access to leisure spaces and opportunities to participate in these activities, that has a positive impact in terms of drug use. Drug use drops when there is better support for the community and people have opportunities to do things other than use drugs.

Drug addiction is a complex issue. We have to take a community-based approach and conduct broad consultations with all stakeholders if we want to eliminate this problem or reduce its impact.

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Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for sharing her precious speaking time with me so that I can express my views on Bill C-12 on behalf of the people of Beauport—Limoilou.

The title of the bill is “An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act”. This bill amends a law. The title sends a fairly disturbing message, one that I would call misleading. I would also like to quote the short title, which the Conservatives liked to trot out all the time. It is the “drug-free prisons act”.

Like many people, I have tried to get dandelions out of my lawn. Everyone knows that is one tough slog. I am not saying it is a lost cause, but those dandelions often come back from the other side of the fence when you least expect it.

First of all, I want to emphasize how unrealistic this bill is, which was also pointed out by the very few witnesses we managed to squeeze into the meetings of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Those witnesses, who were not from the department, pointed out that the bill unfortunately did not introduce anything new, despite its value and the fact that it should be supported. Like my NDP colleagues, I support the bill in principle. This bill will confirm a practice that is already established, but it does not solve the underlying problem.

I want to touch upon the Conservatives' message. It is quite ironic that they have not said a thing since this debate began. I should add that the debate only began about an hour ago, and yet there they sit, firmly rooted in their chairs, refusing to listen to the strong objections and, more importantly, the concerns we are raising in relation to the problem of drug use in our prisons. That problem will not be resolved, not really, by passing this bill.

This title, the drug-free prisons act, and these five clauses send a clear message to inmates with drug problems. If they ever want to be released, they will have to satisfy certain conditions. As far as their substance abuse problem is concerned, they know that they cannot count on getting any help and that they will have to face their problem alone.

That has been precisely the Conservatives' approach for years. Repression above all else is what they promise their base. People who are plagued by a problem they often cannot control are told that they cannot count on the Conservatives to spend any money on supporting them and helping them break free from their addiction to drugs.

It is really too bad. In addition to ignoring the offender population that is facing very serious problems that might prevent early parole and completely undermining reintegration, once again the Conservatives are refusing to listen to experts directly affected by this, namely staff and the Correctional Investigator. These stakeholders are making recommendations to deal with the substance abuse problems in our prisons and other very serious problems that lead to substance abuse, such as mental health problems, a scourge that affects a large segment of the population.

I have some very disturbing statistics, which clearly illustrate the extent of the current problem in Canada's prisons and penitentiaries.

• (1100)

In 2011, 69% of female inmates and 45% of male inmates were treated for mental health issues. That already speaks to the extent of the problem. However, a certain number of mental health cases may not even be treated. This gives us an idea of how this problem cannot be addressed by the pure and simple repression that the Conservatives defend so vigorously. I am going to tell it like it is: it is easy for the Conservatives to score political points on the backs of our inmates while ignoring mental health problems of this magnitude.

I learned about the position of senior RCMP officials concerning the fight against terrorism. The Standing Committee on Finance, which I am pleased to be a member of, is currently carrying out a valuable study of the financing of terrorism. However, what is troubling is that the RCMP is robbing Peter to pay Paul. We had already heard this at the Standing Committee on Finance, but it was confirmed at a meeting of a Senate committee on public safety, if I am not mistaken. The RCMP is transferring investigators from the fight against organized crime to the fight against terrorism. In the funding approved by the House, \$1.5 billion allocated to the RCMP was not spent, but instead returned to the public treasury. Everyone knew it, starting with the Conservatives. However, once again they chose to ignore this. In the end, the RCMP and our correctional services do not have the means to address the enormous challenge of fighting terrorism and organized crime. Similarly, correctional officers are increasingly ill-prepared to address mental health issues, the violence in our prisons and drug use. These budgets are unfortunately being cut.

Ultimately, the claim made by the department and especially by the government that the drug problem in prisons is being adequately addressed rings hollow. I hope that my colleagues will speak up in the House and participate in an important debate. Despite the fancy titles the Conservatives give their bills and the claims they make when they are boasting to their voter base, this once again shows that—I am going to say it again—the victims of crime are collateral victims of the Conservatives' decision to abandon the fight against drugs at every level. We need to focus on prevention.

When people are struggling with addiction and mental health problems and when nothing is done to help them deal with those issues or to prevent them in the first place, they get more and more out of control and their condition deteriorates. It then becomes very difficult for them to deal with these problems by themselves. A correctional officer told me very clearly that, for most of these people, there is life after prison. If their mental health deteriorates and their drug addiction leads them down a dead-end street, their reintegration into society and their ability to find a place in it obviously becomes an enormous obstacle that could lead them to reoffend.

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Once again, the Conservatives are not facing the problem and are abandoning the victims of crime in this regard. I would like to end on that note, and I look forward to questions from my colleagues in the House.

I would like to repeat that I support this bill, but I hope that the means will follow. However, I have been saying that in the House and in committee for the past four years, and I no longer expect results from this dying government.

• (1105)

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou for his speech on a rather important bill that conveys a specific vision of public safety.

My colleague gave us a good analysis of the Conservative way of doing things. I would like to hear him talk about his vision and the NDP's vision of public safety issues. Could he tell us about prevention and about investments in social programs?

What can we do to address this issue? We need to protect public safety in Canada, but how does the NDP propose that we better protect the public?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank my colleague from Brossard—La Prairie for his question.

I do not want to repeat all of the very sensible points made by our highly esteemed colleague from Newton—North Delta, who spoke in favour of education and of the hopes that could be raised when we invest in the future of our young people and the public in general by providing them with opportunities.

I will pick up where she left off and talk about the upcoming budget. As I already mentioned, I am a member of the Standing Committee on Finance. Unfortunately, as with the nine previous budgets, this 10th budget will once again represent negativity and lost opportunities for a large segment of our population. It will cause problems that could escalate and cause people to lose all hope in improving their future or the future of their loved ones.

That is truly disappointing, since the Conservatives have always sought to punish people who stay away from drugs but who do not yet have a good job for their bad behaviour and bad choices. Instead of providing them with opportunities, to be as inclusive as possible and enable people to make real choices, the Conservatives have always limited these choices, and they will continue to do so in this budget.

• (1110)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and for telling it like it is. He had no qualms about saying that the Conservatives are politicizing issues at the expense of certain segments of the population, inmates in this case.

When offenders with addiction problems enter prison, no emphasis is put on treating their addiction and no program is offered to help them overcome their addiction while they are there. They are given no resources. They are told they have to figure out how to overcome their addiction themselves if they want to get early

parole. Those who do not manage to do so will eventually leave prison with the same addiction problems.

What does my colleague think will happen if we stay on this same path, if we do not change this policy and if inmates keep getting released with the same addiction problems?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for his question.

At the beginning of my mandate, when I was taking my first steps as an MP, I talked to a correctional officer about the reality in our penitentiaries. He said that it was characteristic of this Conservative government to ignore the fact that there is life after prison.

Many people leave our prisons abandoned because they were not guided. They were not given the chance to rehabilitate. The Correctional Investigator and correctional officers are deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation, which unfortunately will only get worse in the coming years.

Again, the Conservatives should be ashamed of keeping silent in this debate. Not one of their MPs has risen to speak. I am really looking forward to the upcoming election. When the Conservatives are called on to defend their sorry record, words will fail them again because they will not have spent enough time practising their speeches.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have to seize this opportunity. Actually, I have lots to say about the government's silence.

That said, let me first deal with the positive. I want to thank the NDP members on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, because, especially over these past few months, they have had an enormous amount of work to tackle. I thank the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, the member for Alfred-Pellan and the member for Compton—Stanstead. I congratulate them on their hard work. I understand the frustration that can set in when you have to deal with bills like Bill C-12.

It can be frustrating to know that, clearly, we could do so much better. It can also be frustrating—as my colleagues have said before me—to see grandiose titles like drug-free prisons act, as we can see written in the bill itself under “Short Title”:

• (1115)

[*English*]

This act may be cited as the drug-free prisons act.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

This raises so much hope. People read that and think that that would be wonderful. Then, reality sinks in. After seeing such a grandiose title, I was expecting a rather lengthy, comprehensive bill, since it deals with such a complex issue. Ultimately, with one clause on the bill's short title and just four substantive clauses, the Conservatives are claiming they can eliminate drugs from prisons. This reminds me of the time that they studied the issue of prostitution following the Supreme Court ruling. That bill also had a grandiose title, indicating that, with that bill, the government was going to put an end to prostitution and abolish it in Canada. Well done. There will never be any prostitution ever again. Only, that is not what I am hearing in the street. It remains a thriving industry. It may be done differently, but it still exists.

As I was soaking up my colleagues' speeches—thank goodness they are here to speak in the House—I was reminded of what I dealt with over the past two weeks in my riding. Being in my riding is a much more positive experience than being in the House. Those watching us must be as disheartened as we ourselves can be. Sometimes we get the feeling we are howling in the wilderness, and this is one of those times because we really get the sense that just one side of the House is talking about this, and people are noticing that.

We all know, because lots of people were talking about it, that last week was National Volunteer Week. I made a lot of contacts and met with lots of people in Gatineau who are doing amazing work on all kinds of issues, such as helping people with drug addictions and helping former inmates reintegrate into society.

I sat down with these people and talked to them about the Conservative agenda. I explained to them that I would be giving a speech this week on the fact that the government says it will eradicate drugs from prisons. Mr. Speaker, you cannot imagine how much people laughed at that. They did not take me seriously. They asked me just how the government planned to do that.

I replied by reading clause 2:

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

They said, “All right, and then what?” I told them about clause 3:

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

(3.1) If the Board is informed of the matters under section 123.1 and the offender has still not yet been released, the Board shall cancel the parole if, in its opinion, based on the information received under that section, the criteria set out in paragraphs 102(a) and (b) are no longer met.

They said, “All right, and then what?” I told them about clause 4:

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

They said, “And then what?” I told them about clause 5:

The Governor in Council may make regulations providing for anything that by this Part is to be provided for by regulation,...

Members will understand that they laughed because they wondered how this would make prisons drug-free. They asked me to explain how that would happen.

They asked me to explain how that would happen. I told them that there was no explanation. This bill does absolutely nothing, aside from cancelling someone's parole. No one can be against virtue, which is why there is unanimity on Bill C-12. However, this government is once again missing an opportunity to do something good.

For four years now, the government has been giving us bills with fancy titles that sound great but actually accomplish very little. I think that people are starting to realize this. The best example may be Bill C-51. All of the polls showed how the New Democratic Party was seen to be on the wrong side of the fence: we supported terrorists, we were not to be taken seriously when it comes to security, and the government was right.

Those who are a bit more timid, such as the third party, the Bloc Québécois and others, jumped on the Conservative bandwagon. Everyone was unanimous because they thought it was the right thing to do. When the members opposite and the third party remain silent on a bill like this, I tell myself that the NDP is doing the right thing. At report stage and third reading, we should have something to say on behalf of our constituents. I am not saying that that is necessary for all bills, but when it comes to a bill about eradicating drugs in prisons, I cannot believe that the members of the House, who represent Canadians, have nothing to say about their respective ridings.

All of us, or almost all of us, have detention centres, prisons or penitentiaries in our ridings. We can talk to our constituents, our street outreach workers, the people who take care of those with drug addictions and those who take care of inmates. If we really want to make our communities safe, we need to know what we are talking about. We have to be able to read a bill to our constituents without having them laugh at us and ask us if we are serious and if we really believe that a bill will solve the problem. Where is the money for rehabilitation? Where is the money for programs? The Conservatives cut that funding over the past few years. We are constantly being told that we cannot be serious.

We are taking a stand. We are doing the work in committee. We are unequivocally telling the government that this does not make sense and that it is ridiculous to insult people by trying to sell them this. I am sure that this afternoon we will see even more rhetoric about what they are doing. I cannot wait to see what kind of budget the government will allocate to public safety and justice. Why? Because I still think—and I will be surprised if the government proves me wrong—that this government spends more on ads saying how wonderful and extraordinary it is than on programs that could help drug addicts in prison. It is one thing to be able to prove that someone consumed drugs, with a blood and urine test, and to cancel that person's parole, but do we simply want to punish that person or do we want to ensure that he will not continue to have drug problems after he is released? That is what we should be looking at.

Government Orders

This government has little interest in such things. That is ironic, because at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, one of the first bills that came to us from the Conservative benches, Bill C-583, covered the problems related to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It was a meaningful bill that showed it was possible to do something other than punish. It looked at a disorder, one from which many people in prisons suffer, and tried to find solutions tailored to their needs and their problems. There was unanimity, which was nice, but what did the government do? It withdrew the bill. It forced the MP who introduced it to withdraw it for further study. We took a close look at it in the time we were given. Everyone knows that the Conservatives do not give us much time for thorough study. The study will probably produce some conclusions. I am eager to see the final recommendations that will be submitted to the House.

● (1120)

Considering our past experiences with our colleagues across the aisle, I would be willing to bet that the recommendations will simply encourage a more thorough study and therefore do absolutely nothing. This is really just like what the Liberals used to do before them. It is mind-boggling how similar they are; there is no difference. It is astounding.

It is extremely frustrating because, actually, what is happening here today is a perfect example of what is leading the people of Gatineau to ask, when I meet them, what the point of Parliament is. People here do not even have five minutes to stand up in the House and at least explain how the four little clauses I read earlier are going to achieve what the title says, that is, ensuring that prisons are drug-free. Instead of telling us how wonderful and perfect they are, the Conservatives could simply tell us how they believe these clauses will be so successful, when everything else has failed. It is very frustrating.

Fortunately, things are balanced in Canada. Our democracy has an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a judicial branch. At present, unfortunately, Canadian democracy has to rely too heavily on the judicial branch to rebalance the principles of law, which those on the Conservative benches should be familiar with. The Conservative MPs all have the advantages of the Department of Justice: they can consult people ad nauseam and get legal opinions from the top legal minds in Canada. They do not even take advantage of that. They keep passing bill after bill that gets hammered in the courts all the way to the Supreme Court.

Some denigrate the Supreme Court by claiming that it is engaging in legislative activism. That is not the case at all. The Supreme Court tells us legislators that we cannot do certain things, and reminds us that there are laws in this country and that we have a Constitution and a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It tells us that we can go ahead and pass the legislation that we want, that it is our highest prerogative, but that there is still a framework to be respected. If people are not satisfied with this framework, then it is up to us as legislators to change that. However, we have to work within the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution. This is not about judicial activism.

I will digress for a moment to talk about Edgar Schmidt, a former public servant who is involved in a case against the Attorney General of Canada that is currently before the Federal Court. He said that he

received orders not to follow the charter at all or to just aim for 5%. A 5% chance of winning was enough to move forward. That is ridiculous. This government does not take its role as the executive and as a legislator seriously. That leads to the results we get when we end up before the Supreme Court of Canada.

Bill C-12 will not end up before the Supreme Court of Canada. That is clear. We would not support it if that were the case. Nevertheless, in my opinion, this bill will not accomplish what it is supposed to. Unfortunately, the bill will only delay the action that could be taken to do much better. If only the government would listen to the heartfelt pleas of the people who told us in committee what the government should do instead of cutting rehabilitation and support programs for people with serious drug addictions, then we might achieve better results.

As the Commissioner of Penitentiaries told us, given all the bills with longer and longer mandatory minimum sentences, prisons have no incentive to place these people in rehabilitation programs until just a few years before they are released on parole. Take for example someone who is serving a sentence of seven or 10 years. That individual will not necessarily be placed in a rehabilitation program immediately. The prison might wait until that person has been incarcerated for five years or until he has only one or two years left before he is eligible for parole. What kind of hardened individual have we created in the meantime?

● (1125)

If we claim to want safer communities, what is our responsibility as legislators? When it is time for these people to leave prison, I would like them to be able to reintegrate into society. What will happen if we do nothing to help them? This is not about being a bleeding heart. I would say that there is a certain measure of self-interest. I want to make sure that these people will not be a threat to my family, my friends, my community or me. We must implement the kinds of measures that will achieve these results. This government does not see it like that and, after four years, we are familiar with their approach. We were not born yesterday. This government likes to use grand titles.

This afternoon, we will probably hear about tons of budget measures that earned us the Conservatives' ridicule just for mentioning them. The Conservatives are going to appropriate them to further their interests and to strut around in the next few months, in a manner that I will not even describe, simply to boast about their magnificent agenda, as though this was the best government Canada ever had. They will want to make everyone forget all those years in the past when they were unable to bring forward a balanced budget.

All the Conservatives have done, in fact, like the good economists they are, is to add to the national debt, after everyone had tightened their belts under the Liberal government of the 1990s. That will not stop them from having a splendidly grand title for their budget, as they did for Bill C-12. That is unfortunate. I do not know whether this is what the Conservatives are looking for, or whether it just reaches a portion of the population that is on their side. However, even for those who claim they are tough on crime and believe what the government says, I would tell them to go and read the bill. It is worth doing. I was able to read the bill designed to get drugs out of our prisons in exactly one minute. That gives you a good idea.

Government Orders

If someone listening to me believes that Bill C-12 will help solve the problem, I take issue with that. We should talk because, seriously, no one in their right mind will believe that Bill C-12 will help eliminate drugs from prisons. This is what I call misleading the public.

In my opinion, it is shameful for a government that otherwise proclaims itself to be serious to think it will succeed in slipping this “quick fix” past Canadians. Again, it is unfortunate that when bills have some appeal, like Bill C-583 and others, the government succeeds, through all kinds of procedural tactics, in derailing it.

Moreover, when the Conservatives do not want us to talk too long about something, they bring in time allocation motions. People are no longer fooled, and I saw that firsthand on the ground over the last two weeks. People are aware of this. I am comfortable with that, because the message I am sending to the government is what we have succeeded in doing with Bill C-51. That bill had a fairly strong measure of support when tabled in the House, but that is no longer the case. People are not fooled. They understand, because we explain it to them. We are doing our job as the official opposition. We do not do so just on the basis of polls. We do so on principle. We have stood firm.

Some parties may have changed their ideas along the way when they saw they were perhaps on the wrong side of the fence, like the Bloc Québécois. Others, like the Liberal party, decided to persist in their error and continue to support the Conservatives. That is not surprising, because they are much alike.

That said, people are not easily fooled. We too will have the time to explain what is going on, although we perhaps do not have the same budget as the Conservative government, which will spend millions of dollars, not to say hundreds of millions of dollars, on advertising during our hockey games, for example, to tell us how great its budget is.

However, people are not fooled, and they will be able to tell this government that the time has come to stop mocking them and making them believe it is doing things that it does not do at all.

• (1130)

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech. She really zeroed in on a number of important points, particularly the uselessness of this bill with respect to stopping drugs from entering our prisons.

Because I worked for a long time in our prisons, I can say that it is a daily struggle to prevent drugs from being brought in in all kinds of inventive ways. Also, we should not forget that drug use is strongly associated with many other problems. Therefore, if we want to eliminate drugs from prisons, we should first and foremost help people to stop using them.

However, as my colleague put it so well, that is almost impossible, because it involves a multitude of variables that the bill does not take into account.

Does my colleague not find that this bill is not only useless, but it also includes things that are already carried out on the ground, such as drug testing and the suspension of parole for offenders who use?

When I read this bill, I had the impression not only that it was useless, but also that the measures it provides for were already being applied on the ground. Did she note the same thing about this bill?

• (1135)

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely the case. I wish to thank my colleague from Ahuntsic for her question. I will take the opportunity to congratulate her on the work she is doing. As a criminologist, she has inside knowledge that is absolutely invaluable and very much appreciated when the time comes to make informed decisions. I am therefore happy to hear her speak.

I would have liked to hear from other members. I have some colleagues who were police officers and others who worked in detention centres. That is the beauty of being in a parliament where there are 308 voices representing personal and individual experiences that are widely diverse, as well as people who are dealing with situations on the ground.

Much like my colleague from Ahuntsic, I was surprised when I read the bill, because its provisions are in fact already being applied. By putting questions to my colleagues who are more knowledgeable in matters of public safety, I learned that we should not take parole officers for idiots. This bill merely states what is already being done. It is as simple as that.

If there is one thing that should be taken from my speech, it is that the Conservatives only wanted to introduce a bill with a grandiose title like “drug-free prisons act”. The Conservatives are touring around their ridings and saying they have introduced Bill C-12 to make prisons drug-free and they are taking serious measures to make prisons drug-free.

People are not going to read the bill. I made a point of reading it in the House because then it will be on the record in Hansard. We will be able to use it and tell people this is it, the vaunted bill in question. The Conservatives have to stop treating people like fools. I advise people to look deeper than the grandiose titles and the smoke and mirrors that the Conservatives have been trying to get us used to for four years.

The fact is that the Conservatives have suffered a series of defeats in the courts and the crime rate for sexual offences against children has risen by 6% in the last two years. Their program is a monumental failure. It is just ink on paper, an excuse to hold press conferences where they can pat themselves on the back. It fixes absolutely nothing.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Gatineau for her speech. She too has not hesitated to tell it like it is.

Can she confirm what I think I understood from her speech: when the bill has received royal assent, it will change nothing in the existing prison system or in how the Parole Board of Canada does things? If that is the case, what actual point is there to this bill?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I am glad my colleague from Sherbrooke sees me as someone who tells it like it is. I think so too.

Government Orders

Obviously, the message in my speech is to watch out for people who tell it like it is. Do not be afraid to go deeper than what they say. Even when I speak—and I am saying this to my constituents in Gatineau—people should not simply accept what I say; they should verify the information I give. Do not fall for a catchy slogan, like the one that says the government is going to make prisons drug-free.

In fact, the day after it comes into force, this bill will have an effect in the range of 0% to 5% and not much more than that. That is unfortunate. I will say it again: it could have been much more than that.

As is the case for many justice or public safety bills, if, beyond the title, we saw real efforts on the part of the government in power to create programs that match these absolutely huge announcements, and if we saw financial and human resources in them too, perhaps then the grandiose title would be slightly more credible. As I was just saying, however, they are merely words on paper that are not followed by any concrete actions.

The first ones to laugh at this kind of thing are people who work in the field, but they are too polite to do it to our faces. The volunteers can do it because they are not paid by the government. They do volunteer work with inmates in the penitentiaries, with people who have substance abuse problems and others. Those people see it right in front of them. They think to themselves that they are doing all this volunteer work when the government has enormous resources it could use to make our communities safer. What it comes up with, however, is rubbish like this. That is what they call it.

This amounts to laughing at people, and that is why people are increasingly stepping away from politics, and that is unfortunate. If that is the goal the government is aiming for, well done! Mission accomplished, if the goal is to upset people, so they will lose interest in all of it and go back home.

