



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 180 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, November 19, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 19, 2012

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

FIREFIGHTERS

The House resumed from October 4 consideration of Motion No. 388.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased to rise in the House today to support Motion No. 388.

Our firefighters put their lives on the line every day, especially when they battle fires and go into burning buildings to save lives. We owe them a debt of gratitude for the risks they take in order to help people trapped in fires. Not only are they putting their lives at risk when they go into a building that could collapse on top of them, but they are also jeopardizing their health because of the toxic emissions given off by the building materials.

Every year, an average of 18 firefighters and seven police officers lose their lives in the line of duty. The 21 firefighters who died in 2011 all died of cancer. Furthermore, although this happens less commonly, some firefighters become disabled or even quadriplegic as a result of a work-related accident.

When something like that happens, the families are left to deal not only with the grief, but also with the lack of financial assistance that could help them get through those extremely difficult times. The families are left without any financial support.

The vast majority of fire departments unfortunately do not provide any compensation to the loved ones of firefighters who die in the line of duty. Considering the courage, dedication and determination of firefighters who regularly put their lives at risk for the benefit of the community, it is nothing short of shameful that this kind of benefit has not yet been created.

For seven years now, the NDP has been fighting for a national public safety officer compensation benefit to be paid to such officers if they are killed or become disabled.

In 2005, my hon. colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster moved a motion calling on the government to create such a compensation benefit. The Conservatives were in opposition at the time and supported the motion moved by my hon. colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster. The Liberals, however, with a minority government, unfortunately did not support this excellent initiative.

An election was held in 2006, and when the Conservatives came to power, this motion had already died on the order paper.

Once again, the Conservatives are not making the lives and health of our public safety officers who risk their lives every day a priority. They made that clear during presentations by our Conservative colleagues who are in favour of this motion. They hid behind some rather questionable arguments whereby public safety is a provincial jurisdiction, when they know full well that it is a shared jurisdiction and that no province would object to the creation of a compensation benefit.

However, the NDP has not forgotten the importance of doing this for the families of the firefighters. Since the beginning of the 41st Parliament, we have moved 11 motions on this issue. Despite our repeated efforts since Motion No. 153 was moved in the House in 2005, unfortunately, this benefit still has not been created. We think it is high time that the Prime Minister made good on the promise he made to firefighters.

We know that every firefighter and public safety organization supports this motion. What more does the government need to get things done and keep its promise?

The motion currently under review essentially asks for three things. First, it asks for the creation of a national public safety officer compensation benefit payable to the families of a firefighter, a police officer or any other public safety officer who is killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty. It also asks that firefighters be entitled to priority access to vaccines and other antiviral drugs for the duration of a pandemic. Lastly, it calls for the establishment of minimum standards in the National Building Code of Canada in order to better ensure the safety of firefighters and first responders in general.

In their role as first responders in emergency situations, firefighters and police officers may come in contact with infected individuals during a pandemic. Under the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the health sector, firefighters and police officers provide “an essential service that, if not sustained at a minimal level, would threaten public health, safety or security”.

Private Members' Business

● (1105)

Regardless, the Public Health Agency of Canada did not include firefighters in the first group to be vaccinated during the pandemic. The H1N1 outbreak showed that levels of protection vary from province to province and city to city, and thus the Public Health Agency of Canada must adopt a national protection protocol. Even our American neighbours, the Prime Minister's friends, included firefighters in the first group of people to be vaccinated. If the Prime Minister really sees himself as the champion of public safety, why has he done nothing about it since 2006? Nothing has been done. The Prime Minister merely makes glowing speeches, but has not taken any real action.

The motion also proposes introducing minimum standards in the National Building Code of Canada to enhance the safety of firefighters during a fire. In 2005, the government reviewed the National Building Code, but did not include firefighter safety as one of the standards in the code. What this means is that contractors are not required to consider the safety of firefighters when making decisions about structures and construction materials.

Try to imagine being firefighters who, at great personal risk, enter a building on fire, where the materials used are highly flammable and put their lives in danger. Furthermore, with the growing number of seniors, it will be more difficult and take more time to intervene because of the reduced mobility of these people. Introducing this standard would reduce the likelihood of firefighters being injured or killed in burning buildings.

I am expecting the Conservatives to reject this motion because they reject the principle of compensation for public safety officers, claiming that they want to avoid interfering in areas under provincial and municipal jurisdictions. We have already heard a few speeches to that effect. When the U.S. government introduced the public safety officer compensation benefit in 1976, it did not hide behind alleged jurisdictional issues. It introduced a benefit that quickly rose to \$250,000.

I remind the government that public safety is a federal responsibility and that Veterans Affairs Canada compensates federal police officers as well as soldiers who are wounded or disabled in the line of duty. Firefighters are the only public safety officers who are not compensated with this type of benefit. I also remind the government that very few municipalities have set up compensation plans for their firefighters. Too many families struggle with financial uncertainty during a time of loss. In rare cases where compensation was provided, it was too little and came too late to relieve the pain and secure the future of the family in mourning.

How can we ask them to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect us when their government is not prepared to compensate them in a worst-case scenario? How can we ask them to risk their lives, knowing that their families will not be taken care of? Obviously, firefighters do not think about this kind of thing before doing their job. We must be appreciative of this complete dedication.

Such a benefit would not represent an exorbitant public expense. The International Association of Fire Fighters estimates that it would cost \$7.5 million a year to pay a benefit of about \$300,000 to survivors or to a firefighter who becomes permanently disabled. In

the current economic climate, that is not a lot of money for a family that is struggling with such a tragedy. Instead of compensation, we expect the Conservatives to offer private-sector solutions whereby benefits would be paid to the family through a private insurance plan. They want to make the families of firefighters take on the responsibility. Firefighters will have to pay for private insurance to protect their families when they are performing their duties. That is unacceptable.