However, when I see the reactions to Bill C-51 or to other bills, I tell the government to pay attention, because at some point it is going to break something that is going to make Canadians stand up as one and say enough is enough. I think that is going to happen, probably sometime around October 19.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague has a lot of experience in this area. Could she give us more of an explanation on the legal aspects of how the bill may or may not help reintegrate folks who have been in prison back into society?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question. When I read the clauses in Bill C-12, it is all about the possibility for the Parole Board to test people before they are let out on the probation and if they have drugs in their system, it would hold a deliberation. It would do absolutely nothing to ensure they do not take drugs. That is the problem.

As the member for Ahuntsic said, how do we ensure that no drugs go into the prisons? How do we ensure that a person who has a drug problem can get out of that problem? There is nothing, but the Conservatives call it a drug-free prisons act. If that is not laughing at people, I do not know what it is.

So many aspects surrounding drugs in prisons would not be addressed with Bill C-12. It is an insult to anybody's intelligence to claim that it would create drug-free prisons.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is an honour to rise in this House to speak on behalf of my constituents from Surrey North, in this case to Bill C-12, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the so-called drug-free prisons act.

The member before me was saying that the title was almost laughable. In fact, I was laughing when she pointed that out, because there is nothing in this bill that would take any concrete steps to prevent drugs entering prisons or to help those in prison to get off drugs.

There is only one small aspect to the bill, and it is a small bill of three or four pages. It is not detailed. The only thing this bill would really change is that it would add a provision to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that would make it clear to the Parole Board that it would use a positive result from a urine test or a refusal to take a urine test for drugs in making its decision on parole eligibility. That is all it would do. Basically, it would give legal authority to the Parole Board to use drug tests or urine tests of prisoners to determine eligibility for parole. Here is the kicker. The practice is already in place. The Parole Board already does this. The only thing the bill would do is give it the legal authority, so nothing else would change. That is why the title of this bill is laughable. It is called the drug-free prisons act.

I have yet to hear any Conservative get up in this House and explain it to this House. None of the Conservatives, or the Liberals for that matter, are getting up to explain to us how this would prevent drugs in our prisons. If the Conservatives were really concerned about preventing drugs, there would be a more concrete effort made to address the demand for drugs in prisons, rehabilitation, and those kinds of initiatives. However, there is nothing in this bill that would lead us to hope that one day we will have drug-free prisons, although it is a great aspiration to go toward drug-free prisons. The Conservatives come up with hollow titles for bills that somehow pretend that things are going to happen.

Yesterday, on the opposition day motion, we were talking about the oil spill in English Bay. The Conservatives have been throwing around the idea of a world-class response. We saw what happened in English Bay when the toxic oil was spilled, and it was not a world-class response. It took six hours to reach the spill. Is that world-class? The Conservatives frame things with fancy titles. I have to give them one thing; they are very good at coming up with fancy names for their bills.

The problem is that the legislation itself is hollow. It does not address what we need to address. If they were really concerned about addressing drugs in prisons, they would bring more concrete proposals to this House, and we would be happy. We have always supported having concrete initiatives to ensure that we have safe prisons, drug-free prisons, and prisons that have a good work environment for the people who work in those difficult situations.

Government Orders

I have visited a prison. I was on the public safety committee, and we were studying this very issue of drugs in prisons.

● (1145)

We had a number of hearings. We heard from Corrections Canada staff, experts and many stakeholders throughout Canada. I can say that the majority of those people at committee were of the opinion that we need more rehabilitation in prison to curb this menace in prisons.

I know that Conservatives do not like facts and figures, and they even have trouble with business and economics when it comes to supply and demand. I will get into that in a minute, but I want to go back to the amount of money the current government has spent trying to prevent drugs from getting into prisons and what the result has been.

In 2008, the Conservatives decided to invest, over three years, \$122 million to bring in sniffer dogs and ion machines to prevent drugs from getting into prisons. The result of that three years of spending a substantial amount of money was that random urine tests done at the beginning and random tests done at the end did not show any difference. Basically, the amount of drugs in prisons before was still present afterward, even after spending \$122 million on interdiction. At the same time, the programs to help these individuals get off drugs were being cut.

In terms of supply and demand, the Conservatives are trying to cut the supply, yet on the demand side, they are not helping those individuals get off the drugs. Sometimes I wonder if the Conservatives actually understand what economics is all about or if they understand the law of diminishing returns.

I had a chance to visit two medium-security prisons in Kingston, the Kent Institution in the Harrison Lake area, and the Matsqui Institution in Abbotsford. I had a chance to sit down with the prisoners, and I asked the warden to step outside. Some of the prisoners were on a committee representing other prisoners. I asked them point blank what had changed in the last three years since the government had started the interdiction program and had spent \$122 million of taxpayers' money. I asked if I could get drugs in the prison. They said, yes, sure I could, and then asked what type of drug I would like. When I asked what had changed, they said the only thing that had changed was that the price of drugs had gone up to five or six times what it was before. They could still get the drugs, but the price had skyrocketed. That was the result of the effort by the Conservative government to stop drugs from entering prisons.

Then I asked if they wanted to get off drugs. I said that surely they wanted to get off this stuff and be clean when they got out. I asked what was needed for them to be off drugs. They told me that they needed rehabilitation programs to help them get off these drugs.

The majority of people going into prison, 80% or 90%, have some form of addiction. This is well documented. However, if there are no rehabilitation services or programs to get into when they get to prison, how are they supposed to manage?

● (1150)

This was what the prisoners were asking for. They wanted programs available to them when they got to prison so that they

could access those services and get off these drugs. There would be less demand for these drugs, and we could reduce the supply of drugs coming into prisons.

One way or another, once prisoners do their time, they will be out in society. We have a captive audience where we can provide rehabilitative services and programs that will help them get off of these drugs and reintegrate into society when they are released from prison. It becomes much easier to reintegrate if they are off of any substances they were taking before they went to prison. As I said, a high percentage of prisoners are addicted to drugs or alcohol when they get to prison. That is the record.

If we are really serious about curbing the use of drugs in prisons, we also have to look at the demand side and at helping those individuals get off drugs. However, the Conservative government has made cuts to rehabilitation services and programs that would help curb drugs in prisons.

Today is budget day. I know that this is going to be the last budget for the Conservative government, because it will not be presenting a budget next year. I can assure the House of that, because I have heard from my constituents and people from across the country that this is the Conservatives' last budget. If the Conservatives are really concerned about curbing drugs in prisons, they have a last opportunity. Let us make an impact. Talk to the Minister of Finance. Talk to the Prime Minister. Talk to cabinet colleagues. Let us make this real. Let us make that investment in this budget to ensure that we have rehabilitation programs not only in prisons but in our communities.

There have been over 20 shootings in my hometown of Surrey over the last 35 days or so. That is very disturbing to me as a father and as a representative from Surrey North. This is happening in my backyard. There is a gang war going on. There are drug deals going on. There is a turf war going on. Unfortunately, what we had feared happened just the other day. One young man was killed, and there are fears that the violence will escalate because of this tragedy on the weekend.

I urge the government to invest in the very programs that are going to make our communities safer instead of coming up with these hollow, laughable names for bills that do nothing to make our communities safe. Let us make real investments in our communities. Let us fund programs.

I have a motion in the House asking for long-term, sustainable funding for youth gang crime prevention programs. I have talked to service providers in my community that help youth and provide services to at-risk youth. What they have been telling me is that the programs that have been funded through the Canadian government have been cut by the Conservatives over the last number of years. If we are going to make investments in our youth and in safer communities, it is these kinds of programs we need to make investments in.

Government Orders

I have talked to the individuals who provide programs to these at-risk kids, and the results are fabulous. There has been about an 80%-85% success rate in these youths being able to graduate from high school. However, I have seen in my own community that the Conservative government has made cuts to the very programs that help our youth get on the right path and that help make our communities safer.

● (1155)

If the Conservatives were concerned about making our communities safer, instead of presenting hollow, laughable bills in this House, they have an opportunity, their last opportunity, because they will not get that opportunity next year, to commit to making that very investment. When they formed government in 2006, they said they were going to do things differently than the party in the corner over there, the Liberal Party, yet they have failed to do that. They are basically doing the same thing. They are shuffling chairs at a table on the *Titanic*. It is not helping. If they were really concerned about ensuring the safety in our communities, they would be making investments.

The bill has a very narrow scope that simply gives direction to the Parole Board to legally use the fact that a prisoner failed to provide a urine sample as a tool to deny parole. As I have said before, the Parole Board has been using this practice. There is nothing concrete in this bill, the drug-free prisons act, that would actually enhance or provide for safer working conditions, safer prisons, drug-free prisons.

There is absolutely nothing in the bill, yet the Conservatives have come up with a fancy name to have people believe that somehow, magically, out of the sky there will be drug-free prisons. Frankly speaking, this is their 10th year in government and I think they are running out of new ideas on how to provide for Canadians, whether it is safer communities, providing services, enhancing our health care, or whether it is working toward having a pharmacare program and a day care program.

The Liberals promised a day care program, a child care program, back in 1972. They did not deliver on that. The Conservatives said that they would make hundreds of thousands of spaces available, yet they have not delivered. We have an idea. We will be bringing in child care programs throughout this country once we form the government in 2015.

An hon. member: Dream on.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I see the member cheering. He can be sure that we will be forming the government in 2015.

There is one issue that comes up often, and we heard it when we were doing the study into drug-free prisons. If the Conservatives were truly interested in drug-free prisons, they would provide tools and investments for the CSC to have a proper intake assessment of inmates' addictions, and then provide the proper correctional program required.

Without addiction treatment, education and proper reintegration upon release, a prisoner will likely return to the criminal lifestyle and possibly create more victims. It is common knowledge that when a young person is brought into the prison system, it is a university for higher learning from other gangsters with respect to crime. Gangsters

are a problem, as I have said, not only in my part of town, but also in prisons.

This is an issue we need to address. If the government were serious about addressing this issue, it would be looking at rehabilitation, looking at investing in our communities across this country, yet the government comes up with hollow titles and tries to pretend that somehow it is actually doing something.

● (1200)

This is a very small step which, yes, I will support, but at the end of the day, what the government is proposing is already being practised by the Parole Board.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Surrey North for his excellent speech and for sharing his experience in his riding and the experience he had when he visited a penitentiary.

He touched on this, but I would like him to elaborate on the subject: does he think this is a real missed opportunity on the part of the Conservatives, to have a bill with this title but with only four clauses that ultimately only reiterate a practice that already exists at the Parole Board? Is this an opportunity that the Conservatives have missed to put new measures in place, real, concrete measures, to prevent the spread of drugs in our prisons? They could have done so much more.

With a title like this, it truly is a missed opportunity. As other colleagues have said, the bill will not have the planned effects, as stated in its title. Is this a missed opportunity? And with this being budget day, would there be other opportunities that the government might offer in order to genuinely address this very real and well documented problem?

● (1205)

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, the short title of the bill is very misleading in the sense that we all aspire to have drug-free prisons, but there is nothing in the bill that is going to help us have drug-free prisons. The bill allows the Parole Board to use drug tests on prisoners to deny them parole. That is already happening. That practice is being used by the Parole Board.

This is a missed opportunity. The member is absolutely right. Today is budget day. The government has run out of new ideas for some concrete ways to make prisons a safer place for correctional workers and for the reintegration of individuals into society. Instead, the Conservatives have come up with a fancy name for a bill that has no impact whatsoever on the actual workings of the prisons or any sort of elimination of drugs.

The official opposition has always advocated for ways to reduce harm and reduce drug use in prisons. We will continue to do that. In 2015, we will bring in real concrete action, real concrete proposals to ensure that our prisons are safe not only for the workers, but also for the prisoners.

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Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. There are so many people working on making safer streets, dealing with recidivism, making sure that we actually get people out of the drug trade and making sure that people do not get involved in drugs. Then we have the Conservative government.

This is a perfect Conservative bill. It meets the three criteria: one, it has a ridiculous title that means nothing; two, it will not change anything because what it is claiming to do is already within the Parole Board; and three, the big kicker, the Conservatives have already wasted \$122 million and have not changed anything. They are going to stand again and bang their heads against a brick wall that they created in their prison attitudes without ever bringing forward in the House one coherent, reasonable response that would actually cut down the drug trade and bring down the rates of recidivism.

With the member's experience in Surrey and what he knows in dealing with drug issues through his portfolio in the House, why does my colleague think the government continues to present such tired, out-of-touch ideas? Maybe it is time that Canadians finally did throw those guys out.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, I could not have summed it up better than the member for Timmins—James Bay did. This bill has a fancy title and yet it has no meat. It pretends to do something that it will not really do. That is what has been happening with the Conservative government over the last four years that I have been here. The government pretends to be doing something, but actually does not do anything.

The member is absolutely right. The government spent \$122 million over a three-year period to eradicate drugs from prisons. What was the result? The result was zero change. In the Correctional Service annual reports, I checked the random drug testing that was done and after this \$122 million was spent, the rate of drugs in prisons was the same as before. There was no significant change.

Experts have been telling the government that if it is looking at the supply side, it also has to look at the demand side, which involves prevention and rehabilitation. The government put a chunk of money on the supply side, which had no effect on the amount of drugs getting into prisons, but on the demand side, it cut the preventive and rehabilitation programs that would cut the supply if there was no demand. I know it is hard for the Conservatives to comprehend something as simple as supply and demand.

The member is absolutely right. The government has run out of ideas. I think Canadians will show the Conservatives the door come October 19, 2015.

• (1210)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, crime is a big issue for many Canadians, I would say in particular in his part of Canada, in Surrey. It is a top-of-mind issue for many voters and yet in dealing with this issue, it is important to bring our best intelligence and thoughtfulness around what to do about crime, be it crime that is committed in prisons or leading in.

My question for the member is about this particularly annoying statistic for the Conservatives, which should not be annoying

because it is good news. For a number of years now, 15 or 20 years or more, crime rates in Canada have been steadily dropping. Violent crimes, property crimes, murder and whatnot have steadily dropped, all statistics across the board. At the same time, since the Conservatives have been in government, and I would argue it was more for political reasons that they needed to make crime an issue, the incarceration rate has gone up. Before any of the measures that the Conservatives brought in, the crime rate was dropping and continues to drop even though they bring in these new laws and they are supposed to change this, that, and the other. The one thing that has changed is incarceration, which is an incredibly expensive thing. It runs up to more than \$100,000 a year per prisoner. My friend tells me it is \$150,000 for a federal maximum prison. However, the government is unconcerned with whether its measures are actually working, but just wants to spend money and lock up more people.

If crime is dropping, let us look at the things that actually work. If incarceration rates are going up, let us look at who is being incarcerated and try to find out how to prevent the crime in the first place. Would that not be the most ideal crime-fighting tactic any government could take on?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley hit the nail on the head. Absolutely, we need to take proactive approaches to crime in today's society, and prevention is the best investment any government and any society could make.

There have been a number of shootings in the town of Surrey over the last month. There have been over 20 shootings. A young person was killed over the weekend. There are fears in my community that this will further escalate. Not only do we need more police, which the government promised back in 2006, but we also need additional preventive programs, preventive investment in communities, to ensure that young people are not getting into these types of activities. Unfortunately, I have talked to many organizations on the ground and the Conservatives have failed to make these vital investments in communities that would make them safe.

Many studies have been done. These are not Kijiji facts. These are academic studies from the United States and Canada where a minimal investment in crime prevention programs provides a huge return at the end. As the member pointed out, it costs a lot of money to keep someone in prison. Up to \$150,000 is being spent per prisoner per year, but a fraction of that invested early on in gang-prevention programs in communities would make Canada a better place for all Canadians.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to play a role in this debate. It is an important debate.

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Although the bill itself is rather modest in scope it is rather expansive in title. It claims to be the drug-free prisons act, but it would actually amend a practice that is currently being carried out by the Parole Board, which is to take into account either a failure to take a drug sample or the results of a drug sample testing for someone who is about to be released on parole. Therefore, it would not actually change very much, except to put into law a practice that already exists. However, it is an opportunity for New Democrats to spend some time to talk about the approach the government has taken not only for legislation in general, but in particular, legislation as it relates to crime and punishment and the treatment of offenders.

We can be magnanimous today and say everyone in the House would like to have a safer society. We would like to have safer streets and communities. The question is, how do we go about that and is the government's approach one that works and actually creates safer communities or is it not? We on this side of the House, in particular New Democrats, believe that the government is an absolute failure when it comes to this issue. It is great at the rhetoric. We have one here today. "The act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act" is the long title. The short title, the inaccurate propaganda title, is "the drug-free prisons act". The government is good at propaganda. It actually puts propaganda into the names of legislation.

I do not know if this is unique to this particular government. Maybe the Liberals did it too. I do not remember that far back. I was not here then. I was here back in 1987 when the Progressive Conservatives were in power but I was not here during the Liberal regime.

To call this act "the drug-free prisons act" is an attempt to fool people. There is an old saying that is common enough, but we do not hear it that often these days as it is a bit of an old-fashioned saying. It is, "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." In fact, one cannot fool the majority of the people all of the time and the government is going to find that out in September of this year.

Let me go back to the first part of that saying, "You can fool all of the people some of the time". The government believes it can get away with titles like this. It believes it can fool all of the people some of the time. By calling a bill "the drug-free prisons act", it believes it can make people think the bill will remove drugs from prisons.

The government has spent \$122 million on interdiction programs over a three-year period from 2012 on, the same period it took \$295 million out of the corrections system. What was the result? Did it create drug-free prisons? It absolutely did not. In fact, there are just as many drugs in prisons these days as there were then. Therefore, is the government's approach working? No, it is not.

I would like to quote from the office of the correctional investigator, Howard Sapers, a very renowned expert on this matter. He is so renowned that the government decided not to renew his appointment after serving the position for some eight years or more and doing a magnificent job providing dispassionate, fact-based, evidence-based advice to government. In his 2011-12 annual report he said that a zero tolerance stance to drugs in prison is an aspiration rather than an effective policy that:

...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.

● (1215)

The John Howard Society is working very hard at this but this is basically saying that it is not a realistic goal to even have. Therefore, the government really has the question put wrongly and it has the wrong answer.

What we are really trying to do to create a safer society and safer communities is to reduce the number of victims of crime. We know that the crime rates are going down, although we would not know that from the emphasis that the government is placing on it. Prisons are becoming more filled. The conditions in prison are getting worse with double-bunking and so forth. One of the consequences of that is we will not have safer communities. If we have people in prison longer without programs to assist with issues such as drug addiction and substance abuse, many of those prisoners will eventually be released into society once they have served their sentence. If they go out into those communities without those problems having been solved or tackled they will pose a bigger danger to society and there will be more victims of crime. That is just plain logic. I know that interferes with the views of some of the members opposite with respect to humankind and how we should deal with criminals.

I practised law for many years and practised criminal law for a number of those years. I understand the system. There are principles of sentencing. The idea of sentencing is to fit the sentence to the crime. There are a number of factors taken into consideration. We need to deter and punish crime but we also need to rehabilitate the offenders so that we have safer communities. Those factors are taken into consideration. Once they get into a prison those factors should be put to work. Once they are removed from society, as best we can we want to reduce the rate of recidivism, which is a complicated word for a simple thing. It means that we do not want these people who are in prison to commit crimes when they get out. How do we do that? By spending \$122 million over a period to try to interdict and prevent drugs from getting into prisons, totally without serious effect, and then spend I think it was \$9 million to \$11 million over the same period on substance abuse programs in our prisons. That does not make sense. At the point in time when this bill was going through committee it was estimated that 2,400 prisoners in our corrections system were waiting to get access to a substance abuse program. One would ask what happened. One aspect is that they are in prison with no access to a substance abuse program and have access to drugs, because we know that there are drugs in the system. When those prisoners eventually come out of prison without having had an opportunity to deal with their drug addiction and without having an opportunity to move forward they will go back into the streets without the ability or the opportunity to be better serving members of society. That is really what we are dealing with.

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One of the comments that was made by representatives of the John Howard Society was that this bill will not eliminate drugs from prisons and merely seems to be a tactic to ignore some of the real issues in prison, such as mental illness, double-bunking and prisoner self-harm. Prisoner self-harm is one aspect that we are reminded of as a result of the very tragic story of Ashley Smith, a young woman who died in prison at the age of 19. She was first arrested at the age of 14 for I believe throwing crabapples at a letter carrier, which was what got her in trouble with the law. She ended up in what turned out to be a death spiral from the ages of 14 to 19, which led her to desperation and maltreatment by the prison system. There have been reports on this. It is a tragic case.

● (1220)

It was well investigated, well reported on, but tragic nonetheless. She ended up killing herself under the watchful eye of corrections officials who were told not to interfere while she was strangling herself in prison. That is what it came to in that particular case. It was a sense of desperation that cried out for reform, cried out for change, and change is still required to take place. We are not getting it from the government. What we are getting instead is increased crowding in prisons and the closing down of some special facilities that dealt with mental health cases in prisons.

We do know that when we are talking about drugs in prison, a very high percentage of the offender population who abuses drugs is also currently struggling with mental illness as well. We do not have adequate programs in the prisons for that.

The Conservative government is closing down treatment centres for inmates dealing with serious mental illness. This is a very serious problem. Many times drug abuse and substance abuse occur with mental health problems. There are some figures that show the size of this issue. In 2011, it was estimated that 45% of male offenders and 69% of female offenders had received a mental health care intervention prior to going into prison.

That shows a level of serious need within prisons to provide access to care and access to programs. Prison can, in fact, be a positive experience for some people who are in desperate circumstances if the programs are available.

We need to have an attitude that recognizes that there is individual responsibility, and nobody is suggesting that everybody in prison is there because they have somehow been wronged. However, we do know there are socio-economic factors. We do know there are people with serious needs that are not being met in society, whether it be drug addictions that they have no way of dealing with or whether it be mental health issues that are improperly or inadequately addressed in society.

We do know there is high unemployment in many parts of this country. We have significant problems in the aboriginal communities as a result of many factors which I will not go into here. There is a whole series of issues that have led to that situation.

We cannot say the answer is to just increase the sentences, which we have often heard from the government. Putting in mandatory minimum sentences as a deterrent to people committing crimes is something we know does not work and has even been recognized very recently by the Supreme Court of Canada. The research shows,

and has been confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada, accepted by the highest court in the land in a recent decision, that mandatory minimum sentences as such do not in fact deter crimes.

The government is anxious to continue to make prison a situation which is negative, not only for the prisoner, obviously, but also for corrections guards. When the government starts talking about zero opportunities for parole forever, what will that do for the safety of corrections officers? What will it do if a prisoner has no hope whatsoever of ever getting out and nothing to lose? Even if there is a faint hope, it is still some sort of hope.

It the metrics of that are changed and we say to the prisoners that no matter what happens, no matter what they do, they are not getting out ever and the circumstances are going to be worse, will that help the safety of corrections officers? I think the answer is pretty obvious. It does not at all.

We have to do something different from what the government is doing, because what the government is doing, frankly, does not work.

● (1225)

We support the bill because it would in fact put to place in legislation a practice that already exists. We are okay with the legislation. We are happy to see it pass, but we do not want to let his opportunity go when we pass legislation that has a short title of drug-free prisons act, which is clearly a misnomer, is clearly a propaganda title and is clearly wrong. The long title of the bill An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which is fine.

In fact, a motion was made in committee to amend the legislation and, of course, the motion was not allowed. We tried to fix it. I want Canadians to know that even though we support the actual terms of the legislation, what it stands for and what it says, we do not like the title. We tried to change it and it was ruled out of order because there was no amendment to the bill that would lead to a change in the title being required.

What do we have? As of March 14, 2012, the national penitentiary population was 15,000. If 20% of them, nearly 2,400 people, are waiting for a program for drug abuse and substance abuse, then we have a serious problem. If this legislation is followed through, those people would stay in prison longer, they still would not get the programs they need and eventually they would have to be released when their sentences ended. When that happens and they did not have access to the programs, we will have a continued problem for our society, despite the government's claim that it cares about victims. I think we all care about victims. In fact, we care about victims to the point that we want to see fewer of them. One way to do that is to ensure that people who are incarcerated get the rehabilitation programs and support they need to allow them a greater chance of living a life of less crime when they get out and to participate better in society.

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Let us talk about some of our other programs. When we talk about a mandatory \$15-a-hour minimum wage, that is really designed as well to allow people to have a decent opportunity to make a living and support themselves. When we talk about other programs we are promoting, that is also about ensuring that prisoners who get out of jail and want to be productive members of society can have proper rehabilitation programs so they have those opportunities and a better chance of not reoffending.

There was a lot of talk about supporting victims and victims' bills of rights, but the current government has done nothing to help the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board program that has existed in our country for many years. When it was established, the federal government support was based on the dollar formula of 90/10. It provided victims of crime with compensation for losses they incurred as a result of crime. The government has done nothing about that. It brought in its so-called victims' bill of rights, but it did nothing on the plus side to provide something that would help with their problems associated with the crimes against them.

We want prisons to be a safe workplace for correctional staff. We want prisoners to be rehabilitated. We want to have them access government programs so when they are released, they are in a better position to lead a crime-free life. If part of their problem is mental health or drug addiction and rehabilitation programs can help fix that, we need to put more money into prison programs to make that possible.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

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

Although we support the bill, I would like to take this opportunity to point out just how much the Conservatives' approach does not work, even though they say they are the best ones to handle law and order issues. My colleague gave an excellent example of this in his speech: mandatory minimum sentences. In the United States, even the Republicans, who are often hand in glove with the Conservatives ideologically, are rejecting that idea as a way of reducing crime rates in our communities.

When it comes to drugs in the prison system, we also have to consider health and prevention. Of course, people have addiction problems, and I do not understand why we would not be considering solutions to address that.

As my colleague said in his speech, we could offer programs within the prison system to start reducing the incidence of these problems and healing these people and then, as he put it so well, avoid crimes being repeated. The best way to protect victims is to make sure that people are not in a position where they want to commit crimes, and I think we can do that by focusing on rehabilitation.

On that point, would my colleague like to say more about the fact that in spite of the new laws being enacted, very little is being done to offer more resources? We see cuts being made and a lack of financial resources in the prisons.

What does my colleague think?

● (1235)

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for reminding the House of the fact that the government is bucking the trend. In the United States for example, the trend had been to be far more harsh on prisoners, with more use of mandatory minimum sentences, solitary confinement and other methods. The Americans have recognized that this does not work. Some of the more right-wing states that had a tradition of being so-called tough on crime, as the Conservatives like to call themselves, are recognizing that some of the measures they have chosen lead to greater crime in their communities and to less safe communities. It is a bit of an enlightened approach even for those who take that ideological point of view.

The Conservatives government does not seem to get it. However, I hope that when the government changes in the fall, we will have an opportunity to put more resources into ensuring that rehabilitation programs are available and that prison conditions are more conducive to rehabilitation. That way, when people leave prisons, they will be better citizens and less likely to commit crimes.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is always intelligent when he helps people.

The NDP has been steadfast in our support for measures that will make our prisons safe. Meanwhile, the Conservative government has ignored recommendations from Correctional Service staff and the correctional investigator that would decrease violence, gang activity and drug use in our prisons. Multiple stakeholders across the country agree that this bill would have a minimal impact on the drugs in our prison system.

Recently the Conservatives cut \$295 million to the operating budget of Correctional Service Canada, which likely has impacted the already small portion of the funding that is dedicated to core correctional programming. Meanwhile, they have invested \$122 million into failed interdiction tools, even after the stakeholders and experts in the field have said that drug-free prisons are not achievable. Experts have said that we need to invest in rehabilitation programs for our prisoners and the Conservatives have shown that is not something they are interested in doing.

My colleague said that we needed to invest in more programming to support our prisoners, so when they left the prison system recidivism would be lowered rather than maintained at the same rate. Could my colleague comment on that?

Government Orders

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is a serious situation when the government makes things worse and less safe for our communities by taking the money out of the prison program that could be used for substance abuse programs or other programs that would help to rehabilitate offenders, help them with mental health issues and to provide substance abuse programs. It would leave us all in a situation where, when they came out of prison, they would be in better shape than when they were when they went in. We do not want them in the same frame of mind with the same problems if they can be addressed inside prison. We want it to be a positive experience. Instead, what we have is money taken out of the system and conditions becoming worse, and that is not good for society.

● (1240)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been in the House since this morning and I have listened to the debate very carefully. It is almost deafening that the government and Liberal members are not participating in this debate. Why? Surely, if the government is presenting a bill, it would want to defend it and root for it.

Is it because it is an indefensible bill? The title of the bill would not really address the real issue of drugs in prisons. It would just provide a legal avenue for the Parole Board to use urine samples to deny parole, which is already a practice. One would think that for a bill like this, the government would be getting up, cheering and defending it, letting Canadians know what is happening in the House of Commons.

Would the member care to comment on that?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, the member for Surrey North makes an interesting point. I see members opposite, apparently unwilling to get up and talk about this. I suspect there is one reason why. I do not really believe that anybody over there is happy to get up to try to defend the fact that they have called this bill the drug-free prisons act when it would do nothing of the kind. In fact, it has no relation to having drug-free prisons at all. I think the member for Yukon and the committee recognized as much by acknowledging that the title was a bit of an overreach. That is a pretty big admission from the other side.

In fact, it is more than an overreach. It is something that is really indefensible and that is why we do not see anybody on the other side getting up trying to defend it.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, following in a similar vein to my previous question, we know that mental health is a significant problem in our communities across the country. In the intake interviews with prisoners, there is quite a significant number of prisoners who go into our prison system with identified mental health issues.

Instead of complaining, I would like to hear proposals or propositions of how we could make changes. What should we do as responsible legislators to ensure that the occurrences of mental health issues and concerns with our prisoners as they exit the prison system can be reduced, rather than increase or stay the same. According to many studies, mental health continues to be a problem, rather than being resolved or worked on while our prisoners are in the system.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I will quote Catherine Latimer, the executive director of the John Howard Society, who talked about what we could do for people who were out on parole. She said:

We want to enhance the likelihood that communities would be safer. We do that by a supported, targeted parole reintegration scheme that looks at the needs of the individual and how to support those needs.

On the way in to prison, when individuals are taken in and assessed at the beginning, there has to be a program that assesses the addiction problem and provides a proper correctional program for that offender. Without addiction treatment, education and proper reintegration upon release, a prisoner will likely return to a criminal lifestyle and possibly create more victims. That is what we are trying to prevent.

● (1245)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-12, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, and as others have pointed out, the short title is the drug-free prisons act.

Other New Democrats have indicated today that we are supporting this very narrow bill, and people might wonder why we are rising to speak to the bill if we are supporting it. Part of the reason we are rising to speak comes down to the short title, the drug-free prisons act. Nothing in the bill would contribute toward a goal of drug-free prisons.

One would think, given the Conservatives' approach to being tough on crime, that part of their interests would be that any legislation they bring forward would actually have a goal of keeping our communities safer. So part of that goal would be that, when people are incarcerated, when the justice system has found them guilty and they are incarcerated for whatever their misdeeds were—we would presume the Conservative goal would be to ensure that prisoners are rehabilitated so that they can be reintegrated back into the community in a safe way and thus keep our communities safer.

I think all of us in the House would argue that one of our roles is to ensure that federal employees have a safe workplace. We would assume that any legislation we bring forward would consider whether or not the workplace for correctional officers, men and women who serve in the federal penitentiary system, is safe. I would argue that nothing in the bill would achieve those ends.

I am turning to the legislative summary because it is important to highlight what exactly the bill would do and presumably why the bill came about. The legislative summary says:

The bill requires the Parole Board of Canada (PBC) (or a provincial parole board, if applicable) to cancel the parole of an offender who has not yet been released if the offender tests positive in a urinalysis or fails to provide a urine sample and the Board is of the opinion that the criteria for granting parole are no longer met.

The bill also clarifies the legislative intent underlying section 133(3) of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act 1 (CCRA)—which authorizes a releasing authority to set conditions on an offender's parole, statutory release or unescorted temporary absence—to provide that conditions may be set regarding the offender's use of drugs or alcohol, including when that use has been identified as a risk factor in the offender's criminal behaviour.

There is a long history of drug use within the penitentiary system, and the legislative summary quotes some of that background. Under a section called "The Presence of Drugs in the Federal Penitentiary System", it says:

Government Orders

Prevalence rates of substance abuse for persons involved in the criminal justice system are “much higher” than those in the general population. According to the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), “in Canada, 80% of offenders entering the federal prison system are identified as having a substance abuse problem.”

I am going to repeat that number: 80% of people of entering the system have a substance abuse problem. That should be setting all kinds of warning bells off for everybody in the House who is considering legislation.

The summary goes on to say:

The presence of drugs within the federal penitentiary system is not a recent phenomenon. Problems associated with drugs in the penitentiary system were noted in 1990 by the Federal Court of Canada in *Jackson v. Joyceville Penitentiary (T.D.)*, when the Court found that the evidence clearly indicated that:

unauthorized intoxicants in the prison setting create very serious problems including a greater risk and level of violence that affects the safety and security of prison institutions for both staff and inmates.

In 2000, the Sub-committee on the Corrections and Conditional Release Act of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights tabled a report entitled *A Work in Progress: The Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, in which it noted:

One of the issues that arose in virtually every correctional facility visited by the Sub-committee was the entry, presence and use of drugs in an environment where they are not supposed to be found. The Sub-committee also learned that the brewing, distribution and consumption of alcohol are serious problems in many correctional institutions. The consequences of the presence of alcohol and drugs in correctional facilities can be devastating to both the correctional environment and to what corrections personnel are trying to achieve in working with offenders.

Probably people who have listened to this debate would presume that the collection of a urine analysis for drug testing is something new, when in fact, it has existed within the penitentiary system for a number of years.

• (1250)

I will not go over all the history, but the mandatory urine analysis within the penitentiary system began in the mid-1980s, and so it has been going on for decades. There have been some changes to it because of some court challenges and human rights issues, but essentially the collection of urine for analysis and drug testing has been within the penitentiary system for a number of years.

What currently exists? According to the legislative summary, under the heading “Authority to Collect Urine Samples” it says, “Today, the CCRA authorizes the collection of urine samples within the institutional setting in the following prescribed circumstances.”

I will read the prescribed conditions without the explanation, but a number of things have to be present: reasonable grounds; random selection; when required for program activity involving community contact or a treatment program; testing to monitor compliance with conditions to abstain from the consumption of drugs or alcohol; consequences of a positive result or a refusal to provide a sample; and consequences for offenders on conditional release. This is the current situation from before we had Bill C-12 before us.

Therefore, we already have this method. However, in terms of drug-free prisons, I will talk a little later about how effective the programs have been, or have not been, and how little the bill would contribute to it.

On the changes to the legislation, clause 2 of Bill C-12 would amend the CCRA by creating a new section, 123.1, which states that the CSC is required to inform the Parole Board when an offender has

been granted day or full parole but has not yet been released, has failed or refused to provide a urine sample or has had a positive urine analysis test.

Clause 3 of the bill would add a new section that states that if the Parole Board has been informed of an offender's failure or refusal to provide a urine sample or positive urine analysis result, and the offender has not yet been released, it must cancel the offender's parole, but only if, in its opinion, the criteria for granting parole provided in section 102 of the CCRA are no longer met.

Clause 4 of the bill would modify section 133(3) of the CCRA to direct the consideration of a condition regarding the offender's use of drugs or alcohol following an offender's failure or refusal to provide a urine sample, and Bill C-12 would give the Parole Board clear legal authority for the imposition of a condition regarding the use of drugs or alcohol by adding that:

For greater certainty, the conditions may include any condition regarding the offender's use of drugs or alcohol, including in cases when that use has been identified as a risk factor in the offender's criminal behaviour.

Therefore, what we have currently is a situation where the Correctional Service of Canada already does the urine sampling and drug analysis, and now we have this communication link with the Parole Board so that it may be considered when granting parole. However, members will notice that nowhere in there does it talk about rehabilitation or treatment while offenders are within the correctional system. Therefore, how this would contribute to a drug-free prison escapes me. I cannot find anything in the legislation that would create an environment that would reduce the use of drugs in prisons, that would presumably lead to better reintegration into society and more safety for prison staff who have to deal with these inmates who may be intoxicated or under the influence of some sort of drug.

It is interesting that this issue has been raised in any number of venues, and I am going to quote from an April 2012 report called “Drugs and Alcohol in Federal Penitentiaries: An Alarming Problem”. This is a report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. In that report, there is a section entitled “The Impact of Drugs and Alcohol in Federal Correctional Facilities”. The report states that:

Upon admission, 80% of offenders have a serious substance abuse problem, and over half of them reported that alcohol and drug use was a factor in the commission of their offence.

Mental health problems are also highly prevalent among inmates in the correctional system. Experts note that drug addicts and inmates with mental health issues generally have complex problems to contend with, such as concurrent mental health issues, drug addiction and alcoholism.

Government Orders

Dr. Sandy Simpson, Clinical Director of the Law and Mental Health Program at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, said that substance abuse “is a driver of mental ill health and it is also a barrier to recovery, wellness, and reducing recidivism.” This is all the more alarming since “anywhere up to 90% of a standing prison population will have a lifetime problem of substance misuse or dependence.” The Commissioner also raised this point with the Committee, noting that “[t]his dependency does not magically disappear when they arrive at our gates.”

● (1255)

Anybody who has studied the corrections system is well aware that these substances are illegally available within the correctional system. I think there is a theory out there that when people go to prison, they will go cold turkey and somehow magically be relieved of needing or wanting the substance, but of course, these substances are illegally available in the system, which does not help with reintegration into society.

With regard to that report, New Democrats actually filed a dissenting opinion because, despite all of the testimony that was heard, the report only came down on one part of a proposed solution. In the dissenting report, New Democrats said:

The report: *Drugs and Alcohol in Federal Penitentiaries: an Alarming Problem*, is fundamentally flawed and fails to adequately represent the testimony heard at committee in a fair manner. Critical information is missing and as a result many of the conclusions and recommendations are incomplete or insufficient, for this reason New Democrat members of the Public Safety Committee have submitted this dissenting opinion....

The most startling example of the information missing from this report is the failure to note evidence that clearly demonstrated \$122 million dollars [sic] of Conservative spending on interdiction tools and technology since 2008 has not led to any reduction in drug use in prisons. The Commissioner of Correctional Services Canada...Mr. Don Head, admitted at meeting number 16 on December 1, 2011, that this spending has been largely ineffective according to the CSC's own report on drug-testing, but this information is not reflected anywhere in the committee's report.

Of significant concern is the appearance that the Committee's report reached a pre-determined conclusion that the solution to the problems of drugs and alcohol in prison is increasing interdiction measures. This conclusion does not reflect the testimony that the Committee heard describing the complexity of the problem of drug and alcohol in federal prisons. As many witnesses affirmed, a narrow focus on interdiction measures alone will not serve the purpose of reducing the use of drugs and alcohol....

New Democrats believe that the problems facing Canadian prisons, including mental illness, drug use and the spread of disease, including HIV and hepatitis, are complex and interrelated. Violence and increased population pressures, gangs and drug trafficking in prisons are as interrelated as well. In order to move towards real solutions targeting the issue of drugs and alcohol in prisons, a balanced approach that is based on a complete understanding of the problems that exist is required.

Unfortunately, that report was another example of where the Conservative majority on the committee used the majority to actually subvert the recommendations and witness testimony so that it came out with a very narrow conclusion that simply did not reflect the other work that was done.

I want to turn for a moment to the Correctional Investigator, who provides annual reports that talk about the state of prisons in Canada. In a report from 2012 on the previous fiscal years, he indicated a number of problems, and I would like to take a few moments to raise that. In his report, he stated:

More offenders are admitted to federal penitentiaries more addicted and mentally ill than ever before. 36% have been identified at admission as requiring some form of psychiatric or psychological follow-up. 63% of offenders report using either alcohol or drugs on the day of their current offence. With a changing and more complex offender profile come accumulating pressure points and needs—provide for safe and secure custody, meet growing mental health and physical health care demands, and respond to the special needs of aging, minority and Aboriginal offenders. This is a compromised population which presents some very complex mental health, physical

health and criminogenic issues. As I report here, these needs often run ahead of the system's capacity to meet them.

He provided some numbers. People love to talk numbers in the House, as they should. He indicated that the annual cost of keeping a federal inmate behind bars has increased from \$88,000 in 2005-06 to more than \$113,000 in 2009-10. In contrast, the annual average cost to keep an offender in the community is about \$29,500. At a time of widespread budgetary restraint, it seems prudent to use prison sparingly and as a last resort, as it was intended to be.

Later on in the report, the Correctional Investigator outlined some challenges with mental health because, as noted, mental health and substance abuse often go hand in hand.

● (1300)

Again, quoting some statistics, he said:

CSC data indicates that the proportion of offenders with mental health needs identified at intake has doubled in the period between 1997 and 2008. 13% of male inmates and 29% of women were identified at admission as presenting mental health problems. 30.1% of women offenders compared to 14.5% of male offenders had previously been hospitalized for psychiatric reasons.

CSC's use of computerized mental health screening at admission indicates that 62% of offenders entering a federal penitentiary are “flagged” as requiring a follow-up mental health assessment or service.

Offenders diagnosed with a mental illness are typically afflicted by more than one disorder, often a substance abuse problem, which affects 4 out of 5 offenders in federal custody.

That is four out of five. That is 80% in custody.

50% of federally sentenced women self-report histories of self-harm, over half identify a current or previous addiction to drugs, 85% report a history of physical abuse and 68% experienced sexual abuse at some point in their lives.

He reviewed the progress with regard to dealing with some of these matters, and the Correctional Investigator indicated the following:

In a series of reports and investigations over the last three years, the Office has identified gaps in CSC's mental health framework and has further recommended a series of measures where progress is necessary. The following are among the most urgent needs in the federal system that speak to capacity and resource issues and raise questions of purpose, priority and direction:

1. Create intermediate mental health care units.
2. Recruit and retain more mental health professionals.
3. Treat self-injurious behaviour as a mental health, not security, issue.
4. Increase capacity at the Regional Treatment Centres.
5. Prohibit the use of long-term segregation of offenders at risk of suicide or serious self-injury as well as offenders with acute mental health issues.
6. Expand the range of alternative mental health service delivery partnerships with the provinces and territories.
7. Provide for 24/7 health care coverage at all maximum, medium and multi-level institutions.

With regard to drugs in prison, he indicated that there is no question that the presence of illegal substances is a major safety and security challenge. He said:

Government Orders

The smuggling and trafficking of illicit substances and the diversion of legal drugs inside federal penitentiaries present inherent risks that ultimately jeopardize the safety and security of institutions and the people that live and work inside them. Almost two-thirds of federal offenders report being under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicants when they committed the offence.... A very high percentage of the offender population that abuses drugs is also concurrently struggling with mental illness. The interplay between addiction, substance abuse and mental health functioning is complex and dynamic. Living with addiction or managing a substance abuse problem in a prison setting creates its own laws of supply and demand, which in turn is influenced by gang activity and other pressures.

We can see that there is a very serious problem within the prison system. We have had a number of experts who have testified to that in a variety of circumstances, yet the bill does nothing to deal with that problem.

He recommended the following:

a comprehensive and integrated drug strategy should include a balance of measures—prevention, treatment, harm reduction and interdiction. The Office's analysis suggests that CSC's current anti-drug strategy lacks three key elements:

1. An integrated and cohesive link between interdiction and suppression activities and prevention, treatment and harm reduction measures.
2. A comprehensive public reporting mechanism, and;
3. A well-defined evaluation, review and performance plan to measure the overall effectiveness of its investments.

With respect to performance indicators and public reporting, a more balanced score sheet might include consideration of these measures:

- Decreased gang activity linked to the institutional drug trade.
- Reduction in the number of major security incidents....

It goes on. I know I am running out of time, so I want to conclude by indicating that the Correctional Investigator said this:

On balance, the facts surrounding and impacts of substance abuse and addiction in federal prisons suggest a different approach. 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.

• (1305)

Although we are supporting the bill, I would urge the Conservative government to take a more detailed and complex look at the problem of substance abuse within the prison system.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been here all morning. It is now a little after one o'clock. I would like to go through the process. The bill was introduced by the minister. There was second reading debate. Everyone in the House agreed, and it went to committee. There was a discussion at committee and witnesses. It came back here.

There have been comments about why the Conservatives have not been up to speak to this. The fact of the matter is that the whole House agrees with the bill. What opposition members are arguing about today is the short title. They do not like the short title. One party is carrying the debate from ten o'clock until two, is my understanding. Then on another date, we will hear about not having enough time to debate issues.

There is other legislation we could have introduced that the opposition members may actually disagree with, and we could have a real debate in the House.

Based on the respect I have for the member who just spoke, would it not have been a better use of the time of the House to deal with legislation and actually have a debate on other than the short title?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the chair of the justice committee for that question. I know that he was listening intently to my speech. As I pointed out in my speech earlier, the reason we are here debating this is that we have so few avenues in this House, because of the lack of democratic process, to raise valid concerns about legislation.

What we know about this particular piece of legislation is that, yes, it was referred to committee. There were only a couple of meetings allocated for it.

We have clearly stated in this House that we are supporting this very narrow bill, and we are raising concerns about the fact that the Conservative government has been in power since 2006 and has had nine years to deal with the very serious problems in the Correctional Service system with regard to drug and alcohol abuse, and it has done nothing about it.

The Conservatives introduced interdiction techniques, for \$122 million, around security measures that have not looked at prevention, harm reduction, and treatment. What are they doing to make sure that when prisoners are released they are reintegrated into a community in a way that keeps the community safe. What are they doing to keep the staff who work within Correctional Service Canada safe? We know that trafficking in illegal substances makes a workplace unsafe for staff and makes the living arrangements unsafe for the prisoners.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, following the comment my colleague just made and her speech, does she think it was a missed opportunity for the Conservatives to find real solutions, and not just the appearance of a solution?

As she quite rightly said, it is just a title, but in reality as in the bill itself, there is no solution that will really eradicate drugs from our prisons.