The government is prepared to give federal funding to build a memorial dedicated to firefighters fallen in the line of duty, but does not want to pay for such a benefit. That is offensive.

● (1110)

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to speak to and in support of Motion No. 388 from the hon. member for Wascana.

I want to preface my remarks by saying that all members of the House recognize the remarkable service to Canadians that our firefighters and emergency service workers provide on an ongoing basis. We recognize the sacrifice they make on our behalf and the risk they take on an ongoing basis, not only in terms of immediate risk but with respect to the long-term health risks and damage to their health as a result of their work in what is a very dangerous vocation and public service.

I want to also say that the Liberal Party views the support of our firefighters and emergency service workers as absolutely essential. In fact, on page 57 of our platform for the last election, we proposed a community heroes fund. Representatives of police and firefighters have long called for a national fund to recognize the service and sacrifice of officers killed in the line of duty. A Liberal government would establish a community heroes fund that would pay a benefit of \$300,000 to the family of fallen officers, not only helping to secure their financial future but also demonstrating the respect and gratitude of their communities and their country.

Furthermore, we also proposed a volunteer firefighters tax credit in the platform, which was a refundable tax credit that is quite different from the non-refundable tax credit proposed subsequently by the Conservative government. From a fairness perspective, a refundable tax credit would benefit all volunteer firefighters, whereas a non-refundable would perversely not benefit the lowest income volunteer firefighters. Therefore, I wanted to lay out a couple of concrete examples of our historic support for both our professional and volunteer firefighters.

I will read the specific motion to set the context.

It states:

Private Members' Business

That the House hereby affirm its support for the following measures to support Canada's firefighters which, in the opinion of the House, the government should act upon promptly: (a) the creation of a national Public Safety Officer Compensation Benefit in the amount of \$300,000, indexed annually, to help address the financial security of the families of firefighters and other public safety officers who are killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty; (b) the recognition of firefighters, in their vital role as "first responders", as an integral part of Canada's "critical infrastructure", and as "health care workers" under the Canada Influenza Pandemic Plan, entitled to priority access to vaccines and other drugs in cases of pandemics and other public health emergencies; (c) the specification of firefighter safety as an objective of the National Building Code of Canada; and (d) a review of the National Building Code of Canada, in conjunction with the International Association of Firefighters, to identify the most urgent safety issues impacting firefighters and the best means to address them.

As well, the International Association of Fire Fighters does an exceptional job in representing these professionals and these great Canadians in their work with members of Parliament and their representations to members of Parliament. I am sure all members would agree that they play an important role in bringing to light some of these important issues and priorities.

To begin with, it is absolutely essential and completely reasonable that we establish this public safety officer compensation benefit in the amount of \$300,000.

• (1115)

I referenced the last Liberal platform having called for a similar community heroes fund. I would hope that members of Parliament from all parties would support the establishment of this fund for firefighters either killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty or for the families of those firefighters. I find it hard to imagine how there could be any opposition to something as reasonable as this.

Second, in terms of the recognition of firefighters and their vital role as first responders, this is something that has evolved in recent years, in that we see firefighters becoming more highly trained as medical professionals as well as traditional firefighting. Firefighters are often the first responders in a medical emergency. This change would recognize firefighters as health care workers, which they are. It would be difficult to argue that firefighters trained to perform emergency medical procedures are not medical workers. This change would simply recognize a fact that is unarguable. As such, the material change would be that, under the Canada influenza pandemic plan, the recognition of firefighters as health care workers would entitle them to priority access to vaccines and other drugs in cases of pandemics and other public health emergencies.

This is a recognition of two things: first of all, as I said, the material change in the training and education of firefighters and their performance of emergency medical procedures on an ongoing basis; but also the increased risk we face in Canada of pandemics and other public health emergencies. I find it hard to believe that anyone would disagree with this simple recommendation that came forward from the International Association of Fire Fighters.

The specification of firefighter safety is an objective of the national building code. This is key, and it is one of those recommendations that make us wonder why it was not done previously. We do have, as part of our national building code, certain provisions on issues related to protecting families and that sort of thing, but the reality is that the design of buildings can have a significant effect on the risk posed to firefighters in the event of an emergency. We ought to be aware of what those risks are, take them

into account and incorporate them into the national building code. I suspect we could make some changes that would be relatively inconsequential to the functionality of buildings on an ongoing basis or even the cost of construction, but the changes could contribute significantly to the protection of the lives and wellbeing and the minimization of the risks to firefighters. This makes a great deal of sense.

Those three broad areas are ones we support wholeheartedly. We commend the hon. member for Wascana for putting this forward.

I would add that, on the volunteer firefighter's issue, I represent rural and small town communities in Nova Scotia where the lion's share of our fire protection is from volunteers. We would also call on the government to make fully refundable the volunteer firefighter's tax credit such that it would benefit all firefighters, particularly those low-income firefighters who do not benefit from the current tax credit because it is non-refundable.

I want to again commend the hon. member for Wascana for his commitment to firefighters and for putting Motion No. 388 forward.

• (1120)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in support of Motion No. 388, tabled in October 2012 by the member for Wascana.

This three-pronged motion mirrors previous motions from New Democrats, a total of 11 over the last number of years, calling for pandemic protection for firefighters, for national building code amendments and the creation of a national public safety officer compensation benefit. These motions reflected repeated requests from our brave and dedicated Canadian firefighters, requests that are sound and reasonable, and deserve a long overdue response. The responses that have been offered in recent years are an appreciated first step.

In 2005, the NDP Motion No. 153 called for the creation of a monument to fallen firefighters. The new Canadian Firefighters Memorial is a fitting tribute to the courage and dedication of firefighters. This memorial is an important way to ensure that the names of the brave men and women who have lost their lives in the line of duty are forever remembered. Likewise, the yearly memorial ceremony is an opportunity for Canadians to pay respect to the fallen firefighters and to show our solidarity. In my riding of Edmonton—Strathcona, our local firefighters are remembered with honour at an annual ceremony held at a monument paid for and preserved by the Edmonton Firefighters Memorial Society.

Our solidarity and appreciation for Canadian firefighters must go beyond mere symbols and tributes. This important motion promotes action to reduce the loss of firefighters' lives and to ensure that when, regrettably, a loss of life does occur, the family members left behind are adequately taken care of. This is the very least that we owe these brave men and women who put their lives at risk daily in the service of Canadians.

Private Members' Business

The first priority measure, identified by our firefighters for action by the federal government, is the creation of the national public safety officer compensation benefit. This would provide adequate compensation for firefighters killed or disabled in the line of duty. The awarding of compensation to survivors often depends upon municipalities, resulting in significant disparities across provinces and territories, and even among municipalities. For example, when Kevin Olson tragically lost his life in the 2005 fire in Yellowknife, his spouse received a mere \$22,000 benefit.

In the tragic event of the loss of a firefighter's life, we can only imagine the grief of family members left to cope with such a heartbreaking loss. It is precisely at this time, at a time of mourning, when the financial pressures of bills and mortgages arise. Proper compensation for loss of life given to ensure public safety would allow families of fallen firefighters to be protected from the double hit of financial insecurity following their loss.

I am certain that Canadians would be surprised to hear that when firefighters are killed in the line of duty, their survivors are not eligible to receive the compensation available to RCMP officers and Canadian armed forces personnel. Yet they are men and women in uniform who are dedicated to protecting our public safety and security.

I had the privilege of doing the one-day firefighter work, all in uniform, wearing the tank and the hat, and going into a burning building. I have an even greater appreciation now for those firefighters. I proudly display my own personal fire hat in my office. What possible rationale is there for excluding firefighters from receiving this compensation?

The government frequently talks of its efforts for regulatory harmonization with our southern neighbour, yet in the United States a similar benefit for the families of fallen firefighters has been in existence since 1976. It is high time that this long called for compensation benefit be established in Canada. As a firefighter with the Edmonton Fire Fighters Union, Local 209, in my riding, advised me, "It is about the federal government recognizing the contribution of our nation's public safety officers, whether police, border guards or firefighters".

Surely this is what the federal power of peace, order and good government is all about. In the view of Local 209 and all Canadian firefighters, it is the right thing to do. New Democrats agree it is the right thing to do. I encourage the government to support the motion and the creation of a universal compensation benefit similar to what is available to other public safety officers.

Second, the motion calls on the government to extend recognition to firefighters under the category of first responders under the Canada influenza pandemic plan. I would concur with the hon. member that firefighters certainly fall within the plan's parameters, including under critical infrastructure and as health care workers.

• (1125)

If properly applied, this designation would entitle firefighters to priority access to vaccines and other drugs in the event of a pandemic or other public health emergency. Firefighters rush to the assistance of Canadians at great personal risk daily, and it is only right and proper that every possible measure be implemented to

protect the well-being of firefighters. In turn, this will protect Canadians.

Third, reduction of firefighter injury and death must be made a priority. This motion calls for critical amendments to the national building code to specify firefighter safety as an objective. Upgrades to the national building code should be made in direct consultation with firefighters. This would ensure that safety issues impacting firefighters would be identified and addressed.

I fully support this call, but frankly, many of the critical amendments have been long identified and could be expedited. Changes to the national building code will pave the way for parallel changes to provincial and territorial codes. In Edmonton, we saw, in the MacEwan fire disaster, an example of the impact when fire prevention measures are ignored. Closely built homes of flammable, vinyl materials and absent fire barriers resulted in a massive number of residences being destroyed by fire. Recommendations by fire safety experts had been ignored. Firefighters were put at risk combatting this major fire.

The recommended reforms to the national building code related to improving fire prevention and the safety of firefighters could prevent death and injury, and I point out that we, on this side of the House, are speaking about preventing victims. The Edmonton Fire Fighters Union, Local 209, has also wisely recommended a national database to register and track types of fires and incidence of injuries. Such a resource, if made accessible to all firefighters, would provide highly valuable information to prevent fires, injuries and deaths.

In summary, the time is long overdue for acting on these motions that have been brought forward over the past decade. Our firefighters deserve our support.

• (1130)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 388, put forward by my colleague, the member for Wascana. The motion would direct the House to take four measures in support of Canada's firefighters, increasingly known as first responders.

Normally, we as individuals never expect to require emergency service, be it as a result of a car accident, a farm accident, an accident on the waters with either a recreational or fishing boat, or a fire. However, if such an accident were to happen, a quick response can mean the difference between life and death. It can also mean preventing a relatively small amount of fire damage or other damage from becoming a real catastrophe to the community as a whole.

Private Members' Business

I had first-hand experience with the actions of firefighters, quite a considerable time ago, when I had a major fire on my farm operation. It involved a 14,000 square foot barn and a dairy operation, and four fire departments responded to the call. We saw how those firefighters worked on site and coordinated their activities to prevent further damage from occurring. We saw how they showed up to where the fire was happening with about three seconds of notice when their pagers went off. They were mainly voluntary firefighters in that case. With about three seconds' notice on a day in May when they were doing their own work in their own fields or businesses, at the drop of a hat, they headed to the emergency. Some of them were on the site for as long as 24 hours. That is dedication and that is service to the community. They can make a huge difference between life and death or in preventing a further catastrophe from happening. Therefore, we have to recognize them on a number of fronts.