Does she believe the Conservatives have missed a good opportunity to really deal with the problem and find practical ways of solving it? Could today's budget also provide a practical and genuine opportunity to attack the problem? Does she think the Conservatives have let a good opportunity go by?

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I will start with the tail end of the question on the budget.

I am under no illusion that the government is actually going to take some of its responsibility for some of the most disadvantaged people in this country seriously and put the resources in to work with offenders with a view to keeping our communities safer. I did not get an opportunity to talk about aboriginal offenders, who are seriously over-represented in the federal correction system.

Government Orders

Everyone has to remember what the ultimate goal is. It is to keep our communities safer and to reduce recidivism. I have no confidence that the government is going to put any resources into the Correctional Service that will help us, as a country, meet that goal.

With regard to the bill as a missed opportunity, what is unfortunate is that this is not new information about drug use within the prison system. Correctional Service Canada itself has information that suggests that it is a serious problem. The office of the investigator actually took a look at the stats, and although they claim that there has been a slight reduction in the number of urinalysis that are showing positive results for drugs, in fact when some other things are removed, like legitimate prescription drug use, they plateau. Their methods are not affecting drug use within the prison system.

Correctional Service Canada, the Office of the Correctional Investigator, mental health professionals, the John Howard Society, the Elizabeth Fry Society, and the list goes on and on, all talk about the serious problem around substance abuse within the prisons, with people both entering and exiting the system with mental health and substance abuse problems.

This was an opportunity to actually do something meaningful instead of putting forward a bill that misleads the Canadian public about what the Conservative government is actually doing to create a drug-free prison system. It is a missed opportunity.

• (1310)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, carrying on with the theme of the budget that is coming up this afternoon, I know a lot of seniors are concerned about the pensions they are getting. This is another topic I have heard about many times in my community, where seniors are living in poverty. However, I am going to stick to the topic at hand, Bill C-12.

I was glad to see a Conservative member get up to actually ask a question. However, rather than asking a question, the member went on a rant about the title. He did not provide the answer to the question we have been asking all morning: How does the title relate to the actual content of the bill? The title includes the words “drug-free prisons”. However, what we have heard in the House from member after member of the official opposition is that the bill will actually do very little, if anything at all, to curb drugs in our prison system.

The government has an opportunity to invest in rehabilitation and treatment programs in the prison system. I know that most are not very optimistic that the government will take any sort of leadership role, which it has failed to do in the last nine years.

My question is to the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. Is this a trend with the government in regard to fancy titles for hollow legislation that does not actually address some of the very issues we need to address in this House?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, it is a very troubling trend. I cannot speak for the government. It is unfortunate that the Conservative government will not get up and explain how this piece of legislation actually contributes to drug-free prisons.

As I noted in my speech, the legislative summary clearly pointed out that drug testing has been going on in the prisons since the

1980s, and we have not seen a decrease in the use of drugs. Again, I need to point out that a lot of these drugs are smuggled in or brewed on site. Testing has not led to a decrease in the use of those illegal substances. They are illegal within the prison context.

There is nothing in this bill that indicates that simply continuing to do the drug testing they have already been doing since the 1980s and simply informing the Parole Board will change anything. The Parole Board still has the option of granting release, depending on the conditions.

It is not clear to me from this piece of legislation, or from any analysis I have seen on it, how this is going to contribute to a drug-free prison. The Conservative government has not stood up in this House and explained it to us.

The government wonders why we want to debate this. It is because it is asking us to roll over on a piece of legislation that does not do what the title says it is going to do. We have a responsibility to the Canadian public to raise concerns when legislation is brought forward. That is simply what we are doing here. We are exercising our democratic right to highlight concerns with a piece of legislation. I want to reiterate that we are supporting it, but we believe that much more needs to be done in order to keep our communities safer.

• (1315)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to rise in the House today to talk about Bill C-12.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Timmins—James Bay. I will therefore be speaking rather more briefly, but there is no harm done, as I will be leaving the floor to others.

As my colleagues have pointed out, we are going to support this bill. However, we see it as a little piece of paper that does not really solve the problem. It is a little something, but the drug problem in the prisons is a very large one. What is before us today is only a small part of the solution.

This bill provides for ineligibility for parole following a positive test or a refusal to provide a sample. I emphasize that this is already common practice. Drug tests and the refusal to provide a sample are already taken into consideration. That does not change much. It is nevertheless a step in the right direction. At least we are talking about the problem, which is a start. However, we believe the important thing is to create a safer environment for correctional staff, and one in which inmates or ex-inmates can be reintegrated into society and into the community. We have to create an environment in which they can take part in detoxification programs, one with programs and resources for inmates who are unfortunately drug-dependent.

It is also important that we address the problem of street gangs in prisons. It is often street gangs that produce drugs or alcohol inside prisons or arrange for drugs to be smuggled in. Obviously, the result is that the problem spreads and proliferates.

Government Orders

Street gangs and drugs can increase violence in prisons. This concerns me greatly because in Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, in the riding of Terrebonne—Blainville, there are three federal prisons. Many of my constituents work in one or other of the three. I have spoken to prison workers who are extremely concerned, because their working conditions are unsafe. The environment is not safe because we are not dealing with the problems of violence and street gangs. We are cutting budgets, resources and detoxification programs. We are also increasing the number of prisoners in the cells, with double-bunking, which can increase violence and the spread of gangs within prisons.

Ultimately, it creates a more dangerous work environment for corrections officers. We need to think of those people. They do an extremely difficult job. Not just anyone can do this job in a pressure-filled environment. These people work with prisoners and help protect society. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to do our best to ensure that our prisons are free of drugs and violence. We have a duty to reduce the presence of—if not eliminate—street gangs in prison.

• (1320)

This bill may have started with good intentions, but the government made our prisons less safe by reducing the budget for drug addiction programs by \$295 million, which is 10% of the total budget. This will obviously affect the programs, which are often the first targets of cuts to public safety.

However, these programs are essential to helping prisoners rehabilitate. If we want them to become productive members of society, we need to give them a chance to take part in drug treatment programs and free themselves of their addiction. If they have mental health problems, we need to give them the opportunity to participate in proper programs in order to receive care and get their condition under control. Unfortunately these programs fell victim to the Conservatives' budgets.

The government invested \$112 million in tools and technology to tackle the problem of drugs in prisons, but failed to achieve the hoped-for results. Now the Conservatives are trying something else. That seems logical to me. This bill might be part of that, but it lacks substance. All it does is reiterate what is already being done, such as screening.

To get to the root of the problem, we need to look at the big picture. If these people have addictions, we need to treat them. If drugs are available in prison, we have to tackle that problem. If drugs are banned in prison, why are they there? If it is because of street gangs, we need to go after street gangs. That seems logical to me, but unfortunately, that is not what is being done.

I talked about the importance of having programs that meet inmates' needs so that they can be reintegrated into the community and become productive members of society. However, the government reduced funding for these programs from \$11 million to \$9 million even as the prison population grew. That is not enough.

Another thing I wanted to point out, which the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers also pointed out, is that we all want to get rid of drugs in prisons. That is a sincere objective shared by us all. However, we need to be realistic. The union and many other

witnesses said that completely ridding prisons of drugs is not a realistic goal. That is important to remember.

The bill's short title is the "drug-free prisons act". We all want to get rid of drugs in prisons. That is not the issue here. However, we have to wonder if that is realistic. The experts say that it is not. Once again, we need to reframe the debate. Maybe that way we could achieve something.

I want to talk about programs again. I talked about how the budget for drug addiction programs and anti-gang programs was cut from \$11 million to \$9 million. In seven institutions surveyed in February 2012, only 12.5% of offenders were enrolled in a core correctional program, while 35% were on the waiting lists to access these programs. The waiting lists continue to grow, but institutions do not have the resources needed. It is critical that we address these problems.

In closing, I wish to reiterate our support for the idea of eliminating drugs from prisons, but I want to emphasize the need for resources and programs so that correctional officers can work in a safe environment.

• (1325)

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if my colleague would indulge me, I wonder if she could put herself in the minister's shoes for a moment and answer the following question: if she had been asked to try to eliminate drugs from prisons, would she have come up with a bill that has only five clauses or would she have presented a much more comprehensive solution?

What kind of action might she have taken to come up with a comprehensive solution to the problem of drugs in prisons?

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I believe that as a rule, MPs do not usually respond to hypothetical questions.

Nonetheless, in this case, I am being asked whether I, as minister, would introduce a bill with just five clauses to get rid of drugs in prisons, which is no small feat, and the answer is no. It takes a lot more than that.

We need to invest in programs and provide resources. There needs to be a serious commitment to the programs that the inmates have to have access to. There needs to be mental health care. This calls for a multi-faceted solution.

This bill is a piece of paper that may indeed have an impact, but it addresses just a small part of the problem and provides a small offering of potential solutions. What we really need is a greater commitment if we want drug-free prisons.

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask a second question.

Government Orders

I wonder if my colleague would indulge me in another hypothetical question. Does she think it is worth talking to provincial stakeholders to get the provinces' support when it comes to addiction services?

As we know, addicts are more likely to commit crimes in order to pay for their drugs, among other things. That is how they end up in prison.

In the member's opinion, is it also worth talking to provincial stakeholders to address the issue of addiction and mental health?

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague once again.

Yes, we must always work with the provinces, especially on such a broad issue as drug addiction. This problem affects many people. When someone has an addiction, they might do something they would not ordinarily do.

The keyword here is prevention. It would be fantastic if there were no more crime and if there were no more prisons because there were no more offenders. It would be fantastic if there were no addicts in Canada.

However, to make that happen we have to work on prevention. Prevention is vital. We need to consult the provinces and different organizations working in the community in order to come up with a proper prevention action plan. There must be consultation.

Unfortunately, on many occasions, we have seen that this government consulted no one. The Conservatives do their homework in their little corner, and if we do not agree with their decision they just brush us off and do not consult us. They do not consider our point of view and they move forward without consulting. That is unfortunate because there are opportunities to be seized, and we can work together on prevention.

Prevention is central to a discussion of public safety issues.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to rise in this House to represent the people of Timmins—James Bay.

The bill we are debating today, Bill C-12, the so-called drug-free prisons act, is a perfect bill for a Conservative government in the last tired dying months of its senile reign. It meets the three main criteria of a Conservative crime bill.

It has a bogus title that they would somehow create drug-free prisons, when their own studies say they are never going to deal with that and they need to come up with other solutions.

As a classic Conservative bill, it would not change anything. It is a windmill that the Conservatives are going to run at with their fake spears because the provisions already exist. They are saying they are going to ensure that the drug tests are brought before the Parole Board to stop these bad people from getting out. The Parole Board already has those powers. They are tying up more time in the House of Commons.

However, there is a third element that makes it a definitive Conservative crime bill, because these guys are not tough on crime,

they are dumb on crime. It is more wasted money. Do members know, and the folks back home, the terrible financial record of the current government that will blow money on anything that suits its ideology, like the F-35s that it was going to spend incredible amounts on?

The Conservatives have spent \$122 million on this program already, claiming that they are going to stop the drugs in prison. "We're going to get tough on those prisoners". After \$122 million, they have come up with nada, zero, doughnuts. They have not delivered on anything. Rather than going back and figuring out what they are doing wrong, they will just come up with another fake bill, with another fake title, offering very little.

Why this is of concern is that this is a government that has run on its so-called tough on crime agenda with one bill after another without ever coming forward with focused, coherent legislation that, number one, can meet the test of the charter and is not a waste of money. Our present justice minister has had more recalls than the Ford Pinto, in terms of his legislation. It costs Canadian taxpayers about \$100,000 a year to incarcerate a prisoner. That is an enormous amount of money that is being wasted in prisons.

I am not saying that we do not need prisons to hold people. However, if we are going to spend up to \$100,000 a year holding each of them, we could certainly divert a lot of that money toward smart crime prevention, which is to keep people out of the prison system. The fact that we do not factor in is the enormous financial, emotional and psychological damage that happens to our society when someone gets into the system in the first place.

We need to look at where solutions exist, where good grassroots solutions exist, so that we can actually find ways to cut the recidivism rates and ensure that we are pulling people out of the prison system and out of the nightmare of drug addiction and drug trading.

I have seen a few really good models at the grassroots level of how we could actually be smart on crime. For example, just recently in Timmins we launched a fentanyl task force. Fentanyl has become a major problem. It has replaced what was the OxyContin epidemic. I have noticed, in many of the communities that had never dealt with opiate addictions before Oxy became very street available, that a lot of people got caught up in Oxy who would not normally have got caught up in Oxy. It created a market for heroin synthetic opiates. Now, with the Oxy market being squeezed off, fentanyl has become the new drug of choice. Fentanyl is extremely dangerous. It is a patch that is meant to deliver a synthetic heroin over a three-day period. If people cut it up and smoke it, they might end up getting the full shot in one go, which will stop the heart. I have seen young people who have died from fentanyl, and these were good young people. These were people with their whole lives ahead of them who thought this was a party drug, and it is not.

Government Orders

In the city of Timmins, as they have done in so many other communities, we have started a grassroots response of bringing people together, asking, “How do we learn from each other? How do we start dealing with the trade in fentanyl?” However, we obviously need the federal government involved because we need a way of tracking the fentanyl patches. It is not simply a matter of someone taking their uncle's or their grandmother's patch off them when they are getting cancer treatment; there is a trade that is going on in fentanyl that is much bigger.

● (1330)

The impact here is that we have the demand of people who are being brought into addiction, thinking that it is a party drug and this drug could actually kill them. We have to do the public awareness on that, but there is the supply issue. If it is a lucrative enough market, we are going to get into the gangs and a very illegal trade by people who do need to be put away. However, we need a way of tracking them and working with police.

At the grassroots level, what we have done in the Timmins area with the fentanyl task force is try to find ways to come up with smart solutions from the grassroots up so that we are, first of all, preventing the casualties, deaths and overdoses that are costing our families terrible emotional strain, as well as costing the medical and prison systems. We are also trying to find a way to track these patches back to the source so that we can cut off that trade. We need the federal government to show some leadership on this. That is one important element.

I was at a very fascinating conference just this past week in Timmins, led by Brent Kalinowski, who spent 27 years on the Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, police force. Brent was bringing to Timmins a program that is working very well in North Bay, and it is working in Saskatchewan and some other communities, where they create a community hub. Brent explained this really well when he talked about the years that he had spent in policing, going after the bad guys after the fact, after the damage had been done, and after the families' lives had been ruined. At that point, what can we do with these characters except put them in jail?

We are dealing with enormous costs to the medical system, to the prison system, and to families who might never recover if it is an act of violence. Brent said that after 25 years of doing this, he felt that there needed to be a smarter way of getting people before they get too far into the system. That is a really important issue. There is nothing soft or namby-pamby about diverting people out of the prison system. When we put someone into the prison system, we are putting them into a university of humiliation and a university of crime. That is not where we want our graduates coming from, so whoever we can divert from that, we are making smart, grassroots responses.

The hub response that is working very well in North Bay and that we have talked about bringing into Timmins is one where we bring the key organizations together, including the school boards, the addiction experts and the police, and identify individuals. We do not give the person's name, but we could say that we have a 13-year-old female who overdosed twice and was in the emergency ward, and we think that this may be the scene of a need for greater intervention. The school would say that it has her and that she has been missing

school five, six, or seven days in a row. One of the counsellors would say that they have been dealing with her and what is actually happening is that a boyfriend has moved in and it has become an abusive situation.

All of the little pieces of the puzzle around this hub become identified. We have a problem here. This could end up flaming into a much more serious condition. They put a team together to go and meet the family, the mother and daughter, and say “How can we help?” It might seem like an extremely simple solution, and it might seem that it would not work, but it is amazing, they say, how quickly people are willing to open their door and say “Thank God. Come in. Can we make you a coffee? How can we divert our child from this crisis?”

It goes all the way up through various issues. We start to see the symptoms in someone who is starting to miss school when they are young, starting to get in trouble, or starting to appear again and again in the emergency ward. These are people who either become victims of violence or victims of crime, or become criminals themselves. Once they have identified someone who has had months of skipping school, certain schools would say that they will just suspend them permanently. They are suspended, they are out there and they are not being helped. The emergency ward just puts them back out on the streets.

We need a smarter way. If we are going to get them to the prison system and waste \$100,000 a year, plus all of the other costs that the system incurs, and then spend \$122 million to stop them doing drugs in prison, there has to be a smarter way of doing this. We are seeing some really good grassroots models coming from police and community organizations. That is where the House of Commons needs to start working to say that we can be a lot smarter on crime, rather than always spending the enormous amounts of money after the fact and after it is too late.

● (1335)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague across the way. Certainly, we have a lot of differences on many of these issues, but one thing that we do agree on is the importance of investing in programs that will help to reduce recidivism. During the break weeks, I had the honour of announcing some large funds for a group in my riding that is doing work in that area, helping prisoners who have been released to re-enter society in a way that will help them to not reoffend.

It is important to note that currently, there are 1,500 drug seizures each year in the prisons. It would seem like common sense that we should not have drugs in our prisons, but the reality is that we do.

I have one simple question for my colleague. If inmates are doing drugs in prison, what does he think the likelihood is of them successfully staying off drugs after their release from prison or when they are on parole? What is the likelihood of that happening if we are actually providing drugs for them while they are in prison?

Government Orders

● (1340)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. colleague would agree with me that if prisoners are doing drugs in prison, it is a problem, but there is certainly a huge problem when the government spent \$122 million trying to stop drugs from getting into prisons, they are still in there, and the solution in this bill is to allow the Parole Board to look at drug tests, when it already has that power. We need to look at other options.

The concern I have if there are people dealing with drugs in prison, and there is a high percentage of people with mental illness, where are the plans in place to make sure they are getting training? People in prison need to be re-educated. If they are doing drugs in prison, they are going to come out doing drugs and are going to carry on the cycle of violence. The fact is that simply naming a bill the drug-free prisons act will not stop this problem. We need to look at the smart solutions, and the smart solutions will deal with the prison population and making sure that there are ways of retraining them out of this destructive lifestyle.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know, in the opinion of my colleague, what the best objectives are if we want to stop someone's addiction. We are talking about people in jail, but in communities what is the best treatment? Is it just to say drugs are illegal and people should not take them or provide professional resources that they will benefit from and maybe stop their addictions?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, as a nurse, my colleague certainly knows the impacts of misusing fentanyl. We do not want people playing with these drugs because they are killers. This is the differentiation from people going to a party and smoking pot. When people smoke a synthetic opioid, they can die as soon as they do it.

Number one is that we need to work with our communities for public awareness, to say these are not party drugs we are talking about. We need to make sure that the supply is not going into the communities. What we are seeing in rural areas, which is surprising us, is the rise of hard drugs. Before we knew of cocaine and other drugs, but heroine coming in is going to bring gangs. When gang violence comes in, heavy organized crime comes in. We need to get back to the source. Again, on the issue of fentanyl, we need to find out where these patches are coming from and cut off the source, because we do not want that kind of organized gang violence coming into our communities.

At the end of the day, we have to go back to the model that I talked about, the hub approach, where we start to identify people when they are young and getting themselves into trouble. If we can divert any of them from the system, it will save us enormous amounts of money, the emotional heartache that it brings to families, and the lost opportunities that we are seeing in our communities when people fall into this and end up losing or ruining their lives.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do with respect to Bill C-12 is go over the summary of the bill, provide a few specific quotes, and then give some observations.

The summary of Bill C-12 states:

This enactment amends the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to require the Parole Board of Canada (or a provincial parole board, if applicable) to cancel

parole granted to an offender if, before the offender's release, the offender tests positive in a urinalysis, or fails or refuses to provide a urine sample, and the Board considers that the criteria for granting parole are no longer met. It also amends that Act to clarify that any conditions set by a releasing authority on an offender's parole, statutory release or unescorted temporary absence may include conditions regarding the offender's use of drugs or alcohol, including in cases when that use has been identified as a risk factor in the offender's criminal behaviour.

In reading the summary, it is obvious why the bill will likely receive support for its passage from all parties in the chamber.

I would like to take a different approach to debating Bill C-12. Let me start off by talking about the short title. I have often talked about where these short titles come from. I have suggested in the past and will continue to maintain today that when the government comes up with legislation, it goes directly to the Prime Minister's Office where the individuals there come up with the short title. The short title of this bill is the drug-free prisons act. If we think in terms of the implications of making a title of a bill, what sort of impression are we giving to Canadians?

I would like to focus on the 2011-12 annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator, which made the following observation with respect to the prevalence of drugs within our federal prisons:

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.

One of the biggest issues I have with the Conservative government is the type of propaganda and political spin it puts on the legislation it brings to the House of Commons. We see this yet again with Bill C-12. The Government of Canada and the Prime Minister are trying to give the impression that if we pass this legislation there will be drug-free prisons. If the Conservatives were honest with Canadians, which is a rarity with this government, they would acknowledge that achieving a drug-free prison is not as easy as just saying it in the title of a bill and then having 308 members of Parliament voting in favour of the legislation.

Government Orders

I have had the responsibility of being the justice critic at the provincial level. As a justice critic, I had the opportunity to tour a number of prisons in the province of Manitoba, such as the remand centre, where individuals will often be brought to stay overnight or while awaiting trial, and the Headingley Correctional Centre, which is a provincial jail where prisoners with sentences under two years are sent. I have also had the opportunity to visit federal penitentiaries such as Stony Mountain. I believe that the government has not done its homework with respect to dealing with our correctional institutions, jails and prisons. I suspect Manitoba is not that unique and that the issues I am referring to with respect to the province of Manitoba are applicable no matter where one goes in Canada, and even beyond Canada's borders, as we have been told by our professionals, which is that drugs are a reality in our prisons and that there is a need for the government to do more.

● (1345)

The Office of the Correctional Investigator said that a comprehensive and integrated drug strategy should include a balance of measures: prevention, treatment, harm reduction and interdiction. That is in the 2011-12 annual report. The information is actually there. If the government really wants to deal with the issue, there is plenty of information to assist it in bringing forward legislation.

Also, especially today, when we are talking about crime and prisons, things which Canadians are very much concerned about, the budget will be released in a few hours from now and the government is going to set its priorities. Would it not be wonderful if we saw a government that had the common sense to understand that it takes more than just the Prime Minister and his minister who is responsible to wave a wand and to improve the system. There is an obligation to meet with the different stakeholders. There is an obligation to work with the provinces and the provincial ministers who are responsible for the administration of justice in those jurisdictions.

We need to look at how we can work with our correctional officers. I would suggest that our correctional officers are one of the greatest assets we have as legislators in terms of being able to deal with the issues in our prisons. When we ignore the potential of consulting and working with those correctional officers, we set ourselves up for what I would suggest is a situation that could ultimately cost lives.

When I was an MLA, there was a riot in the Headingley jail. A number of factors were involved. I cannot say 100%, but I would be surprised if drugs were not involved in one fashion or another in terms of what took place in that riot. I suspect if we took the time to meet with our correctional officers, we would get a better understanding of why drugs continue to be such a significant factor in our prisons today.