I will deal specifically with each issue in the motion. The first requests that the House affirm its support for:

(a) the creation of a national Public Safety Officer Compensation Benefit in the amount of \$300,000, indexed annually, to help address the financial security of the families of firefighters and other public safety officers who are killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty...

This kind of measure is in place in the United States and we have it in place for military personnel. It could be seen as a cushion for those families who allow their husbands, wives, brothers or sisters to operate as first responders in a fire department. It gives those families some security in knowing that should something happen there would be at least some financial compensation that would protect them into the future. It would do two things. It would give the families assurance that, should something happen, there would be some security there for them, and it would also give firefighters or first responders some assurance that their families would have some measure of protection should an event happen that causes them to lose their lives.

This one-time payment of \$300,000, paid by the Government of Canada to the family of a firefighter who lost his or her life in the line of duty, would therefore go a long way to help families deal with a tragic situation, free from the concern of individual bargaining agreements or subject to their province.

● (1135)

At an estimated annual cost of only \$10 million to \$12 million, can members really argue that this is too high a price to pay to recognize the service of someone who has laid down his or her life in saving others? I think not. We should be able to do this. There is no reason the House cannot approve this measure and give such assurance to first responders and their families.

The second point is the recognition of firefighters' vital role as first responders and their integral role as part of Canada's critical infrastructure, as well as health care workers under the Canadian influenza pandemic plan. In other words, they should be entitled to priority access to vaccines and other drugs in cases of pandemics or other public health emergencies. That is an extremely important point. I am almost shocked this is in fact not the case yet. As first responders to medical emergencies, including people who are in respiratory distress, firefighters are likely to come into contact with infected people in the course of their duties. As a result, they are at

an increased risk of exposure to infection during an influenza pandemic.

Recall the H1N1 and SARS outbreaks. These things do happen. We never know when the next occurrence might be. I think we would all want to feel that firefighters have access to the vaccines necessary because they will be assisting people in places where they will be at greater risk. It only makes sense for them to be included in that plan so they can receive the vaccines necessary to protect their health.

The Canadian pandemic influenza plan notes that firefighters and other first responders provide "an essential service that, if not sustained at a minimal level, would threaten public health, safety or security". A study concluded that without any precautions, 25% to 30% of firefighters could be unavailable at the height of a moderate pandemic, leaving fire departments unable to provide adequate services, including fire suppression, search and rescue, protection of our national infrastructure, and in most communities, first response to medical emergencies.

Other countries, like the United States and Germany, include firefighters and their first responders for vaccinations. Therefore, it only makes sense that we should as well.

The third thing the motion does is to specify that firefighter safety should be an objective of the National Building Code of Canada. It is a very important point and relates to the fourth point as well. I will read it and speak to both at the same time. The fourth point calls for "a review of the National Building Code of Canada, in conjunction with the International Association of Firefighters, to identify the most urgent safety issues impacting firefighters and the best means to address them".

Perhaps many people in the House do not even know that when one walks onto the floor of a new house, the joists holding up that floor are not nailed together as they used to be. Only glue is being used. Therefore, if there is a fire in the basement and a firefighter walks onto that top floor, the glue has melted by then and the first thing that happens is the whole house collapses.

Those are some of the things that we have to look at and Motion No. 388 will assist us in doing that. I urge people to strongly support this measure.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this motion is really important to me because it affects people in my riding to whom I am truly grateful for the work they do to keep our community safe.

The purpose of Motion M-388 is to help Canada's firefighters. These heroes demonstrate exceptional courage in fighting fires. It is high time that the government followed through on its promises. It must immediately do what is necessary to compensate the families of firefighters who are killed in the line of duty.

Private Members' Business

The Académie des pompiers, an institution of excellence in my riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, trains firefighting recruits. I would very much like to be able to assure those who are being trained in this field that their member of Parliament is proud of them and supports them, and that their government cares about their safety and recognizes their work.

I would also like to take a moment to talk about firefighters who, unfortunately, are often overlooked. I am talking about our volunteer firefighters—people for whom fighting fires is not a full-time job, but is nevertheless a calling. I know many people like this in my riding. They are outstanding members of the community. We must thank them because they do not do this work to make a living. They do it because they like doing it and they want to help the community.

[*English*]

As a little side note, I want to thank a man named George, who was very influential in my life. He was my bus driver when I was in high school. Unfortunately, he passed away. He was a volunteer fire chief. He was a wonderful man who always managed to get us to school on time, even if he had to go to put out a fire early in the morning. He was really an incredible man and had a huge influence on my life because he had such a big heart.

[*Translation*]

The motion before us is a step in the right direction. It sets out three measures being called for by the International Association of Fire Fighters, which the NDP has been actively supporting for a number of years now. These measures are: a public safety officer compensation fund, priority access to vaccines and antivirals for firefighters in the case of a pandemic, and the creation of minimum standards in the National Building Code of Canada to enhance the safety of firefighters. The people of my riding are calling for these measures.

One of the letters I received in response to this motion was from André Genest, the mayor of Wentworth—Nord, a small township in my riding. He got me the support of Jason Neil, the chief of Wentworth—Nord's fire department and first responders unit.

In an email, Mr. Neil accurately described the measures called for in this motion. He said:

These are modest, reasonable and well-thought-out requests. The motion will be debated and voted on in Parliament this fall. This will be an important opportunity for members of Parliament to show that they support the courageous individuals who risk their lives every day to keep Canadians safe.

It is an honour to rise here to speak in favour of this important motion on behalf of my constituents, for the safety of the men and women who protect them and me. I would like to do more than simply support this motion; I would like to underscore all of the work done by the NDP, by many of my colleagues in this House, for firefighters in particular.

We do not have to go back very far to see how important measures like the ones in this motion are to the NDP. There is no doubt that the NDP is the party that stands up for firefighters and their families. The NDP has moved 11 out of the 12 motions, including this one, that have been moved in the House of Commons on the subject of firefighters, their safety and recognizing their work.

I wish to congratulate and thank my colleagues from London—Fanshawe, Vancouver East and Newton—North Delta, to name just a few.

● (1145)

They have introduced bills on the following subjects: a national office for fire statistics; a death benefit for public safety officers; independent investigations when a firefighter dies in the line of duty; changes to the National Building Code; a public safety officer compensation fund; protection for firefighters in the event of pandemics; and tightened regulations on fire services at airports.

Of course I cannot forget my hon. colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster, a pioneer in this struggle on behalf of firefighters. The NDP has been actively working on this issue for 10 years now, and it won adoption of Motion No. 153 in the House of Commons in October 2005. One of the key components of the motion moved by my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster is reiterated in the motion currently before us: the creation of a public safety officer compensation benefit.

The other part of Motion No. 153 was the creation of a national memorial to commemorate firefighters who have died in the line of duty. The government achieved this on September 14, 2009. This is an effective symbol to ensure that we properly recognize the sacrifices made by Canadian firefighters who have given their lives or have been injured in the line of duty. However, it is more than just a symbol.

A public safety officer compensation benefit still has not been created in Canada because the government feels that this is the responsibility of the municipalities and the provinces. The Conservatives have to understand that the provincial jurisdictions are to be used as guidelines for respecting the other levels of government and not as excuses for inaction. Contrary to what the Conservatives' short-sightedness suggests, it is possible to work with the municipalities and the provincial governments to improve things. The mayor of Wentworth-Nord said in a press release that it was very important. The municipalities are calling for this.

Firefighters, public safety officers and their families deserve better. We must combine our efforts to ensure that the value of their exceptional contribution is recognized.

It is clear that the NDP has been the most active party in matters affecting the health and safety of firefighters.

This support is seen not just in the motions moved in the House. The NDP has officially expressed its support for the demands of the International Association of Fire Fighters in a number of speeches by our leaders during the association's annual conventions.

In closing, I want to thank the hon. Liberal member for Wascana. I want to thank him first for moving this motion, and also for acknowledging, in his August 27 letter calling for support for his motion, the NDP's efforts in all this. The NDP is proud to see that, in this motion, the Liberals are supporting something for which the NDP has been fighting for over a decade.

Private Members' Business

I want to thank all hon. members who are supporting this motion and these common sense measures for our firefighters and their families. I want to thank them for joining the NDP in its fight for greater justice in this matter.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank everyone who has participated in this debate on Motion No. 388. I am grateful for the support that has been offered from all three parties in the House and the independents. I am grateful for that and hope that will be reflected in the vote on Wednesday.

I regret that the government's official position with respect to Motion No. 388 seems to be to oppose the motion. I will address the two key arguments that some of the government members have used in expressing their opposition. One of them has to do with jurisdiction and the feeling that somehow Motion No. 388 encroaches upon provincial or municipal jurisdiction. In fact, there is no such encroachment.

I will discuss the three elements that are involved in the motion. The first of them deals with the National Building Code of Canada. By definition, the National Building Code is under the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada. Therefore, there is no encroachment on anybody else's jurisdiction there.

The second element is the issue of vaccines. The guidance that is being talked about in my motion is federal guidance on vaccine priorities as developed and published by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Again, there is no infringement on provincial or municipal jurisdictions. The provinces and local authorities would retain their full local flexibility. That remains fully intact. It is simply at the federal level that the advice would be offered about the priority to be given to firefighters and first responders.

The third element is the issue of the public safety officer compensation benefit. I am happy to note that in virtually every civilized country in the western world, including the United States, it has been recognized that this is an appropriate national obligation for governments to acknowledge. Why is that so? Apart from paying tribute to the important work that firefighters, first responders and public safety officers do in our society, there are some other very tangible benefits to providing this benefit at the national level. First, consistency is gained in the treatment of all public safety officers regardless of what level they happen to be employed at. Second, some of the pressure, cost pressure in particular, is taken off of the local municipalities. Third, the collective bargaining process will probably be improved by bringing in this provision at the national level and removing what could be an irritant at the local level. Fourth, a compensation plan for all public safety officers across all jurisdictions can be designed that will roughly match what is available today for members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP. All of that can be accomplished at the federal level through the adoption of this measure without, in any way, encroaching upon local or provincial jurisdiction.

The second argument is one of cost. I want to point out that the cost of this measure, particularly the compensation benefit, is very modest, entirely scalable and within the control of the government because it is the government that will ultimately define who falls within the definition of a public safety officer. Surely, firefighters,

police officers and emergency medical technicians would fall within that definition. Beyond that, it is the government's call to draft the definition in the legislation. However we cut it, annually the cost will be a modest one, less than the cost of government advertising, a security detail for the Prime Minister, a three-day meeting of the G8 or G20 or a rounding error in the government's fiscal framework. Therefore, it is affordable.

Finally, on the issue about how current MPs have previously voted in the House on similar proposals, I am pleased to report that some who previously voted no will be voting yes this time, which improves the chances that this measure will pass. Let me observe that there are 48 Conservative members in the House today who were also in the House the last time a similar measure to this one was voted upon and every one of those 48 Conservative MPs voted yes. I would certainly invite them to do it again. We need to get this job done and we need to do it together in the interest of what is right for Canadian firefighters.