We have not seen that. We have not seen this goodwill from the majority government. It comes right from the Prime Minister's Office. Many times we have been critical of the Prime Minister because he does even recognize the need to have first ministers' conferences. What message does that send to his ministers about having ministerial conferences? To what degree has the Minister of Public Safety met with the attorneys general or ministers of justice in different provinces? After all, the Prime Minister feels he does not

have to meet with the premiers on a regular basis. He is the first Prime Minister in a generation plus that has ignored the need for a meeting with first ministers. I suspect that has a lot to do with the same attitudes that the ministers across the way have.

The Minister of Public Safety is not working with our provincial ministers. If he worked and consulted with the different stakeholders, including the provincial ministers, I would suggest that we would be debating better legislation than what we have today. We are getting close to an election. The Prime Minister's motivation for a number of years has been how to get re-elected. It is all about power, but at the end of the day, what we want to see is good governance.

● (1350)

The Prime Minister more than his predecessors has been found wanting in being able to deliver to Canadians solid programs that will make a difference. The Conservatives want to talk about drugs in jails. Yes, we and our constituents are concerned about drugs in jails, but the Liberal caucus is concerned about what is being done to prevent crimes in the first place. These are the types of issues which I believe Canadians want us to debate in the chamber, as opposed to a piece of legislation that is meant to do one thing alone, which is to make a couple of modifications. The PMO has come up with a wonderful short title, the drug-free prisons act, to give the impression that the Conservatives are really tough on crime, tough on convicts and that they are going to get rid of drugs in prisons.

I have news for the Prime Minister. His plan is not going to work. Canadians are seeing more and more the degree to which the Conservatives talk a lot but their actions have been found wanting. Canadians have a higher expectation of government. They want government to deliver on the issues that are important to them. We will get a very good sense of that today when the budget comes down. Where is the government's emphasis going to be?

The other day I was here and we were talking about the exploitation of children. Cybertechnology was the issue. The Internet's impact on the exploitation of children in Canada continues to grow. The Conservatives again had a piece of legislation which tried to give the impression that they were actually doing something on the issue, but the reality is that the RCMP that was tasked with the responsibility of dealing with the issue was underspending its budget by 10%. Millions of dollars were not being spent in order to create a false impression that there will be a balanced budget.

It is the same principle here as it was there. On the one hand, we have legislation that talks tough, but the actions in the budget will say something entirely different. What was so horrendous about that private member's bill is that we were talking about children who were being exploited through the Internet, and the government was underspending on the RCMP which was investigating and trying to lock up individuals who were doing that exploitation.

On the legislation before us, to what degree have the Conservatives done their homework?

Statements by Members

I am only making an assumption, but sometimes that could be a big mistake in itself especially if it is related to the Conservative government, but have there been any members other than the Minister of Justice who have visited the prisons? To what degree have the Conservatives visited some of our prisons in Canada? They could gain a lot by going out and taking the time to get a better understanding of what is actually taking place in the real world. That applies to more than just prisons.

I have had the opportunity to talk to Correctional Service officers. They are very much concerned about the issue of safety, not only the safety of the prisoners but equally, and in the minds of many, more importantly, the safety of the institution and the guards themselves.

We have seen double-bunking and triple-bunking take place. To what degree is the government bringing in programs that will take some of the pressure off convicts who are taking drugs in prison?

• (1355)

What kind of action is the government prepared to take? Do we, for example, have drug detection dogs going through prisons? What about new detection equipment? If we talk to correctional officers, they tell us about the need for searches and how important they are. However, they will also tell us about the importance of being able to look at the issue in a holistic approach.

When I think of a holistic approach to deal with our prisons and jails, it is not just Ottawa that is responsible. The administration of justice goes beyond Ottawa and incorporates our provinces as well. They play a vital, critical role with regard to what happens in our jails, as do other stakeholders, whether it is law enforcement officers or the different groups out there.

The message I have for the government is that it is great to see this bill, but I question the motives of the naming of the bill. I would sure love to see some resources allocated that will make a real difference for Canadians in dealing with—

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The Chair regrets having to interrupt the hon. member for Winnipeg North at this point. He will have three minutes remaining when this matter next returns before the House. The time for government orders has expired.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

LEGION OF HONOUR

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Mr. Peter Poohkey of Airdrie, Alberta, on receiving the French Légion d'honneur.

The Légion d'honneur is France's highest honour, and it is being awarded to all living Canadian veterans of the Second World War who participated in the D-Day landings and therefore contributed to the liberation of France.

[Translation]

This honour represents the unique and special relationship between France and Canada, which is based on the common values and the freedom that we defend.

[English]

I was honoured to join Mr. Peter Poohkey's proud family, his comrades at the Royal Canadian Legion Airdrie Branch No. 288, as well as his many friends from the Balzac United Church in celebrating this very prestigious honour on April 7.

I thank him and all of the other Canadian heroes who have served and sacrificed so that we could remain free.

* * *

[Translation]

WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY DAY

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, April 26 is World Intellectual Property Day. This year's theme is "Get up, stand up. For music." The music that we listen to today comes from artists around the world, but in the era of globalization and the Internet, we need to ensure that those who make our cultural identity so vibrant, our Quebec and Canadian creators, can make a living from their art.

That is why the NDP believes that we need a better balance between the rights of creators and the rights of users. We have been speaking out for a long time about the government's failure to listen when it comes to this issue. The experts are clear that intellectual property and high-quality patents promote innovation and the creation of good-paying jobs. Today, it is essential to see the protection of intellectual property as a way for Canadian businesses to succeed in the digital era.

Canadians deserve a dynamic digital economy in which they can benefit from opportunities to innovate. On World Intellectual Property Day, let us be proud of our Canadian creators. Their work deserves to be recognized and protected.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-INDIA RELATIONS

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a proud Indo-Canadian and as a member of the international trade committee, I was very encouraged by the positive results for Canadian businesses from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bilateral visit to Canada last week.

Not only were 16 commercial agreements worth over \$1.6 billion and six significant initiatives between Canada and India finalized, both Prime Ministers also agreed to complete the road map to finalize a comprehensive economic partnership agreement by September 2015. This agreement will significantly expand trade between Canada and India.

Statements by Members

On behalf of 1.2 million Indo-Canadians, I would like to thank Prime Minister Modi for his visit, and thank our Prime Minister for extending Canada's hospitality. I am proud of our Prime Minister's leadership in strengthening Canada's relationship with India, and opening trade opportunities in this growing market of over 1.2 billion people.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throughout our history, Liberal governments in particular have welcomed immigrants from across the world who chose Canada as their home, immigrant, who worked hard not only for their families but for our country.

In return for their help to build a stronger Canada, we have offered a pathway to citizenship and a chance to more fully join the communities they helped to create.

Across the GTA I have heard from many people in communities who are feeling abandoned as they wait to be deported after working so hard in Canada. I heard in particular from people in the Portuguese community, many of whom support families back home with their earnings, who will not be allowed to come back and see their extended families for at least four years.

Now they are back to square one. Many applied for permanent residency and should be allowed to stay through that process and have their work permits extended. These women and men came to Canada to provide a better life for their families. They worked hard and they deserve new pathways to citizenship. Instead, the Conservative government is turning away these nation builders.

* * *

EARTH WEEK

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to kick off Earth Week, I had the great privilege of taking part in a tree planting event at Brantford's new "Forest in the City." The community has embraced the wonderful idea to develop a new urban forest inside an existing industrial park. The project has become a reality, thanks to the hard work of the Brantford/Brant Tree Coalition and project champion Chuck Beach.

With 37,000 trees planted, 2015 marks year four of a five-year plan, with the project well on its way to surpassing the goal of 50,000 trees planted in five years. The new forest includes walking trails so residents can hike and appreciate the diverse ecosystems that are being created. The project has also been supported generously by the city of Brantford, the Grand River Conservation Authority and local businesses, as well as a grant from CN.

New forest in the city is an idea that is growing into a very special place in beautiful Brantford.

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week was National Volunteer Week. In Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, we have hundreds of volunteers who dedicate themselves to making their fellow citizens' lives easier and more beautiful every day. Every minute they spend being involved makes our community richer and better.

This year as always, the teams running volunteer centres and meals on wheels and their volunteers travelled the streets of Saint-Bruno and Saint-Hubert to provide hot meals and help with organizations. They also helped people prepare their tax returns. They accompanied people to the hospital and did so many other little things that mean so much to our community.

On behalf of all of the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, I would like to thank them.

I urge all of my colleagues here in the House to honour the work of the volunteers active in our communities.

* * *

[*English*]

ISLAMIC STATE

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we stand proud that Canada is joining our allies in the fight against ISIS. Due to the competence of our Canadian Forces, we are punching above our weight alongside our allies in this important mission.

Recently Colonel Sean Boyle of 22 Wing/CFB North Bay has been elevated to Canada's air task commander, Operation Impact in the Middle East. Our former wing commander has an exceptional record of service that will ensure Canada continues to perform above expectations.

Operation Impact aims to halt and degrade ISIL's presence in Iraq and Syria. To date, Impact has degraded ISIL's control by 25%.

Commander Sean Boyle's community and country are solidly behind him.

I ask my colleagues in the House to join with me in recognizing the leadership of Commander Boyle and the many Canadians in uniform who continue to serve and protect our great nation.

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LIVE BELOW THE LINE

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1.75 a day. Forty-five percent of all child deaths have malnutrition as an underlying cause. A child who gets proper nutrition is 33% more likely to escape poverty as an adult.

Statements by Members

Each year a number of organizations, including Results Canada, encourage Canadians to become more aware of the cause of fighting world poverty. One way to highlight that fight is for people to take the “Live Below the Line” challenge, and limit their food and drink for five days to whatever they can buy with \$1.75 a day.

Along with hundreds of Canadians and some colleagues in the House, I will take that challenge next week.

My five day budget of \$8.75 will include two bagels, three cups of oats, one potato, one yam, one bunch of carrots, one onion, four cups of beans, rice, lentils and peas, five tea bags, which will get very well used, and all the tap water I can drink.

It is a heck of a way to start a summer diet, but I invite colleagues and all Canadians to Google “Live Below the Line”, take the challenge or simply donate to the cause of fighting world hunger. My stomach is growling in anticipation, already.

* * *

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the government announced the name of the consortium it has selected to rebuild the Champlain Bridge.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives are determined to impose a toll that no one wants, which is going to cause terrible congestion and will result in huge economic losses for the people and businesses of the south shore. Furthermore, we still do not know how much users will have to pay to cross the new Champlain Bridge.

[English]

People of my riding of Brossard—La Prairie want to know how much profit the PPP will be making on their back.

[Translation]

The Conservatives' mismanagement does not end there. Although they are talking about a \$3-billion to \$5-billion project, they are refusing to ensure that there will be economic spinoffs for our communities.

Given this mismanagement and lack of transparency, only the leader of the NDP has the experience and the solutions needed to replace the Conservatives and repair the damage they have done.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

JEWISH HISTORICAL EVENTS

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this month Jews in Canada and around the world will mark three historical events.

On April 15, Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, was an opportunity for Canadians to pay tribute to the six million Jews who were murdered at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators. It is also a time to raise awareness about the Holocaust and to combat anti-Semitism.

Tonight at sundown begins Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Day of Remembrance for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terror. On this solemn day, we pay tribute to those who tragically lost their lives defending Israel's right to exist in peace and security.

Yom Hazikaron concludes with the start of Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day. This year marks 67 years of independence for the Jewish state.

Our Conservative government is proud to celebrate not only Israel's independence, but the strong friendship between Canada and Israel that is based on shared values of freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Am Yisrael Chai.

* * *

MEMBER FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA SOUTHERN INTERIOR

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I ride off into the sunset later on this year, I would like to pay tribute to all those who made the past nine years the most enriching experience of my life. I thank my wife Ann and my staff, both past and present, for their loyalty and service to our constituents.

To those front-line activists who are advocating for a better world, it has been an honour to stand by them.

To the members of my party who are always there for every election, I thank them for their confidence in me. One such person is my brother George, here with me today, who together with his wife Gloria have been truly an inspiration to me.

To all those in Ottawa who make this a very pleasant place to work—custodians, maintenance workers, restaurant and cafeteria staff, security personnel, post office staff, House of Commons and NDP staff—I thank them for their professionalism and dedication.

[Translation]

Lastly, I want to thank all of my colleagues, from all political parties in the House, for the respect they have shown me. It has been, and continues to be, an honour to work with them. I wish everyone all the best in their future endeavours.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents know that our Conservative government believes in keeping more money in the pockets of Canadian families. That is why we continue to lower taxes and why the Minister of Finance will table a balanced budget in the House today.

For example, the new family tax cut and enhanced universal child care benefit will benefit 100% of families with kids, the vast majority of benefits going to low- and middle-income families.

The Liberals and the NDP want to raise taxes on the middle class. That is why we are the only ones Canadians can trust to lower taxes and balance the budget.

* * *

BUD INGS

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remember a great man, a great Prince Edward Islander, and a great Liberal.

Born in Mount Herbert on February 5, 1926, Bud Ings grew up on the family farm and later established his long-running, well-known, and successful veterinary practice on Prince Edward Island, first in Fortune, then in Montague, and finally in Brudenell.

Along the way, Bud was elected in 1970 to the Liberal government of Alex Campbell and served as minister of agriculture, health, and social services. He later became president of the Liberal Party of Prince Edward Island, contributed to the establishment of the Atlantic Veterinary College and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, was a member of many community boards and an avid musician, photographer, and author, writing two award-winning books documenting his successful veterinary career.

With Bud's passing, our province lost one of its greatest sons, and his family lost a wonderful father and grandfather. There was no one else like Bud. He will be sorely missed

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr Speaker, our government increased the amount Canadians can earn tax free and removed over one million Canadians from the tax rolls. We cut the GST, introduced pension income splitting, and created the family tax cut with benefits to help 100% of families with children.

We created important tax credits, like the credit for first time home buyers and the credit for family caregivers. Our government's tax relief will save the typical family of four in Don Valley West nearly \$6,600 this year.

However, the Liberals and NDP would raise taxes. According to media, the Liberal leader has claimed he can convince Canadians to accept a tax hike. Meanwhile the NDP would raise the cost of gas, groceries, and everything else with its carbon tax.

Stay tuned. Despite the opposition's high-tax plans, our government will table a budget today that will continue to make life more affordable for Canadians.

* * *

•(1415)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in question period the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister did again what Canadians find reprehensible. He ran away from serious questions.

Just a few months ago Canadians were outraged by this member's refusal to answer clear questions from the Leader of the Opposition

Oral Questions

about Canada's mission in Iraq. He eventually gave a theatrical and tearful apology. However, yesterday, in response to clear questions from New Democrats about Senate residency requirements for a senator who campaigned for him in the last election, he went back to his cynical old tricks. So much for his full apology and the tears he shed in the House.

The lack of respect Conservatives have shown the House is at a new low. Canadians deserve better, and they can trust that an NDP government will answer questions in question period, will give Parliament the respect it deserves, and will fix the damage the Conservatives have done. Respect for Parliament is only an election away, and that is good news for Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our plan to keep taxes low for families is working.

Under our Conservative government, the tax burden on Canadians is at its lowest level in over 50 years. Every family with children will benefit from the new family tax cut.

The family tax cut and the improved universal child care benefit will put more money in the pockets of every family with children. We know that the Liberals and the NDP would increase taxes on the middle class. Canadians know that our government is the only one they can trust to lower taxes.

Together, we look forward to learning about the measures for families that are included in the balanced budget that the Minister of Finance is presenting this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister maintain that Mike Duffy was a resident of Prince Edward Island when he, the Prime Minister and leader of the government, appointed him to the Senate?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a constitutional practice with regard to this that dates back almost 150 years.

[English]

Obviously, the matters to which the member refers are really Mr. Duffy's expenditures, which as we know, are right now before the courts. While the government is assisting the Crown with its case, we are not going to comment on testimony before the court.

Oral Questions

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, actually what we are talking about is the Prime Minister's decision to name him. We are not talking about Duffy's expenses. The Prime Minister is going to have to talk to the lawyers who are now pleading this case, because they say that it was the government that named him irregularly.

[Translation]

Mike Duffy helped 74 members of Parliament because he was doing something out of the ordinary. In return for being appointed to the Senate when he did not live in Prince Edward Island, he was going to help 74 government members.

Does the Prime Minister not realize that everyone now understands that the only reason he appointed Mike Duffy was so that he would raise money for his Conservative Party and his government?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we followed a parliamentary practice that has been in place for nearly 150 years.

[English]

The issue before the court, as we know, is Mr. Duffy's expenditures, just as when we are talking about residence the issue is also expenditures with the leader of the NDP. The residence of the Parliament of Canada is Ottawa. It is not Saskatchewan, Quebec, or everywhere else where he tried to use parliamentary funds to establish party offices. That was obviously incorrect, and that money should be paid back.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his deal with Mike Duffy, Nigel Wright agreed that, if asked, the Prime Minister would make a public statement confirming that Mike Duffy met the residency requirements to sit as a senator from Prince Edward Island. The Prime Minister went ahead and made that very statement five days later on February 27, 2013, when he claimed that Duffy was a P.E.I. resident. However, now the government's own prosecutors are saying just the opposite in court. In fact, they are saying that it was not true.

Is the Prime Minister claiming that the government's own lawyers are now misleading the court?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, what I am saying is that there is a whole series of charges against Mr. Duffy that relate to his improper use of public funds. Obviously I am not going to comment on those matters.

We have assisted the RCMP in its investigation. We have been assisting the Crown in its prosecution of this case, but obviously I will leave the evidence before the court to be decided on its merits.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now 60 Canadian business leaders are speaking out against the Conservatives' Bill C-51:

...this proposed legislation will undermine international trust in Canada's technology sector, thereby stifling the kinds of business our...companies can generate....[O]perators of online platforms...[fear the] risk of criminal sanction for activities carried out on their sites.

With senior business leaders now siding with the NDP against the Conservatives' Bill C-51, will the Prime Minister finally withdraw this attack on Canadians' rights and freedoms?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the NDP has never supported one serious anti-terrorism measure ever, in any Parliament in this country. The reality is that these measures are strongly supported by Canadians.

These measures parallel the kinds of authorities that other national security and police agencies have in other countries. As a matter of fact, it is absolutely unacceptable that websites or the Internet would be used for terrorist recruitment purposes. It should be a crime, and it will be a crime when this legislation passes.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all of civil society is opposed to Bill C-51, and rightly so. Scholars have shown that it violates our rights and freedoms, environmentalists are worried about their freedom of expression, and now corporate leaders are saying that it is bad for business. The only ones who support the Prime Minister are the members of the Liberal Party.

Why does the Prime Minister refuse to listen to reason? Why is he ignoring everyone and why in this case is he ignoring even the most respected business people in the country?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, most Canadians support the government on this.

However, the Liberal Party can read the polls. That is the reality of the situation. We expect a strong response. Our law enforcement agencies, like those of other countries, have the powers necessary to counter jihadist forces. That is essential, and we will continue to act to protect Canadians.

I would also like to commend the police in Montreal for the arrests they have made and the work they have done in response to these incidents.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the government's plan to double tax-free savings account contribution limits is regressive, with benefits mostly going to wealthy Canadians. In fact, the PBO says that under this plan, gains for the wealthy will be 10 times those of other Canadian households.

First income splitting, now this. Why does the Prime Minister continue to prioritize tax breaks for the rich?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, of the some 11 million Canadians who have been involved in TFSAs, the vast majority are people of modest or middle-class incomes. The vast majority. It is fulfilling a promise we made.

Oral Questions

I know why the Liberal Party and the NDP oppose these tax reductions. It is because they want to hike taxes on hard-working, middle-class Canadians because they need that money to give to bureaucracy to fund their priorities.

Hard-working, middle-class Canadians want more of their own money in their own pockets.

• (1425)

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government cynically plans to spend billions on income splitting and increases to TFSAs, both of which overwhelmingly benefit wealthy Canadians. At the same time, it is increasing the retirement age to 67 from 65, putting the retirement security of our seniors at risk.

Why is the Prime Minister giving tax breaks to the wealthy, instead of ensuring that our seniors can retire in dignity?

[Translation]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have cut taxes for all Canadian families and all Canadian seniors.

We instituted income splitting for seniors, and the Liberal Party voted against it. We introduced the largest increase in the guaranteed income supplement for our seniors, and the Liberal Party voted against it. It always votes against benefits for the middle class and tax cuts. It always votes against putting money in taxpayers' pockets. The Liberals want money for themselves.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government plans to spend billions of dollars to help the wealthiest Canadians by introducing income splitting and increasing the TFSA contribution limit. At the same time, the retirement age will increase from 65 to 67, jeopardizing the financial security of our seniors.

Why is the Prime Minister giving the wealthiest Canadians more tax breaks rather than helping our retirees live in dignity?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we cut the taxes of all Canadian seniors. Furthermore, middle-class seniors and people of modest means received the largest cuts. That is the reality.

However, the Liberal Party and the NDP always oppose tax cuts for these people because they want this money to go to the bureaucracy. We want this money to remain in the pockets of our taxpayers and our seniors.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, former Senate law clerk Mark Audcent has testified that it was the business of the Prime Minister's Office to vet Senate appointees to see if they were actually eligible to sit in the Senate. On the day that Mike Duffy was nominated, the media pointed out that Duffy, as a resident of Kanata, did not actually have the right to represent Prince Edward Island. In response, the Prime Minister's spokesman, Dimitri Soudas, assured Canadians that Duffy would take the steps to become eligible, but that did not happen.

Can the Prime Minister explain why he failed to follow through on the promise to ensure that Duffy actually became a resident of Prince Edward Island and, therefore, eligible for that housing allowance?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the constitutional practice on this has been clear for almost 150 years, but what it suggests to me is that the member is actually trying to make a victim out of Mike Duffy. Mr. Duffy is not a victim here. He is accused, after an independent audit, after an RCMP investigation, and, ultimately, the Crown believes that he committed fraud. We will see what the court says on that matter, but I am very surprised, now, to hear the NDP trying to make a victim out of this senator accused of such serious crimes.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, maybe I will have to start this again because it is the issue of Duffy's eligibility, which the Senate has said was the role of the Prime Minister and it was his eligibility to sit that was the centre of the negotiations in the backroom, with Nigel Wright, in the Prime Minister's Office, which led to the bribery charge.

According to the RCMP, the audit was whitewashed on the issue of residency. Then the Prime Minister stood on February 27, 2013, to state that:

...all senators conform to the residency requirements. ...those [residency] requirements have been clear for 150 years.

Would the Prime Minister explain on what basis he considered Mike Duffy to be eligible for this housing allowance and a resident of Prince Edward Island?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, as I just said and as the Prime Minister said, the constitutional practice on this has been clear for almost 150 years.

Mr. Duffy is not a victim here. I cannot believe, now, that the NDP is trying to suggest that Mr. Duffy is a victim. Is it because the NDP is accused of doing the exact same thing, pretending that it was hiring people to work in an office in Ottawa when, really, these people were being housed in Montreal, in a partisan office, using House of Commons resources, against the rules, accumulating \$2.7 million worth of illegal expenses?

• (1430)

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has a duty to comply with constitutional requirements when appointing senators.

The parliamentary secretary told the press that it was up to the Senate to follow the rules, but that is not true. The Prime Minister is responsible for ensuring that constitutional rules are followed.

Why did he not follow them?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, constitutional practice has been quite clear on this for more than 150 years.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

However, what is also clear is that one is not allowed to use House of Commons resources for partisan political purposes.

Now, this member used more than \$25,000 of House of Commons resources for political purposes.

The member for Scarborough Southwest took it to a different level. He took almost \$140,000 worth of resources that would have been used in his constituency and funnelled it to an illegal office in Montreal.

They should pay it back.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this may surprise you but I agree with my colleague.

Indeed, for 150 years, the rules for appointing senators have been clear: it is the responsibility of the Prime Minister. That is what we are saying. Even government lawyers agree with us on this.

Why was it so important to break the rules in order to appoint Senator Duffy? Why? Was it for his skills, his expertise and his great care in managing public property, or was it because they wanted to use Senator Duffy to do something other than study bills?

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a member who owes Canadian taxpayers more than \$122,000. In fact, he owes them \$122,122. He can repay the money that he illegally took from Canadian taxpayers by a money order. I am not sure if they take credit cards. I know he knows how to write cheques because he wrote 29 separate cheques to the separatist party in Quebec. I would encourage him to use one of these methods to repay the money he took illegally from the taxpayers of Canada.

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*[Translation]***FOOD SAFETY**

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is taking unacceptable risks with food safety.

The union representing meat inspectors has sounded the alarm and is speaking out about a serious shortage of inspectors in Quebec. Quebecers want the products on their plate to be of high quality. However, the government insists on off-loading its food inspection responsibilities onto the companies so that they can regulate themselves.

Why are the Conservatives giving up on food safety for Canadians?

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want high-quality food on their plates, and that is exactly what they have.

Dr. Stuart Smyth, from bioresource policy, University of Saskatchewan, said:

Canada has one of the top...food safety systems in the world. Other countries look to our regulatory system as a model of food safety....

...food products that are available for purchase in our grocery stores are as safe as they possibly can be.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is completely false. As history has unfortunately shown us, we cannot rely on companies alone to inspect our food. The Conservatives have probably forgotten that, since they continue making more and more cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. That agency is predicting that the government will reduce spending on food safety by 21%.

Is food safety in Canada not important to the Conservative government, or do we need another serious crisis for the government to act?

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the premise of that question is totally inaccurate. Food safety is at the highest level in Canadian history. Budget 2014 committed to 200 more front-line food safety inspectors. I would like to read another quote from Dr. Sylvain Charlebois with the University of Guelph, who said the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's method is the "right way" to approach inspections.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that the parliamentary secretary should tell us so, because, quite frankly, in the city of Toronto there is one inspector, just one, for consumer protection for the entire city of Toronto, who is responsible for every restaurant, every retail store. There is just one inspector, but the government says just one is enough. Four and a half million people should be looked after by one inspector, the parliamentary secretary says.

What it actually boils down to, the bottom line, is when will the government actually get serious about food protection in this country, look after consumers and make sure that food is safe?

● (1435)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, The Conference Board of Canada ranks our food safety system number one out of 17 OECD countries, which includes the U.S. The fearmongering is unacceptable from that side.

Again I will provide a quote. Dr. Keith Warriner, University of Guelph, stated that the suggestion that the meat sold in Canada is unsafe is "scaremongering".

Oral Questions

[Translation]

LABOUR

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have no more interest in protecting interns than they do in ensuring the safety of our food. Too many young Canadians have to work long hours with no protection and no pay, just so they can break into the labour market.

That is why I introduced a private member's bill to protect interns from sexual harassment, exploitation and dangerous work.

Why do the Conservatives refuse to work with the NDP in order to grant interns these basic protections?

[English]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like I have said before, this government is committed to the safety of all workers. The Canada Labour Code states that employers must ensure that individuals, including interns, are protected and informed of health and safety hazards in the workplace.

Let us be very clear. We are supporting interns, actually providing them jobs and opportunities, things the opposition votes against every single time.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us actually be very clear. We are talking about unpaid interns. The fact is that unpaid interns have no basic workplace protections like health and safety. They do not even have access to provisions under the Canada Labour Code that protect paid employees, paid interns, from sexual harassment in the workplace.

If the government was serious about this serious issue, then we could get the job done and pass the intern protection act now, but, instead, why are the Conservatives once again putting politics ahead of the health, the safety and the well-being of young workers in this country?

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I literally just said. In the Canada Labour Code it states that employers must ensure that individuals, including interns, are protected and informed of health and safety hazards in the workplace. It is very clear.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Leading Seaman Robyn Young was misdiagnosed and went through needless surgery because of negligence by the military. The quality of care decision rendered yesterday glossed over this most significant point. The government claims to look after service men and women, but is failing to do so on so many fronts. The minister promised to support Leading Seaman Young and has not done that.

Will the minister finally do the right thing and restore Robyn to full-time class C status so she can finally get the benefits that she needs and deserves?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member deliberately asked a question that is impossible to answer, because she knows that I am constrained by the Privacy Act. If the member

would like me to release the details of the report from the Surgeon General's review committee, I would be very happy to do so. The findings in that report are not consistent with what the member just said.

I believe the member should respect the professional opinion of the physicians on that panel, including the external physician who reviewed these matters. The Forces has given extraordinary medical care and treatment and consideration to Leading Seaman Young and has offered a transition plan to this individual as well. We will continue to support Leading Seaman Young.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a lot of words with no answer and no heart.

[Translation]

The tragic death of Sergeant Doiron requires a complete and transparent explanation. Canadians deserve to know the truth. For six weeks now, we have been waiting for a full investigation and results, and we are getting nothing but contradictions.

Will the Minister of National Defence convene a board of inquiry so that Canadians and Sergeant Doiron's family will know what really happened?

• (1440)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the hon. member was not here yesterday, because I said that Canada is conducting two internal investigations. The Canadian Special Operations Forces Command is leading one of the inquiries and the other is being done by the Canadian Forces national investigation service. As I said yesterday, and on many other occasions, we will make both reports available as soon as we receive them, except, of course, the parts that deal with confidential military activities.

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FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, food inspectors are currently in short supply in Quebec, which needs about 30 more inspectors than it has. In Alberta, slaughterhouses and meat processing plants are operating with 33% fewer inspectors than the minimum set by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The damage has been done.

Why, in budget after budget, has the Conservative government done nothing to ensure food safety for Canadians? Why has it gotten to the point that we have an inspection crisis that will be difficult to resolve?

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that that information is very inaccurate. Economic action plan 2014 committed to hiring over 200 more front-line food safety inspectors. It is important to point out again to the public that in the OECD, according to The Conference Board of Canada, we are first out of 17 countries, including the U.S., in terms of a strong, robust system.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we still do not have clear answers on the circumstances that led to the death of Sergeant Doiron. First, the government said that the coalition's U.S. headquarters would investigate. Then we were told that the U.S. special forces would be doing it. Now we are hearing that journalists are being denied access to the site where the incident occurred.

What exactly is the government trying to hide? Will it launch a public investigation?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have absolutely nothing to hide. As I have said repeatedly, there are two Canadian investigations, one of which is being conducted by the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service, a military police organization. We will be releasing the report, except for elements that must remain confidential for military and operational reasons, of course. That goes for the investigation carried out by the Special Operations Forces Command too. We will also release the summary of the U.S. report, with their permission.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are confusing and contradictory reports about how Sergeant Doiron died in Iraq. Some reports say he was on the front line. Others say he was far back. Canadians should have the answers by now but do not, and the government seems interested in keeping us in the dark. The one thing that is clear is that as of now, there will not be a board of inquiry by the Canadian Armed Forces, despite the fact that these boards are common after a death in action.

Will the minister commit to a board of inquiry and to making the results public?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the position of the NDP is entirely contradictory, because the member has asked for a quick review of this tragic incident of friendly fire, but a board of inquiry typically takes months, sometimes years. This is why, several years ago, the military moved to having summary investigations of military deaths so that lessons could be learned and the facts could be public much more quickly. That is why the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service is conducting a summary investigation, as well as the Special Operations Force Command. Both of those reports will be released publicly when they are available, except for those elements that touch on confidential military operations.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, boards of inquiry are certainly taking years under the current government.

Robyn Young, a 24-year-old reservist, displayed symptoms of a brain tumour for four years but was sent by the Department of National Defence for corrective eye surgery. The department now refuses to take responsibility for misdiagnosing her, and Young is now left to fend for herself, despite the minister's assurances of support. Can the minister promise the House today that he will do what is necessary to make sure that Leading Seaman Young gets the help she needs?

● (1445)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot take that question as being posed in good faith, because I have offered that member a briefing on this matter. The member, in order to get briefed, would have to obtain a privacy waiver from the individual in question. If he received that briefing, he would find that the premise of the question he just posed is not accurate.

[Translation]

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is another example of this minister's incompetence when it comes to helping our soldiers.

Leading Seaman Robyn Young is being left to fend for herself. After undergoing unnecessary surgery that aggravated her health problems, she has now been cut off from medical support and financial assistance.

The Canadian Armed Forces, and apparently this minister, are washing their hands of this serious misdiagnosis. It is outrageous.

Will the minister keep his promise and help reservist Young?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member were truly interested in this case, she would agree to receive the briefing we offered her and every opposition member concerned about this case.

Ms. Young's permission is required before we can share all the details of her case. The Canadian Forces are still there to provide medical support to Ms. Young, as we have been doing all along.

The Surgeon General reviewed her case, and I would be pleased to share the results of the report with the hon. member if she obtains permission.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the strong leadership of our Prime Minister has delivered remarkable results for Canada. Since our government was elected in 2006, Canada has had the strongest job creation in the G7. What is more, the International Monetary Fund and the OECD expect Canada to be among the strongest growing economies in the G7 this year and next. Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance please tell the House how our government's plan for the economy differs from that of the opposition parties?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Brant for that excellent question and for his great work as chair of the human resources and skills development committee.

Oral Questions

The Liberal leader's same old high-tax, high-debt agenda is perhaps underpinned by his position that a budget can simply balance itself. Meanwhile, the NDP continues to push risky high-tax schemes, like a \$20-billion carbon tax that would hurt Canada's economy and kill Canadian jobs.

To the contrary, our Conservative government remains steadfast with our low-tax plan, a plan that has provided over 1.2 million jobs for Canadians across the country since the recession. Members should stay tuned, because in less than two hours, Canada's Minister of Finance will table a budget that will keep—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that even in an election year, the Conservatives just cannot break their addiction to partisan appointments. Just last week it was revealed that the government appointed a former Conservative candidate and donor to the the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Tribunal. It is critical that judges in this position are truly independent and impartial. They are deciding cases that involve public servants blowing the whistle on the government. Why did the minister insist on a partisan Conservative nomination for this important post?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all candidates are vetted for their appropriateness and high calibre, and that is the case in this case as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives clearly have no shame when it comes to appointing their friends to high places.

They just appointed their former Ottawa Centre candidate to the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Tribunal. Get real. Whistle-blower defence groups do not trust him. This is no way to encourage public servants to disclose wrongdoing.

Why did the Conservatives appoint one of their cronies to this important position?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every candidate will be appropriate. Our government obeyed that rule in this case.

* * *

• (1450)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government likes to repeat that it has a plan to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, but the latest Environment Canada report indicates that our emissions have increased since 2013. They have not been reduced—they have increased. The Conservatives may be congratulating themselves, but Canadians and our international partners are not.

Will the government finally take action to follow through on our commitments with other countries?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is the first government in Canadian history that reduced greenhouse gas emissions and it will continue to do so without introducing the NDP carbon tax. We will continue to implement a responsible sector-by-sector regulatory approach that is aligned with the United States and that protects Canada's economic competitiveness.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, falling further and further behind is not showing leadership. Environment Canada clearly shows that our emissions are growing, thanks to the government's refusal to take climate change seriously and to breaking its own promise to regulate the oil and gas sector. Any hopes that the government could meet its targets, well, they are fading.

Why is the government ignoring our international commitments and putting our health, environment, and economy at risk because of climate change?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our record is very clear. We have reduced emissions while growing the economy and creating good, well-paying jobs. We will continue to implement a responsible sector-by-sector regulatory approach that is aligned with the United States to ensure that Canada's economic competitiveness is protected.

Our government is also the first government in Canadian history that has seen reductions in greenhouse gas emissions on that basis and it will continue to do so without the job-killing carbon tax.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, well over 1,000 young aboriginal girls and women have gone missing or have been murdered, and individuals from premiers' offices to mayors' offices to chiefs and councils and many stakeholders are calling on this cold-hearted Conservative government to recognize the need for a public inquiry.

The Prime Minister and the Prime Minister alone needs to explain why the government is not calling for a public inquiry. Does he have the courage to stand in his place today and explain to those individuals and the stakeholders why he refuses to call that public inquiry?

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, these are terrible crimes against innocent people. The RCMP has said in its own study that the vast majority of these cases are addressed and solved through their police investigations. We do not actually need another study. There have been 40 that have already been completed. What we do need is for the police to catch those responsible and punish them.

Oral Questions

Our government is focused on making sure we take action to make sure individuals are supported, that these crimes are prevented, and that these individuals are protected. Unlike the opposition members, who vote against matrimonial property rights that could protect these people, we are here taking action to support these women.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, yet the victims bill of rights ignores an important group of victims. At committee, Maureen Basnicki, whose husband was killed in the 9/11 attacks, pleaded for Canadian victims of crimes committed abroad to be included under the bill. The government rejected those pleas. Why are Canadian victims, like 9/11 widows, being ignored? Conservatives claim to be focused on terrorists. What about the victims?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, far from being ignored, victims in Canada have never had more attention, more support, more legislation, and more funding than from this Conservative government. This historic bill, as the hon. member and members present will know, for the first time entrenches in Canadian law rights for victims across the country. This is a historic piece of legislation. We hope to have the bill back before the House for royal assent, and I hope the member and his party will continue to support it.

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*[Translation]***STATUS OF WOMEN**

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no woman has been nominated for induction into the Canadian Science and Engineering Hall of Fame in the past two years.

Two eminent female scientists stepped down from the selection committee at the Canada Science and Technology Museum to protest the lack of willingness to recognize the contributions women make to the sciences.

Will the government show some leadership and take action to promote the success of women in the sciences?

• (1455)

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear: the Canadian Science and Engineering Hall of Fame is simply housed at the museum. The nomination process and the selection committee operate independently of the government and work based on nominations from the public. I wanted to be clear that the museum does not make the nominations.

We are very proud of the women in the sciences and we encourage them to continue.

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*[English]***MARINE ATLANTIC**

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador rely on Marine

Atlantic. It is a critical transportation link that our people and our economy cannot live without. Yet in the main estimates the government showed a cut of \$97 million in operating funding to Marine Atlantic. This is unacceptable to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The federal government has a clear obligation to protect this ferry service under our terms of union. Will the minister ensure that this budget has full funding for Marine Atlantic?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can speak to the main estimates, but I cannot speak to the budget because we all have a wait a few more minutes for that to be unveiled. The hon. member should know that.

The main estimates are just that. They are estimates with the information that we have at that point in time. Since 2006, we have provided Marine Atlantic with significant new funding that allows it to provide a superlative service.

I am very proud of the men and women at Marine Atlantic and everything they do every day to serve the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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TAXATION

Hon. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, families in my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country are looking forward to the enhanced universal child care credit and family tax cut.

I am proud to say that it is our government that has introduced these measures because we understand that all Canadian children deserve support. This includes children living with disabilities.

Could the caring and compassionate Minister of State for Social Development please inform the House how our government is helping these children?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his consideration for the families in his riding.

Our government is helping children with disabilities by launching our enabling accessibility fund program to help make playgrounds more accessible for children with disabilities.

In addition to that, I was very pleased to announce at the Starbright Children's Development Centre in Kelowna that we would be funding that specific program. Families were thrilled to hear that and to hear about our expanded universal child care benefit and family tax cut.

We are cutting taxes for Canadian families with children. The Liberals and the NDP want to increase taxes, increase debt, increase burdens on Canadian families.

*Oral Questions***RAIL TRANSPORTATION**

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the debate yesterday we learned that in the middle of a disastrous oil spill in Vancouver, nobody in the federal government thought it was necessary to contact Vancouver city hall. Apparently that was somebody else's job.

It is not much different when it comes to rail. The mayors of Oakville, Burlington, Milton and Halton Hills are pleading with the Minister of Transport to help stop CN as it starts to expand its services in those areas in a very dangerous way.

The minister is not only in charge of this file, it is her riding. This is the question because it is her job not someone else's job, but maybe it will be soon. Will the minister sit down with those cities? Will she start working with cities across the country to protect public safety?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed, I do exactly that through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Every one of those cities that the hon. member quoted, I actually met with last week in a round table sitting in my riding at the brand new velodrome, which is funded by this government as part of the Pan Am/Parapan Am Games.

I would like to thank the Minister of State for Sport for all the good work he does on that issue.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for four years now, the government has left the pyrrhotite victims in my riding to fend for themselves.

The answer the Coalition d'aide aux victimes de la pyrrhotite was just given from the Conservatives in response to their request for financial assistance is a resounding no. It is unacceptable that the government is part of the problem but refuses to be part of the solution.

At a time when the government is preparing to confirm its gifts to the wealthiest Canadians in its budget, can the thousands of pyrrhotite victims expect the slightest bit of compassion from the Prime Minister?

• (1500)

Hon. Ed Holder (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the pyrrhotite problem falls under provincial jurisdiction. In fact, the Government of Quebec has a provincial program to provide financial help to property owners dealing with damage caused by pyrrhotite. I invite anyone who is concerned about this problem to contact the Société d'habitation du Québec.

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[English]

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous Liberal governments that balanced their budgets by slashing transfer payments to our territories and cutting programs and services, our government is making record levels of investments in the north.

We are giving Northerners the opportunities and the tools they need to shape their own future.

Could the Minister of the Environment update the House on what our government is doing and how we are investing in the great people of Canada's north?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to list all of the things we have invested in, which the member for the Northwest Territories voted against.

He opposed the Inuvik to Tuk highway. He opposed the health transfer monies. He is opposed to infrastructure investments. He opposed job training. He opposed the establishment of a Health Canada office in Yellowknife. He also voted against aboriginal women having the same matrimonial rights as other Canadian women. He also did not bother to show up to vote against the long gun registry.

That is the record for the member for the Northwest Territories.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after investing in Churchill Falls, which will be in direct competition with Hydro-Québec and Quebec's revenues, after imposing a toll on the new Champlain Bridge and after condoning the comments of a member who said he was fed up with the National Assembly's unanimous declarations, now the federal government is once again taking unilateral action with its reform of the temporary foreign worker program, despite repeated requests from Quebec's labour minister.

Does the federal government's new way of co-operating with Quebec involve imposing its way of doing things on the province and then sending it packing?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, our government works with all of our provincial partners on every issue.

We have an excellent relationship with the Government of Quebec. It is a partnership based on our common priorities, and we are going to maintain that partnership.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in December 2014, the government ended the moratorium on deporting some 3,000 citizens of Haiti and Zimbabwe, requiring them to obtain status by June 1, 2015.

Despite the tireless work of refugee aid organizations, out of an estimated 1,500 cases, only about 400 have begun processing, and only 25 have been forwarded to federal authorities. This speaks to how cumbersome and complex the process is.

Government Orders

Will the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration give people an extra three months and simplify the permanent residence application processes?

[*English*]

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are one of the most generous countries in the world. We accept one in ten of the world's resettled refugees. We do everything we possibly can to assist refugees once they are here. They know the rules and they abide by the rules. We are very pleased to say that this year we are sponsoring an additional 10% in our levels plan, who will be coming through refugee processing.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

DRUG-FREE PRISONS ACT

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

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North has three minutes left to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with only three minutes, it puts a lot of limitations on what I can say. It is important to highlight an aspect of the legislation that I believe speaks volumes about the way in which the government approaches legislation. It is something that I have made reference to with other legislation, and that is the way in which the government determines how to name its legislation.

In naming legislation, the government's attitude seems to be more about political spin than anything. That no doubt is its first priority. It is much like how we see a government that will introduce a budget in about an hour's time. It will want to promote it by spending millions of public tax dollars to tell Canadians how wonderful its budget is, and there will be many misgivings in that budget. However, the government is more concerned about promotion, self-preservation and trying to communicate a message than it is about substance and content. This is yet another bill where we see a great example of that.

The Conservatives have titled the bill the drug-free prisons act, trying to give the impression to Canadians that they have a mechanism or a way in which they can ensure prisons across Canada are drug-free. If they consult or look in a mirror behind a closed door where no one else will see, I am sure they will find that no one could legitimately suggest that it is achievable to get prisons 100% drug free.

As it has been suggested by our correctional officers, we need to strive to do what we can to ensure we minimize the amount of drug abuse that takes place in our prisons, and I am all for that. There is some merit and value to the substance of the legislation. That is why the Liberal caucus will vote in favour of it.

However, it fails to deal with the broader issues. It does not necessarily deal with the issue of how we would prevent, for

example, crimes from taking place in the first place. It does not give us any reason to believe the government has done its homework on the legislation. To what degree did it work with the provincial governments, for example, and the ministries of justice and safety in the different provinces? After all, it is a joint responsibility in the sense that it is not only Ottawa that deals with justice-related issues, but also our provinces. Yet the government, through the leadership of the Prime Minister's Office, never sees the merit in having a first ministers conference.

The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has not done his homework in terms of consultation. If he had, I suspect we would see better legislation than what we have before us.

• (1505)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The distressing situation we are seeing right now in our prisons is partly the legacy of the Liberal government. The Liberals were in power for 13 years. During their reign, or rather, under their yoke, inmates complained about long waiting lists for drug treatment programs. It was already a problem back then. When I ran my first election campaign in 2006, long waiting lists for unemployed workers were already a problem too. The employment insurance program was already full of holes.

I would like my colleague to explain why the Liberal government of the day, the party he represents, did not take steps to fix the problem. I am not interested in hearing about how that was another time and he was not around then.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, had the member been listening, he would have caught the end of my comments where I was talking about the need to work with the provinces. That is very important. I started my speech by talking about being the justice critic when I was a provincial MLA. We should not underestimate the role that provinces have to play. If the member wants to make partisan shots about the former Liberal government, I can tell him that when I was a critic, it was an NDP provincial government and there is not enough time in the rest of the day between now and the budge, for me to give examples of just how bad the provincial New Democratic government was. It was unable to deal with the issues facing our prisons. In fact, one of the issues I highlighted earlier was in regard to the Headingley riot, which in part was because of the provincial government.

The bottom line is we need to see a higher sense of co-operation in dealing with our prisons. That is the way to deal with some of those core issues that need to be developed. That means having to work with different levels of government and different political parties.