• (1150)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 21, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

• (1155)

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The House will stand suspended until 12 o'clock.

Government Orders

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:56 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12:02 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[English]

HELPING FAMILIES IN NEED ACT

The House resumed from November 8 consideration of the motion that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought for sure the NDP members would finish their debate first, but you are the person in charge so I will go on your advice.

It is a great pleasure to join the debate on Bill C-44. It is important and worthwhile legislation. The committee has been somewhat seized by it the last number of meetings and by very compelling testimony, which I will refer to as I make my remarks.

At the outset, the Liberal Party believes in the spirit and intent of the legislation. Since the bill was brought forward by the government, it has supported the legislation throughout the process.

The essence of bill is to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act, to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the income tax regulations that will offer support to families facing unthinkable and traumatic sad events.

Over the past month, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities has heard from medical experts, social service experts, charities, not-for-profit groups and others that are doing good work to help families through incredibly difficult times, trying to care for a critically ill, missing or murdered child.

Most important, we heard from the families. I want to thank them first and foremost for the strength and courage they brought to these meetings and for their ability to advocate for the types of support that would have helped them through times of unfathomable grief.

As I look around at the members in the House today, I think we can all agree that regardless of what the legislation might be, when the bill goes to committee, we have access to people, experts in the field. Many times we are inundated with numbers in the millions and billions. The testimony through these hearings and through the review of the bill was not about millions or billions; it was about the one child who had gone missing or the one child who was lost because of a critical illness. The testimony was about knowing that this was more important than anything else in the lives of people.

It was a very emotional time for those witnesses who came to our committee and shared their stories. I know they hold the appreciation, the thanks and the respect of our entire committee.

Some who gave testimony said that this was a first good step, but there was more that could be done. I will speak about that a little later on when I talk about some of the amendments put forward.

Bill C-44 could have been improved. Many of the witnesses made some very concrete and positive recommendations to strengthen the bill. I had hoped that those recommendations would not have fallen on deaf ears, but unfortunately the government did not feel changes had to be made. The way that the bill was presented certainly took a couple of those amendments off the table. In fact, none of the amendments offered either by the NDP or by the Liberal Party made it through.

• (1205)

We based our amendments around the testimony we heard. We went through the process of gathering that information, and we made the amendments according to the facts that were established during the course of the hearings. We certainly put our amendments forward in the spirit of making the bill better for Canadians.

A number of amendments were declared out of order on the grounds they were beyond the scope of Bill C-44. It was disappointing they were not implemented and the opportunity to strengthen the bill was overruled by the government.

I would like to talk about a couple of the amendments. On behalf of our party, I raised two categories of amendments to Bill C-44. These would have made changes to the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code.

The first one was to extend the leave of absence for a parent of a critically ill child from 37 weeks to 52 weeks. We heard from parents and other stakeholders that 52 weeks would be an absolutely reasonable period of time. Critically ill children are often struggling for their lives well beyond 37 weeks and it seemed unfair and unreasonable to restrict the period to 36 weeks, especially when the legislation would provide for 52 weeks for parents of a missing or murdered children.

As a person, not even a member of Parliament, how do we quantify the amount of pain and grief that one experiences when one has a missing and/or murdered child? What that would take from a person, mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually, would be enormous. However, if parents have to watch their sons or daughters battle with a critical illness, are we in a position to judge which is more distressing or more hurtful? We thought we could apply the same grace to parents of critically ill children by increasing the employment insurance benefit to 52 weeks from 37.

The other amendment was to extend the unpaid leave in EI benefits to 14 days after the day on which a recipient's child died, instead of the last day of the week, to provide parents with additional support during a period of grief.

Government Orders

Both of these amendments asked that the parents of children who died from a critical illness be afforded two additional weeks to grieve. As it stands in Bill C-44, special benefits for parents of a critical ill child would expire on the last day of the week in which the child died. This means that if a child passes away on a Thursday, the child's mother or father would be required to return to work that following Monday. Therefore, the parent loses a child on Thursday and has to return to work on Monday.

If bereaved parents returned to a workplace that required a degree of concentration, maybe it would impact on the safety of others working around them. We would expect people in a position of trust or responsibility to be sound of mind and mentally prepared to perform the duties that are asked of them on a daily basis. I would think if parents are dealing with the death of a child, they would want some time to come to terms with that, to work with their families, their spouses and their other children. We thought it would have been in order to extend that benefit for an additional two weeks. That was ruled out of order as well.

● (1210)

Our amendments would have increased the supports for the parents to receive the same types of benefits through this incredibly dark time.

The other amendment was to eliminate the unequal and unfairness of the labour force attachment by reducing the number of labour force attachment hours required of employment insurance claimants from 600 to 420 that would have to be worked over the six-month period. Reducing the number of hours required would have the effect of extending benefits to part-time workers. We know the number of part-time workers has grown in the country.

In 2004, one in eight jobs were of a part-time nature. Now, one in seven jobs are of a part-time nature. That is fairly significant. It is a big change in the fundamentals of the workforce structure in our country. The amendment we put forward would have addressed the number, especially if a primary caregiver were the mother. The number of women in the workforce who work part-time far exceeds the number of men who work part-time.

We asked the government how it arrived at this number and it could not really provide a legitimate rationale for the 600 hour requirement. We quizzed officials on this and they said that they chose this number because that was what was required to receive special benefits. It was synchronized up like that. There was no other rationale for it. If they had looked at the changing nature of the workforce and the fact that the part-time worker segment had grown so much over the last eight years, they may have been able to alter their perception to improve the legislation.