I do not believe the New Democrats are any holier than any other political party in trying to achieve justice and making sure we have safe prisons for our correctional officers and others.

Government Orders

• (1510)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the way the government names these bills, this one being the drug-free prisons act. It really is more impression than reality in terms of getting to results and having the prisons drug-free. There are some elements of the bill that would actually prevent some use of drugs in the prison system.

My question is a little broader. What about crime prevention strategies that need to go beyond the bill that would actually keep people out of prisons so they do not really fall under that act? What about a crime prevention strategy itself?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague. That is the type of attitude we need to be bringing into the House in dealing with justice issues.

Prisons and jails are an absolute in modern day society, but there is so much more we could be doing and so much more emphasis could be placed on how we could be preventing crimes from taking place in the first place.

Let me give a very specific example. In the city of Winnipeg and many other municipalities across Canada, we have seen an increase in the number of individuals getting involved in gang activities. Ultimately, that activity will lead them to incarceration. Why not have more resources, or a government that is more progressive in taking action that is necessary to provide other programs? Youth need to be engaged so there is more of a challenge to their abilities, as opposed to having our young people being challenged by gang opportunities and ending up in jail, which creates all sorts of other social issues.

We need to be much more proactive. Hopefully, we will see something on that in the upcoming budget. Something the Liberal Party would like to see is a more proactive approach in dealing with—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Ahuntsic.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, as you know, several studies have shown that marijuana seriously impairs concentration and decision making capacity. Marijuana is extremely harmful to young people's brains, especially adolescents and young adults. When it comes to medical marijuana, that is one thing, for as we all know, all medications can have side effects. Recreational use, however, is another thing altogether.

More and more studies are showing this. We know that the Liberal Party wants to legalize marijuana; it wants to make money by collecting taxes on marijuana, just as many dealers do.

I have a question for my colleague. Given that his party wants to legalize marijuana, does that mean that his party also plans to give it to inmates, since that is the most common drug used in prisons?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, as for the political party that the member will be running for in the next election, all one has to do is maybe do a little search on Google to find some interesting comments from its former leader, Jack Layton, in regard to the issue

of legalization of marijuana. The member might find that quite interesting if she takes the time to investigate it.

In relation to Bill C-12, the drug-free prisons act, I will read a specific quote, which I made reference to earlier, from the 2011-12 annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator. The following observation was made with respect to the prevalence of drugs within our federal prisons:

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.

I think that the bill might make a modest move forward, but at the end of the day, we need a much more comprehensive approach to deal with drugs in our jails and prisons.

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, it is really unfortunate to see the member spewing this rhetoric rather than having the courage to respond directly to the questions he is asked. My colleague from Ahuntsic asked him a very interesting question.

I want to talk about another issue, though, because any time we talk about drug use in prisons, we have to talk about mental health issues. There is a link between the two. The member will have to defend this record under the Liberals, in light of the upcoming election campaign, so he can practice by answering our questions directly.

The number of inmates with mental disorders doubled under the Liberal government. In my speech this morning, I indicated that over half of all inmates have been treated for mental health issues. This is huge, and it is a serious problem that is directly related to the problem of drug use and trafficking in prisons.

How can he justify this Liberal record from the time they were in power?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member might not like the answer, but that does not necessarily mean it does not answer in good part the question that has been posed.

The member just made reference to mental health. The budget for mental health is administered through our provinces, and many individuals who are not getting the mental health attention they need at the provincial level ultimately will end up in our prison system. This is why I said that if we want to look at governments, all one needs to do is look in my own backyard in the province of Manitoba. Whether under Gary Doer or Greg Selinger, one will find that the whole issue of mental health has not been dealt with to the degree in which it could have had a more positive impact within our prisons.

I would suggest to members that we need to see a higher sense of co-operation between the federal government and the provincial governments, because both have a role to play in terms of improving the conditions in our prisons. That should be our first goal. It is something which the leader of the Liberal Party and Liberal caucus is committed to doing.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be able to rise today to discuss Bill C-12. I would also like to respond to a few comments by my honourable colleague from Winnipeg-Centre, who talked about co-operation between the Liberal party and the provinces.

In 1995, the Liberal federal government decided to cut millions of dollars in transfer payments to the provinces in order to balance its budget. That is exactly what the Conservatives are doing. In matters of federal-provincial co-operation, therefore, I am not sure we can count on the Liberals to work with the provinces and offer more services to Canadians and to Quebeckers.

We are talking here about a bill that my Conservative colleagues consider crucially important. In general terms, the bill seeks to introduce a practice that is already in common use. Some government members would like to tell Canadians that this bill is going to work miracles, but that is untrue. This bill merely adds to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act the possibility for the Parole Board to base its decisions respecting parole eligibility on positive drug tests or the refusal to provide a sample.

Yet the board has been doing that for years. Writing it into law is a good objective, but I doubt very much whether this bill will succeed in eliminating drugs from our prisons, as the Conservatives claim. Are they implying that there is a problem with the board itself? That is another question. However, this bill covers only a page and a half. Accordingly, as far as details are concerned, they will get back to you.

The bill is therefore misleading, because it will not do much to eliminate drugs in the correctional system. The solution it proposes is a practice that has been carried out for years, and unfortunately has not solved the problem. I therefore do not see how writing it into law will make it possible to solve mental health problems and eliminate drugs from our federal penitentiaries.

In my speech, I will be giving some ideas for a solution, but I will also raise a few priorities that the Conservatives refuse to consider, preferring to invest elsewhere and put money in the pockets of the wealthiest or the large corporations.

All the witnesses who spoke in committee told us that the bill would have little or no effect on drug use in prisons. We know that the government is using this legislation to cater to the wishes of its electoral base or do some election campaigning, instead of proposing real solutions to a real problem.

The situation is very different in our federal prisons. In connection with the study we are concluding in the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the Correctional Investigator of Canada came to tell us that over 45% of the federal prison population is dealing with mental health or neurological problems. That is nearly 50% of the population.

In general, unfortunately, these people use drugs. Therefore, is requiring them to take a urine test in order to be eligible for parole going to solve problems at the source, including their mental health disorders? I repeat that nearly 50%, not just 1% or 5%, of all offenders in federal institutions have mental health problems.

● (1520)

We have a problem here and Bill C-12 will do absolutely nothing to help these people. The bill offers them no tangible support. Instead, it cuts the budgets for programs to treat addiction and to provide support for people with mental health problems.

However, they say that enshrining in legislation that someone will or will not be eligible for parole is going to prevent that individual from taking drugs. That is ridiculous. I will give an example: many of my colleagues here have children. When you want a child not to do something, you educate the child, you offer them support, and you talk to them. You do not leave the child with no support and then tell them that unfortunately they have made a mistake and it is their problem. That is not how you solve a problem at its root. If we do that, we have failed in our role as legislators and as a society: to help the most vulnerable people, for example, people who unfortunately have mental health problems or neurological problems.

This is very interesting because the mistaken perspective adopted by the Conservative government when it comes to public safety has multiplied the prison sentences imposed on people with addiction or mental health problems, for example, through mandatory minimum sentencing. I will come back to this later in my speech. Many individuals who are addicts or are dealing with mental health problems find themselves in prisons. The Correctional Investigator of Canada has told us that the correctional service unfortunately can no longer offer specialized services tailored to these people because the Correctional Service of Canada does not necessarily have the resources to detect and diagnose these problems.

At the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, we are doing a study on FASD, or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. There are no precise statistics because these individuals cannot be diagnosed, but for the moment it is said that they represent about 5% of the federal prison population. According to testimony we have heard at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, 55% of people who have problems caused by fetal alcohol exposure have addiction problems. What is specific to FASD is that these people have a low capacity for understanding the consequences of their actions, a low capacity for analyzing situations and a low capacity for learning from their mistakes. It has been proven that these people should not be in the prison system because they are not necessarily responsible for their situation. What do we do with these people? Is Bill C-12 going to help them? Is the fact that the government has decided to put it in the bill that they will or will not be eligible for parole going to help them? No. On its face, these people will not receive the help and support they need to overcome their addiction problems.

Government Orders

I would like to talk about the fact that the Conservatives have never acted on the many reports from the CSC in 2006 and 2011 and from the Correctional Investigator of Canada in 2008. Those reports could be used, for example, to tackle the problem of gangs in prisons. The Conservatives are closing down prisons and there is double-bunking in the cells. It has been shown that this leads to more crime and more gang activity, and so to more drug trafficking.

To solve the drug problem at the source, we have to offer support to people who are incarcerated and to correctional officers, so that they are able to do their job properly.

• (1525)

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her excellent and very passionate speech. She has touched on a fundamental aspect of the issue we are discussing today: rehabilitation. That also includes treating people for the various illnesses and pathologies that are found in the prisons. This is crucial because if we could do that, we could prevent the unfortunate consequences and, most importantly, ensure that many of these individuals can be better reintegrated into our society.

Why would it be in the interests of society to rehabilitate these people more effectively and, most importantly, to provide the Correctional Service of Canada with the necessary resources, both human and financial?

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

It is fundamental. All the experts agree that the source of the problem is the fact that nearly half the people in our federal institutions have mental health problems. What is more, most of these people also have substance abuse problems.

We have to provide correctional officers with resources to offer programs and support to help people overcome their addictions, so that when these people are released one day, they can return to society in a positive way.

• (1530)

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to add that most of our institutions lack not only resources, but also planning. What do we do with these people? If we want to prevent crime, then we have to have a public safety plan, a national safety plan. We also need to pass a number of bills in order to prevent different types of crimes. We were talking earlier about criminal gangs. That too takes prevention and resources on the ground.

I would like to ask my colleague what type of resources should be put in place in our prisons in order to prevent various types of crime and especially recidivism?

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Mr. Speaker, that is a relatively broad and very complex question. The justice system and the prison system form a whole. For example, mandatory minimum sentences will send people to jail and, unfortunately, those people often have mental health or addiction problems. With the increase in mandatory minimum sentences, we have seen an increase in people suffering from mental health and addiction problems. What is being done about this? The Conservatives' response is to write into the conditional release act that inmates do not have the right to take

drugs. That is really an insult to our intelligence. It will not solve the problem.

To solve the problem the government must invest in systems and an intervention plan. For instance, when people go to jail, they should be diagnosed and receive tailored services; we need to know what we are dealing with. Correctional officers currently do not have the resources or the capacity to provide services to inmates. Therefore, not only are correctional officers at risk, but so are inmates. There is more violence.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are debating at third reading Bill C-12, which adds a provision to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act enabling the Correctional Service of Canada to eliminate drugs from prisons. I must say that this is quite ambitious given that we know that there is not one correctional service in the world that has been able to do this.

This title, which again is reminiscent of a newspaper headline, does not reflect the content of this bill, which actually makes an amendment that is very narrow in scope to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

This amendment makes it clear in law that the Parole Board of Canada may use the positive results from drug tests or refusals to take drug tests in making its decision on parole eligibility. Note that the board already does this.

The amendment also makes clear that the Parole Board can impose conditions on the use of drugs or alcohol, once again a practice that is already in place.

In the case of a positive drug test when an individual is on parole, the discretion remains where it should be, with the Parole Board of Canada.

That is why we support the bill. The Parole Board of Canada is independent and is in the best position to judge individual cases and determine the consequences when someone fails a drug test or violates the conditions of parole.

Let us talk a little about the Conservative government's approach and its zero-tolerance approach to drugs. The Conservative government has dedicated a lot of time and resources to eliminating drugs in prison, with little success.

Correctional Service Canada has admitted that the \$122 million spent on tools and technologies to eradicate drugs in prisons has not led to any reduction in drug use in our prisons.

According to a 2012 Public Safety study, we know that drug-free prisons are unlikely to be achieved in the real world, yet the Conservative government continues to pander to their base, as always, by investing money with the aim of achieving this unrealistic goal.

Government Orders

The Conservative government's faulty approach to public safety has resulted in more prisoners with addictions and mental illness in our prison system.

The NDP has been steadfast in our support for measures that will make our prisons safe, while the Conservative government has ignored—yes, you heard me correctly, ignored—recommendations from corrections staff, corrections unions and the Correctional Investigator that would decrease violence, gang activity and drug use in our prisons. The government has not only ignored these recommendations but it has also made budget cuts.

In 2012, the government announced that it planned to cut the budget of Correctional Service Canada by \$295 million by 2015, and that is what it did. The budget for Correctional Service Canada was cut by over 10%, while during that same period, the prison population grew from 14,000 to 15,000 inmates.

• (1535)

The consequences of these cuts include more double-bunking and the closure of treatment centres for inmates with serious mental problems. This has resulted in increased violence. The Conservative government has also failed to address the growing problem of inmates with addictions and mental illness.

In 2011, 45% of male offenders and 69% of female offenders received a mental health care intervention. Despite this staggering data, the Conservative government still has not asked for a report from Correctional Service Canada, or CSC, on the implementation of recommendations to improve handling of prisoners with mental illness.

Rather than focusing its efforts on a narrow bill, the government needs to invest in rehabilitation programs to limit violence and the use of drugs in our prisons. Our priority should be a corrections system that can deliver effective rehabilitation programs, such as continuing education, addiction treatment and support programs to assist in reintegration. That is the only way to reduce recidivism rates and effectively tackle the issue of repeat offenders.

To truly address the issue of drug use in prison, CSC must have a proper intake assessment of an inmate's addiction and then provide the proper correctional programming for that offender. Our priority must be to keep communities safe by preparing ex-inmates for reintegration into society once freed from their addiction and thus less likely to reoffend. Without addiction treatment and proper reintegration upon release, a prisoner will likely return to a criminal lifestyle and possibly create more victims.

Before I conclude, I would like to say that committee work is not just for kicks. Our mandate is to examine, analyze and legislate to improve our society. I think that the Conservative government is being disingenuous by introducing a bill that does not take into account witnesses' recommendations even though they are the people on the ground. Several witnesses have said that Bill C-12 will not do what the short title says, so the Conservative government should show some common sense and stop its electoral propaganda.

The NDP is the party that listens to constituents, experts and the people on the ground. This bill, like so many of the Conservative government's bills, ignores the real needs on the ground.

• (1540)

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is all very interesting, and I would like to thank my colleague for her speech.

I talked about this in my speech. The basic problem is clear. Everyone says so. I do not understand why the Conservatives do not get it. CSC has produced a number of reports about how inmates with mental health issues make up close to 50% of Canada's federal prison population.

Right now, there is no plan, no budget, no system to adapt the programs and support services available. Bill C-12 is a drop in the bucket compared to everything that needs to be done.

Can my colleague tell us about some of her solutions to this problem?

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her relevant question.

As I mentioned, what this Conservative government is doing is cutting funding in a system that is already struggling. Consider what the the CSC Commissioner said at the time of the coroner's inquest into the death of Ashley Smith. He said that his organization did not have the resources needed in that regard. The Correctional Investigator's report on women who self-harm or commit suicide stated that Correctional Service Canada remains ill-equipped to manage offenders who chronically injure themselves.

That is why we in the NDP believe that there has to be a greater focus on drug treatment programs, education and the reintegration of people who are victims of their drug addictions. We know that most people who are in prison, up to two-thirds of the prison population, suffer from mental illness, which is why substance abuse treatment is needed.

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. She is a doctor. She has a health care background and therefore feels empathy for these people.

I have seen figures estimating that over 2,000 or 2,400 inmates are currently on waiting lists for drug treatment programs. If I were to say that that bothers me, I know the members opposite would say that I support criminals, more or less like grade school children.

I am actually thinking of the consequences. If these people are treated like animals in prison, it is much more likely that they will reoffend and we will have more victims. This is a complex, long-term problem.

What are my colleague's thoughts on this aspect of the problem, which requires long-term reflection, specifically to avoid creating more victims in Canada?

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Government Orders

As we said, every program requires money and human resources. However, this government is not using common sense.

The only way to address the problem of recidivism is to treat drug addictions. In the past, this involved methadone treatment, but now it involves opiate substitute treatment. Unfortunately, not all inmates have access to treatment and here again there are waiting lists. Some people serve their sentence and leave prison with the same problems they had when they arrived or worse. With the Conservatives' zero tolerance policy, people leave prison more hardened and will likely victimize more people. The government's policy does not work.

• (1545)

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-12 seeks to add a provision to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that makes it clear that the Parole Board of Canada may use positive results from urine tests or refusals to take urine tests for drugs in making its decisions on parole eligibility.

This gives clear legal authority to an existing practice of the Parole Board. I support that and so I support this bill, since it simply places something that already happens in practice into the act.

[English]

Since we are talking about a provision that is rather straightforward and relatively uncontroversial, I want to take the time to talk about related issues that I believe need to be addressed, so I will take the time that has been allotted me to do so.

[Translation]

The government is making our prisons less safe by cutting funding to correctional programming, such as substance abuse treatment, and increasing the use of double bunking, which leads to more violence. That is not only dangerous for inmates but also for those who work in correctional institutions. It also does not promote rehabilitation. This is an issue that we all need to be concerned about.

Our priority should be ensuring community safety by preparing former offenders to reintegrate back into society, and by helping them overcome their addictions and become less inclined to reoffend.

• (1550)

[English]

A report from Correctional Service Canada in 2011 states that there ought to be improved access to medical professionals and medical health services and a continued focus on the role of substance use and self-harming behaviours as coping mechanisms, and that there are several issues regarding the implementation of programming specifically related to the availability and accessibility of programs, the frequency with which programs are offered, and the wait lists of these programs.

The prison population is increasing at the same time as the Conservative government is closing institutions, and this has resulted in directive 55, which I am sure all of my colleagues are aware of, from Correctional Service Canada, which establishes a procedure to normalize double bunking. In my province of Quebec, that has led to double bunking at 10%. Staff and the Correctional Investigator have

repeatedly stated that this leads to increased violence and gang activity.

Further, I want to underline that according to Kim Pate from the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, the rise in women serving federal sentences is directly related to cuts in social services, social programs, health care, education—all the programs that traditionally help level the playing field for those who are most impacted. By “those”, we often mean, of course, indigenous peoples, women, poor people, and those with mental health issues.

According to Correctional Service Canada data published in 2011, 27% of women incarcerated were convicted of a drug-related offence.

[Translation]

According to the Office of the Correctional Investigator's 2011-12 report, almost two-thirds of inmates were under the influence of an intoxicant when they committed the offence leading to their incarceration.

[English]

I want to raise the fact that we are looking at people being incarcerated who need to deal with this issue.

I also want to state that the majority of women incarcerated—86%, to be specific—report having been physically abused at some point in their lives, with two-thirds of the women, 68%, reporting that they had been sexually abused throughout their lives. When we talk about using drugs as a coping mechanism, especially when incarcerated, we need to keep this in mind.

A zero tolerance stance on drugs in prison is proving to be a completely ineffective policy. Meanwhile, harm-reduction measures within a public health system and treatment orientation offer a far more promising, cost-effective, and sustainable approach to reducing subsequent crime and re-victimization. That is from the report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator in 2011-12.

According to a report looking at policy for offenders with mental illness published in 2010, compared to the general population, the rate of mental illnesses among jail detainees is almost twice as high for women, and detainees with a serious mental illness have co-occurring substance abuse disorder.

That is why we are talking about both these things right now. We are talking about mental health and drug use as being correlated and as being major issues that need to be dealt with within the incarceration system, not only for the betterment of the detainees and their reintegration into society, but also to reduce violence in the future, to reduce violence within prisons, and also to make correction officers' workplaces safer ones.

Individuals with mental illnesses are not only disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, but they are also disproportionately likely to fail under correctional supervision. In 2011, 69% of female offenders received a mental health care intervention. When we are talking about their being more likely to fail, we are talking about 70% of the women who are currently incarcerated being those who are more likely to fail. Those are staggering numbers.

Government Orders

[Translation]

To really tackle this problem, we must also tackle the problem of substance abuse in prison. To that end, we must first implement an intake assessment process to accurately measure the level of drug use by inmates, and then provide adequate programs for offenders in need. We talked a lot about that today. We have to ensure that these women have access to these programs and services because, as I mentioned, a large percentage of incarcerated women suffer from mental health or substance abuse problems, as do these men. Without drug addiction treatment, education and proper reintegration upon release, offenders run the risk of returning to a life of crime and claiming new victims. We want to avoid that at all costs.

We should strive to have a correctional system that provides effective rehabilitation programs such as ongoing education, substance abuse treatment and support programs, in order to foster the social reintegration of offenders when they are released. That is the only way to reduce the rate of recidivism.

The last point I would like to make is the following: we want to ensure that prisons are a safe workplace for the people who work there. As I mentioned earlier, we can start by eliminating the practice of double-bunking and ensuring that resources are allocated to the treatment of inmates with substance abuse or mental health problems.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. Although we support the idea and the principle behind this bill because it represents something positive, there is no denying that we are very concerned about how the Conservative government plans on addressing the scourge of drugs.

As my colleague indicated, problems have escalated in our prisons and the situation is almost unmanageable in some respects. Drug addiction prevention programs at Correctional Service Canada have undergone significant cuts. The situation is so serious that the Correctional Investigator made some very important recommendations. One of the recommendations was an assessment of prisoners at intake into correctional programs to identify their addiction problems and to help meet their needs to reduce their dependency on drugs.

Could my colleague comment on how the government will help—or likely not help—prisoners who are struggling with addiction?

• (1555)

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for asking this question.

[English]

Just the cuts to Corrections Canada have dramatically affected the availability of services and programs that do help inmates. Unfortunately, we can see them going down the path of making those cuts and also increasing prison sentences, and therefore, the number of people who are incarcerated. This is a very dangerous situation where now, for just services such as dealing with mental health, dealing with drug addiction, the waiting lists are so long that inmates can wait their entire prison sentence before getting the services. Therefore, they go back into society without the rehabilitation that was needed. These individuals have a much higher recidivism rate.

[Translation]

As I mentioned earlier, 70% of incarcerated women have mental health issues. This means that these services are extremely important and we need to strengthen them. Unfortunately, the government does not really appear to be ensuring that these services are provided.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel for her excellent speech on Bill C-12. Today I would like to share some thoughts about this bill in particular with the House of Commons.

First, I would like to say that the title of Bill C-12 is misleading, considering the content. It is misleading to say that Bill C-12 will eradicate drugs from our prisons. Unfortunately, nothing in this bill will address the problem of drug addiction in our prisons.

I expected better from the federal government. I wish it had handled this issue with greater respect. Unfortunately, it did not. As my colleague pointed out in her speech, that is always the problem whenever it comes to issues associated with drug addiction and mental health. Nothing in this bill tackles the problem directly. There is nothing here that will help the men, women and first nations people coping with drug addiction, which, sadly, is so widespread in our prisons.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I also want to thank the member for Alfred-Pellan for all the hard work she does as the NDP deputy critic for public safety. She is doing a truly fantastic job and we really admire her for that. She raised a very good point.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, basically, this bill just puts into law something that is already a common practice. It does nothing to tackle the problem. I did not spend my whole speech listing all the problems and explaining why it is dangerous, not only for those who are incarcerated, but also for those who work in correctional institutions.

This issue must be considered a priority and it really needs to be dealt with through mental health services and drug treatment programs.

[English]

The Speaker: The time for questions and comments has expired.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The Budget

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

●(1605)

The Speaker: Order. The House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Proceedings No. 18 concerning the budget presentation.

* * *

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved:

That this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise before this House today to table budget documents for 2015, including notices of ways and means motions.

[*Translation*]

The details of the measures are contained in these documents, and I am asking that an order of the day be designated for consideration of these motions. I also wish to announce that the government will introduce legislation to implement the measures in the budget.

[*English*]

I am proud to present economic action plan 2015, our government's plan for growth and opportunity. It is a prudent and principled plan which will see Canadians more prosperous, more secure and ever more confident in our country's place in the world.

The story of Canada is, and has always been, the story of opportunity. Opportunity is what has drawn people here from around the world generation after generation. It is what draws them still, opportunity for themselves and for their families, the opportunity to work hard, dream big and achieve those dreams.

On a personal note, I will be forever grateful to my grandparents for their fateful decision to immigrate to Canada more than 100 years ago. Like so many others, they chose liberation over oppression, opportunity over stagnation, a bright future over a gathering storm.

The federal budget is, on the face of it, about dollars and cents, but on a more fundamental level, it is a path to opportunity, and it is in this spirit that I present it today. I do so acknowledging that we live in what continues to be challenging times.

●(1610)

[*Translation*]

Around the world, many nations—including some of our friends and allies—remain mired in a struggle for fiscal security. Global growth coming out of the great recession has been lacklustre. Geopolitical uncertainty continues to hobble the recovery. And, of course, the dramatic plunge in oil prices has taken its toll on our economy.

[*English*]

Still, news for Canada is, by and large, good. Amid the tumult, our country remains a beacon of economic stability and security, built on a foundation of sound financial management.

I cannot go further without saluting the man who, through fiscal acumen, careful stewardship and love of country, can take so much credit for this, my predecessor, Jim Flaherty. It is because of Mr. Flaherty's efforts and the leadership of our Prime Minister that we are in a position to move forward. It is because of their discipline and deliberate choices in dark times that, rather than privation and painful austerity, we face a future of opportunity and possibilities. That path is the right path for Canada.

I recall the words of another man who, half a century ago, served as Canada's minister of finance, the Hon. Donald Fleming. Like me, he was a proud member of the Conservative government and, like me, he had the honour of representing the good people of Eglinton, the predecessor to my own riding of Eglinton—Lawrence, in the great city of Toronto. He told the House:

We have withstood the disturbing calm of recession, and the winds of prosperity again fill our sails...With a united, determined and confident population, Canada marches on unflinchingly towards its bright destiny.

[*Translation*]

Our economy is now substantially larger than it was pre-recession, a performance that remains the envy of the G7.

International observers expect Canada's growth—already ahead of our peers during the recovery—to continue to be solid. They expect our net debt-to-GDP ratio will continue to be the lowest in the G7.

[*English*]

The causes of global financial challenges are complex and largely beyond our control, but our responses, the choices we have made have been direct and unambiguous. We have cut taxes to their lowest level in more than half a century. We have made the largest, longest federal infrastructure commitment in our country's history. We have negotiated free trade deals that encompass more than half of the global economy. We have increased transfers to the provinces and territories to record levels to support health care and education. We have done all of this while controlling spending.

For generations, Canadian families have understood the path to prosperity. Do not compromise tomorrow by spending recklessly today, do not pile on debt we cannot afford, and invest sensibly for a secure future. For governments, the principles are the same. We have been prudent, we have been practical, and we have stuck to our plan.

I am proud to announce that this budget is balanced. This year, we are forecasting a \$1.4 billion surplus and growing surpluses thereafter.

[*Translation*]

I am proud to announce that this budget I am presenting today is balanced. This year, we are forecasting a \$1.4 billion surplus, and growing surpluses thereafter.

The Budget

Now, this did not just happen. It took hard work, unwavering focus and firm resolve. Some underestimate the discipline involved, suggesting that budgets balance themselves.

They do not understand what it takes, or why it matters so much.

• (1615)

[English]

Perhaps they never will.

A balanced budget is the only way to ensure long-term prosperity for Canadians. It clears a path for further tax relief, bolsters our top credit rating, supports lower interest payments, and inspires greater consumer and investor confidence. It protects health care and education. It strengthens our ability to respond to the unavoidable and the unexpected in a volatile world, and it means, importantly, that we can leave our children and our grandchildren an even more secure and prosperous country, not a hangover from reckless selfishness.

When our government first came to power, we worked hard to reduce Canada's substantial federal debt, and we did it, in short order, by more than \$37 billion.

Then in 2008, the world was rocked by the greatest financial meltdown since the Great Depression. It was not a crisis of our making, but it was nevertheless one we could not escape, so we undertook extraordinary measures to protect the financial security of Canadians, but we did it with a clear and prudent plan to return to balance.

We cannot borrow our way to prosperity, no matter what our opponents might say. Their path, the path of spending money we do not have on bureaucratic programs we do not need leads to the crushing structural deficits that plagued this country for years. When our Liberal opponents tried it, they found themselves in an economic swamp of their own creation. By the time they figured out the disaster the country was facing, the only way out was brutal cuts to programs Canadians counted on.

George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it".

[Translation]

Still, given the chance, they seem determined to try it again. Ignoring the lessons of history, they would take the well-trod road to economic decline—a journey that will not end well.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, it will not end well.

[Translation]

When our Government launched its stimulus program, we made a solemn promise to the Canadian people.

[English]

A promise made, a promise kept.

This budget is written in black ink. This is the responsible way forward for Canada, which is why we have also introduced balanced budget legislation. This legislation will recognize that in times of crisis, a deficit may be the appropriate action, but only with a plan to

return to balance and only with an accompanying freeze on operating spending.

I would now like to talk about tax restraint. Our approach has been clear and consistent: take as little as possible and give back as much as we can.

It all starts with the bedrock of our country: the family. Raising a family is hard work. Unlike our opponents, we prefer to leave it to the experts: Mom and Dad. It also costs a lot of money, which is why in recent months we expanded the universal child care benefit, introduced the family tax cut, increased the child care expense deduction limits, and doubled the children's fitness tax credit. These measures make life more affordable for all Canadian families with children.

• (1620)

[Translation]

For a typical two-earner family of four, it means up to an extra \$6,600 in their pockets in 2015.

Helping families now is vital, but just as important is helping them plan for a secure future.

[English]

Our low-tax measures are extremely important. One that I am particularly proud of is the tax-free savings account. When we introduced the TFSA in budget 2008, it was the most significant boost to Canadians' ability to save for their future since the creation of the RRSP. Since then, close to 11 million Canadians, mostly low and middle-income Canadians, have opened a TFSA.

Who are these Canadians? They are the people we see at the coffee shop, at the rink and in our place of worship. Half make less than \$42,000 a year. Some are saving money to buy their first home or start their first business. Some are saving to put their children through college or university. Others are putting away extra money to make their hard-earned retirement more comfortable and enjoyable. In fact, more than half the people currently maxing out their TFSA contributions are low and middle-income Canadians over the age of 55.

I am also very pleased to announce, therefore, that we will increase the TFSA annual contribution limit from the current \$5,500 to \$10,000. This is another promise made, another promise kept.

We are also making life easier for the almost four million Canadians living with some form of disability. Many Canadians with disabilities, as well as seniors, want to enjoy greater independence living in the comfort of their homes. To help, we will create a new and permanent home accessibility tax credit. It will support those who want to renovate their dwellings to make them safer, more accessible and more functional.

The Budget

[Translation]

Our government has a strong record of support for people with autism spectrum disorders and the people who love them. Our budget builds on this, with funding to pursue a greater understanding of autism and the needs of those living with its unique challenges.

• (1625)

[English]

We will also implement changes to the Copyright Act to implement the Marrakesh Treaty, allowing the one million Canadians with visual impairments greater access to adapted books and other printed material.

We want older Canadians to enjoy the golden years that are their reward after decades of hard work and diligent saving. Our government has already greatly expanded the guaranteed income supplement for very low-income seniors. Today I am pleased to announce that we will give seniors more choice when it comes to managing their retirement income by reducing the minimum withdrawal requirements for registered retirement income funds.

For more and more Canadians, caring for family not only means making sure that kids have the best start possible in life; it means being there for parents and other elderly relatives through their final days. When someone we love is gravely ill, we should be free to focus on what matters most. That is why we are extending the employment insurance compassionate care benefits period from the current six weeks to six months.

Along with supporting Canadian families, our government's priority has always been the creation and protection of opportunity for Canadians. Indeed, since the depths of the global recession, Canada has had one of the best job creation records in the G7. How did we do this? We cut taxes and slashed red tape, and we will continue to do both.

It is no secret that small businesses are critical to the health of the Canadian economy. They employ half of all Canadians in the private sector and contribute over 40% of our private sector GDP. That is why we have worked so hard to support them over the years and continue to do so. We have lowered the small business tax rate to 11% and have increased the amount of annual income eligible for this lower rate.

Today I am pleased to announce that our government will reduce the tax rate further, all the way down to 9% in 2019. This will be the largest tax-rate cut for small businesses in more than 25 years.

[Translation]

Small businesses across the country will be able to use these additional tax savings to fuel growth, invest in capital and hire more people.

[English]

Manufacturing accounts for more than 10% of our GDP and over 60% of our merchandise exports and employs 1.7 million people all across the country. Some have questioned the role of manufacturing in Canada's future economic success. We do not. For this government, the words "Made in Canada" continue to fuel pride and inspire confidence, but we must give manufacturers the tools

they need to create the products and the jobs of the future. That is why I am pleased to announce that we will help to boost this sector's productivity by introducing a 10-year investment incentive that will allow a faster writeoff for machinery and equipment.

We are also launching the automotive supplier innovation program. This investment of \$100 million over the next five years will support our auto parts industry as it meets the constantly evolving demands of automakers and consumers.

• (1630)

[Translation]

We will continue our collaboration with the provinces and territories in skills training. We will also bring employers and educators together to make sure the skills of our graduates match the needs of our economy.

For Canada's best and brightest graduate and post-graduate students, we will increase our support for internships that allow them to focus on industry-related research.

[English]

For students who need to work to put themselves through school, the current in-study income limit of the Canada student loans program is a barrier. We will remove it. We will also reduce the program's parental contribution requirement to make it easier for middle-class families to finance the education of their children.

We will make permanent our foreign credentials recognition loans program, which helps skilled newcomers cover the cost of having their qualifications recognized here.

We will extend the working while on claim employment insurance pilot project, which gives unemployed Canadians the ability to accept some work, work that could lead to learning new skills or even full-time employment while protecting their EI benefits.

[Translation]

Canada is now attracting the best and brightest minds from around the globe in science, research and development.

[English]

To build on this success, we will make a significant new investment of \$1.3 billion over six years to the Canada Foundation for Innovation. We will do that to ensure our researchers continue to have the leading-edge lab facilities they need to be the best in the world.

The Budget

Although their work is about changing lives, some of it is about saving them. A case in point, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research has been searching for a solution to drug-resistant infections. We will provide stable, multi-year funding for this important work. To help meet the challenges of an aging population, we will likewise provide stable, multi-year funding towards the establishment of a Canadian centre for aging and brain health innovation based at Baycrest Health Services in Toronto.

[Translation]

Since the era of the last spike, infrastructure has been vital to Canada's success as a country—which is why it is a key priority for our government. Our new building Canada plan is the largest long-term federal investment in infrastructure in our country's history.

[English]

Indeed, our investment in infrastructure is three times greater than the previous government's, but building this great country is a project that never ends. Anyone who lives in or near thriving, fast-growing cities knows the reality of traffic gridlock, so I am pleased to announce the launch of a major new infrastructure program, the public transit fund. This program, increasing to \$1 billion per year by 2019, will be a permanent source of funding for provinces and municipalities for major public transit projects.

This fund will result in more money and more transit projects by requiring a significant role for the private sector and by allowing for a more flexible payment approach. It will also drive efficiency in the design and costing of transit projects.

● (1635)

[Translation]

Canada is home to some of the world's largest and most experienced private-sector infrastructure investors. This fund will require their involvement and expertise to deliver projects in a manner that is affordable for taxpayers and efficient for commuters.

[English]

Canada's prosperity has always been rooted in our wealth of natural resources. From the bounty of our seas to the abundance of the earth, these riches provide good, well-paying jobs for almost two million Canadians.

Measures we will take to support this sector include the forest innovation program and expanding market opportunities program to help Canadian forestry companies adopt emerging technologies and develop new markets for Canada's wood product exports.

When people make working the land or the sea their life's work, they have earned everything they have put into that enterprise. Therefore, we will also raise the lifetime capital gains exemption to \$1 million. We will do that for those who make their living in farming or fishing.

We are proud of our record when it comes to the responsible development of our natural resources, and we will continue to pursue the vast opportunities with which we are blessed. At the same time, we will only proceed with projects that are safe for Canadians and safe for our environment. We take this stewardship seriously. We are the only government in our nation's history to reduce Canada's

greenhouse gas emissions, proof that emissions can decline even as economic growth continues.

To build on this record of good stewardship, economic action plan 2015 includes investments to enhance marine transportation safety in the Arctic as well as to strengthen environmental protection, spill prevention, and response measures in Canadian waters.

I want to address the dangerous world we live in. We say this often, because it is true. Government has no greater responsibility than protecting the lives of its people. Our government understands the present dangers and is determined to respond responsibly, without ambiguity or moral equivocation. Therefore, this budget includes measures to ensure the continued safety of Canadians.

[Translation]

First, it must be said: The jihadist terrorists who proclaimed a so-called "caliphate" in the Middle East have declared war on Canada and Canadians by name.

In response, we have taken up the fight both overseas and here at home.

[English]

We are extremely grateful to the men and women in uniform who put their lives on the line every day defending our freedoms. Our government will ensure they continue to have what they need to accomplish the dangerous tasks Canadians ask of them. We will increase the annual escalator for National Defence's budget to 3% starting in 2017-18. As a result, our spending on Canada's military will increase by \$11.8 billion over 10 years.

Meanwhile, the RCMP and CSIS will have new resources not only to investigate and prevent further terrorist attacks on Canadian soil but to protect vulnerable young people susceptible to the lies and manipulation of ISIS recruiters, preventing them from throwing away their lives by travelling abroad to join the terrorists' reprehensible cause.

Threats to Canada are not limited to jihadis with guns and bombs. We will also protect Canada's most vital and essential services, including financial systems and communication grids. Our government is also focused on making our streets and communities safer from crime and putting the concerns of victims at the head of our justice system.

The Budget

•(1640)

[*Translation*]

Our government has always supported strong communities, firm in our belief that they are the foundation of the nation.

[*English*]

Central to making our communities great is the willingness of Canadians to help others. Today I am happy to say we will make that easier to do. We will create a capital gains tax exemption for public-spirited Canadians who wish to donate private shares or real estate when the proceeds of their sale are directed to a charity.

For Canadians who support loved ones in other countries, we will take steps to make sure more of their money makes it to the recipient, and less is gobbled up in administrative costs.

[*Translation*]

To assist Canadian businesses that want to invest in developing countries while helping pull those countries out of poverty, we will establish a development finance initiative to provide financing, technical assistance and business advisory services to firms operating in developing countries.

[*English*]

This entire budget is about our unflinching march into the future, so we must never forget our rich and inspiring history, because that history guides our future. As our 150th anniversary approaches, we have set aside substantial funds for the celebrations, both on a national scale and at the community level.

Almost 150 years ago, the Fathers of Confederation had grand dreams and ambitions. If they could see us now, I think they would be pleased with the Canada we have become.

We have been through some trying times but now our hard work, the hard work of all Canadians, is paying off. Those winds of prosperity are powering us toward an even brighter future.

These are times of immense opportunity for Canada but also of substantial risk. The choices we make can assure a secure and prosperous Canada for generations to come. Together, let us make the greatest country in the world even greater

•(1645)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for his first budget.

I think we now understand why it took a couple of extra months to write this document, because on the job growth strategy, he had to borrow and in fact endorse the NDP's job growth strategy put forward by our leader not 60 days ago. It is a curiosity as to why the Conservatives voted against the NDP's idea to lower the small business tax rate, why they voted against the NDP's idea to help out the manufacturing sector, and why they voted against the idea to help out innovation in this country. However, I will allow the minister to answer that.

My question is the following. After 10 years of failed economic strategy from these guys, with billions of dollars going out to corporations, 400,000 lost manufacturing jobs, 300,000 more

Canadians out of work than before the recession, and youth unemployment at twice the national rate, if handing out billions to the wealthiest corporations does not work, why is the Conservative government stubbornly going ahead and handing out billions more to the wealthiest few with its income-splitting scheme?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, I have outlined the great success story that is Canada. Integral to that, of course, is our low-tax plan for jobs and growth—the 1.2 million net new jobs.

The New Democrats—who seem to like part of our budget, which might suggest that perhaps they will vote for it, which we would of course welcome—completely and continually attempt to mischaracterize the family benefit program. Two-thirds of the benefits of the family program will go to low- and middle-income Canadians, 25% to Canadians who earn less than \$25,000. The TFSA, which is a tremendous savings regime for Canadians, will benefit Canadians right across the country, as does the flexibility and the choice provided by the new RRIF structure.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2012, the Conservatives said they had to raise the age for OAS because the program was not financially stable, which we all know is not true. That takes money away from each of Canada's poorest and most vulnerable seniors.

This budget doubles the TFSA limit—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Judy Sgro: Are they finished, Mr. Speaker?

This budget doubles the TFSA limit, but because the TFSA contributions are not considered in calculating OAS payments, this will result in allowing wealthier seniors to get billions of dollars in extra OAS payments.

Why are the Conservatives so concerned with cutting OAS for low-income seniors in order to give more OAS to the wealthier seniors? Do they not realize how unfair and un-Canadian that is?

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, the TFSA is the most popular savings plan that has been introduced since the RRSP. Eleven million Canadians partake in it and of those who have maximized their contribution, 60% earn less than \$60,000.

The member opposite would focus on one small part of the program. It is not a problem at all, but if it ever becomes a problem in the future, we will of course deal with it. Right now, what is important is that this is providing savings opportunities for Canadians right across the country from every walk of life, and advantaging in particular our seniors.

The Budget

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members of Parliament and all Canadians, I would like to thank Canada's Minister of Finance for tabling this government's 11th consecutive budget.

As members may know, our government has done a lot for families by putting more money into their pockets, by expanding benefits such as the universal child care benefit, by introducing the family tax cut, by raising child care exemptions, and by doubling the children's fitness tax credit.

However, across Canada, and especially in my home province of Ontario, Canadians are sick and tired of being stuck in a gridlock that delays them from being with their loved ones or catching their child's soccer game.

I ask the minister, what does economic action plan 2015 do to help these frustrated commuters?

• (1650)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, the people of Mississauga South are fortunate to have such a dedicated MP, the best in over 20 years.

Economic action plan 2015 builds upon our government's impressive record of providing the largest and longest infrastructure fund ever. We have listened to Canadians in our urban and suburban centres across the country. They are tired of traffic gridlock and long commutes that keep them from their families. I am proud that our budget introduces the public transit fund which will provide amounts rising to \$1 billion every year for major public transit projects. It will be a permanent source of financing and will bring in private sector discipline so projects will be delivered on time and on budget.

Again, the opposition is opposed to an initiative that will create jobs and economic growth, relieve traffic jams and reduce smog and pollution.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start by congratulating our former colleague, Olivia Chow, who fought for years to obtain from this government more substantial investments in public transit.

When we look at recent NDP commitments, it is easy to see that we proposed new investments in public transit. Since 2011, we have been proposing that the rate of taxation for SMEs be reduced from 11% to 9%. We proposed extending the accelerated capital cost allowance for the manufacturing industry. All these measures were proposed by the NDP and are more or less tentatively included in this budget.

Now that the Minister of Finance is implicitly admitting that the Conservative approach has been a failure to date, why does he not look to the social economy measures that the NDP is proposing, such as the establishment of a national child care program with a maximum daily rate of \$15 and a \$15 minimum wage for employees of federal institutions?

At the end of the day, these measures will help middle-class workers and also stimulate the economy.

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled that the hon. member supports some of the measures in our budget. I would ask him to support our entire budget.

As far as low-income people are concerned, we created more than 1.2 million jobs; we ensured that more than one million low-income Canadians no longer pay tax; we reduced overall taxes to the lowest levels in 50 years; and we created the historic working income tax benefit to help low-income Canadians who have a job. Transfer payments to the provinces through the Canada social transfer have never been so high.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister obviously understands full well that, if we want to give money to someone or something, then we have to take money away from someone or something else, particularly when economic growth is non-existent as is now the case.

In spite of this reality, the minister would have Canadians believe that he is giving them gifts from on high. However, someone has to pay the price. That is particularly true when the economy is stagnant like it is now. For example, the government is going to spend billions of dollars on income splitting, but it has also raised the age of retirement. Does the government consider that a fair and balanced approach?

I would also like to ask the minister whether those who experience financial difficulties because of the increase in the retirement age will be able to benefit from the increase in the contribution limit for tax-free savings accounts.

• (1655)

Hon. Joe Oliver: Mr. Speaker, as I said, as far as registered retirement income funds are concerned, we are offering choices by reducing the minimum withdrawal amounts; for someone 45 and older, it will still be roughly a third or more. We will reduce the tax credit for small businesses and we are doubling the maximum contribution to the TFSA. We are creating funds for major transit projects and extending employment insurance compassionate care benefits from 6 to 26 weeks. Finally, we are creating a home accessibility tax credit for seniors and people with disabilities to make their homes safer and more accessible.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a few comments before we adjourn the debate today.

It is remarkable to watch the Conservatives stand today. It must be the eve of an election because suddenly they are consumed with the notion that job growth might be an important thing for Canadians, that the 400,000 lost manufacturing jobs are now consuming the government, that the 300,000 more Canadians who are out of work today than before the recession are suddenly an interest to Canadians, that seniors, as was recommended by my friend from Thunder Bay—Rainy River, in adjusting the way RRIFs work, are now a concern for the Conservatives.

The Budget

Imitation is a nice form of flattery, but certainly the Conservatives have missed an opportunity to give up on their stubborn and arrogant push on the \$2.5 billion income-splitting scheme that would do nothing for 85% of Canadian families, overwhelmingly helps the wealthiest few, and have compounded the problem today by adding further help to the wealthiest Canadians by doubling the TFSA, which all studies have shown us again skew toward wealthier Canadians and away from those who need the help.

In the following days, weeks and months, the NDP will continue to put ideas in front of Canadians. The Conservatives picked up a few, but missed the big ones. We know Canadians are looking for affordable child care. They are looking for true environmental protection. They are looking for a manufacturing strategy to help get

Canadians back to work. I look forward to illuminating some more of these ideas for the House and Canadians. I look forward to debate on the budget.

However, I will now move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2) the motion is deemed adopted and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.

(The House adjourned at 5 p.m.)

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