In analyzing how many parents could potentially qualify, we found a significant percentage would not meet the minimum hourly requirement. In 2011, 25% of parents of children under age 18 worked part-time, a very substantive number, part-time being fewer than 30 hours a week. These parents worked an average of 16.5 hours a week. Had they worked continuously for six months, they would have only worked 430 hours, not enough to qualify for the EI benefit. In fact, 80% of fathers and 75% of mothers who worked part-time, worked fewer than what would be required to reach the 600 hours over the course of 26 weeks. That means 275,000 fathers

and 680,000 mothers would not qualify for this new special benefit. It is just wrong to take that number of Canadians and tell them they will be unable to receive the same support as another group of Canadians. It is truly unfortunate and is a missed opportunity.

Had the bill not been introduced so quickly, the opposition may have had time to make improvements at second reading. We heard time after time, almost to a witness, that the age requirement of 18 should be increased. Certainly both opposition parties made a point of this knowing that parents did not stop caring for or trying to support their children just because they turned the magic age of 19. Parents are in it for the long haul. The witnesses believed that the age requirement should be increased.

The bill was brought forward and rushed through second reading. The minister announced the legislation on September 20. The next week, on September 26, the debate at second reading of Bill C-44 began.

● (1215)

However, the technical briefing on the bill, which would amend three pieces of legislation, did not occur until after second reading debate had already begun. We were in the midst of that when the technical briefing took place.

That is the devil in the detail aspect of the way the government has decided it is going to put forward its legislation. We have seen that in the omnibus bill and in a number of other pieces of legislation. Probably the most egregious example would be the budget bill. If they can jam as much as they can in there and run it through as quickly as they can, it would serve some type of purpose. However, if had been given a real opportunity to refine that piece of legislation, we could have put forward the amendments to increase the age and changed the allowable number of hours for part-time workers from 600 down to 420. These changes would have included a greater number of the Canadians who really live on the edges.

However, that is not the way the Conservatives decided to go about it. Indeed, considering the expertise within the public service in the Department of Human Resources, it would have been very useful to have the briefing well before the debate at second reading to provide adequate time to prepare amendments to strengthen this legislation.

I bring members' attention to the fact that in 2002 the Liberal government of the day passed Bill C-49, and I was fortunate to be part of that government. That bill amended the Employment Insurance Act to make the stacking provisions more lenient. The intention of the bill at that time was to ensure that a person who fell ill during a parental leave could also collect EI sickness benefits. What unfortunately happened was that the bureaucracy did not follow the intent of Parliament's legislation and refused perhaps thousands of parents who fell ill during their parental leave.

Government Orders

It was only after one lady appealed the denial of her benefits that the real issue came to light. In 2010, Natalya Rougas, a Toronto mother, was diagnosed with breast cancer while on maternity leave. However, after applying for EI sick benefits her claim was rejected on the grounds that she was on maternity leave and therefore not available for work. She appealed the decision and won her case last year, entitling her to a maximum of 15 weeks of sick benefits in addition to the 50 weeks of maternity and parental benefits that she took after her son was born in January 2009. In his ruling, released in 2011, Justice R.J. Marin said that the legislative changes in 2002 in Bill C-49 were intended to make sick benefits available to women who became ill immediately before, during or after receiving maternity benefits.

Justice Marin later explained that “If the (Employment Insurance) Commission were to give a more liberal interpretation to the provisions of the Act in relation to women who are able to establish a serious illness at the end of their maternal/parental leave, its approach would be consistent with the will of elected officials”. That is a key point, which has been reinforced by a further ruling. Marin also stated that the law was not being interpreted “in the way in which Parliament had intended”.

The lawyer for Ms. Rougas, Mr. Stephen Moreau, expects there are 3,000 or 4,000 such people out there to which this applies. It was funny too that when Bill C-49 was being put forward to make people eligible for those stacking provisions, the Conservatives voted against it. One of their favourite lines is: “These guys voted against it”. Well, they voted against this stacking provision. I do not know where this stands right now and whether these people are being allowed to receive the benefits. However, Judge Marin certainly believes these have always been in order.

I look forward to answering some questions.

•(1220)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, in particular for indicating that he would be supporting the bill. I am grateful for that.

I had the privilege of working on a cross-party group that studied the issue of palliative care. The Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care heard from hundreds of Canadians on this issue. I would like to read into the record one the comments we heard. This lady said:

Governments must support and invest in families during these tragically difficult times. The long term socio-economic benefits and returns of supporting families are far greater than the supposed cost savings that result from a politics of inertia. Doing nothing simply raises the toll of broken individuals and families. Colleen [her daughter] is living proof that there are gaps in our social and support systems that need to be updated. I am asking you [the committee] to extend compassionate leave benefits to at least 26 weeks in a 52 week period. I am also asking that you change the qualifying criteria to “gravely ill” as opposed to “significant risk of death”.

Both of these requests were granted. In fact, we went further than that by granting 35 weeks of benefits. Does my colleague not agree that this is a great step forward on something that has not been addressed by many governments for so long?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, if we are going to quantify the word “great”, I would say it would mean a very good step forward. I will give the member a “very good” on that.

The member for Kitchener—Conestoga made reference to the palliative care committee and its strong collaborative work. However, I know it could have been better. If the legislation had been brought forward during second reading, I know that we could have made some changes to it to increase the age. We would have been able to deal with the required number of hours to accommodate part-time workers. I know that this could have been better. Therefore, “good” is pretty good, but I think there is the opportunity to be better.

When we talked about the other witnesses, I wanted to recognize as well our colleague from Brant who spoke in the House about his own personal ordeal. It was probably one of the most powerful speeches I have heard from a member in the House. I want to recognize him in my comments.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of working with the member on the committee and on the bill. Like him, we too will be supporting the legislation. Like him, we too believe that it is an important first step; but it is just that, a first step in doing right, in particular for parents of murdered and missing children.

I brought up at committee the fact that the government is asking parents to have earned at least \$6,500 before they can qualify for a grant supporting them in their time of bereavement. I do not really understand why it should be \$6,500, when clearly, if someone is making \$10 an hour, they have to work 650 hours to qualify. If the person is making \$100 an hour, he or she only has to work 65 hours. Why should that matter if their child is missing or murdered? Surely any parent who is going through that ordeal deserves the government's support without being means tested in such a bizarre way.

My colleague and I from the Liberal Party explored that issue at committee. I think we both agree, but I wonder whether he heard from the minister any explanation at all during the course of this debate about why this kind of means testing is essential in the bill?

•(1225)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, what it comes down to is that the bill is going to help, I think the anticipated number is, about 6,000 to 7,000 Canadians a year. None of us as parents would ever want to go through an ordeal like that, so for the federal government to stand by them in their time of need is very important.

Again, the means test is an issue for those who are the most vulnerable. If someone is working a part-time job and only making minimum wage, or working for 450 hours a year in a seasonal industry in a remote community, the person is so exposed when something like this happens. They cannot plan for this. They do not say they are looking forward to the day his or her child gets a terminal illness, that they have money tucked away for that. That is not how people live their lives. These families are just rocked to the core and decimated emotionally and, for many of them, financially as well.

Government Orders

Yes, Bill C-44 will help a number of people, but I know that we could have done more. Had we brought it forward during second reading, I know we could have made it better for many more Canadians.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the most disturbing part of my colleague's speech had to do with the child who dies on a Thursday night and the parents are required to be back at work on Monday morning. However, when he presented an amendment to that effect, it was ruled out of order.

I am curious about the government's rationale in those circumstances. Why would the Conservatives not present their own amendment to such an obvious uncaring and unfeeling response to what is arguably the most significant tragedy in any family, the loss of a child?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, dealing with the death of a child is something we hope not to have to go through. However, of all the shortcomings in the bill, one of the most obvious is not to have addressed the requirement that someone be back to work on Monday after burying their child over the weekend.

Why was that not addressed? This goes back to the genesis of the bill, the way it was presented and rushed through at second reading. The Conservatives are not saying no to this, but because of the procedural approach they took in presenting the bill, if an amendment of ours alters the bill's scope, then they do not have to say no because the amendment would be out of order. They can limit the scope of amendments by altering the process to have second reading before the technical briefing. Then the Conservatives do not have to be the big bad wolf and say they would not support these people. It is truly unfortunate.

This is one provision that I know both opposition parties would have supported. However, it was not forthcoming. Again, it is an opportunity missed.

• (1230)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the opposition parties for their support of this bill. It is greatly appreciated. However, I want to correct the record so that we are all clear.

The reason we are expediting this bill is so that Canadian families can benefit, full stop. We want them to have access to these opportunities as soon as possible, and I think the opposition completely agrees with that.

Second, with regard to the age of 18, this is a very set criterion in the institutions that I have worked in and, actually, currently work in. Pediatric physicians do not actually take good care of adults.

My question for the member is very open-ended. Could he please tell me the things he liked about the bill and why he thinks it is important for Canadian families?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to dig out my PMO talking points for an infomercial.

I thought I said fairly eloquently during my remarks in the House that there are good components of the bill, which we have supported

from day one at first reading. However, it would have been better to have had the opportunity to make reasoned amendments to improve the legislation and access for a greater number of Canadians in need.

We know the bill is a positive step for a group of people, but we thought it could have helped even more Canadians who find themselves in pain and turmoil and thrust into a situation the bill addresses.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Selkirk—Interlake.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to rise in this House in support of Bill C-44, the Helping Families in Need Act.

[*English*]

As a pediatric orthopedic surgeon who has worked with many families supporting critically ill children, primarily trauma patients, I can personally attest to the absolute need for this legislation to be passed as quickly as possible. I want to thank the opposition parties for their support of this bill and for the timely passage of it through second reading and committee consideration.

This bill is about supporting families who are going through probably the most difficult times in their lives both emotionally and financially. This legislation introduces new employment insurance benefits for parents of critically ill children, which were announced earlier this summer by the Prime Minister. This new EI benefit would provide 35 weeks of income support to parents who cannot work while caring for their critically ill or injured children under the age of 18. To comment on what the opposition member said earlier, this would then be allowed to be stacked on sickness benefits of 15 weeks, as well as compassionate care benefits of six weeks if families require it.

Children with life-threatening conditions need more than just around-the-clock medical care. They need their parents. This new benefit would help reduce some of the financial pressures that parents experience when they take time away from work while they are caring for their children. Our government recognizes the vital and essential role parents play in both comforting and caring for their children. As a surgeon, I can say that parental support at the bedside is essential for a recovering child. As with EI parental and compassionate care benefits, parents would be able to share these benefits between them. This benefit would also provide support for families in the most tragic and difficult times they may be facing.

Government Orders

Clauses within this bill would also enable the creation of new federal income support for parents of murdered or missing children, as announced by the Prime Minister last spring. Our government has continued to champion the cause of victims of crime. In 2007, we provided \$52 million over four years to enhance the federal victims strategy. In 2010, we provided additional funding for child advocacy centres and victim services for families of missing or murdered aboriginal women.

• (1235)

[Translation]

As announced by the Prime Minister in April of this year, we will provide financial support to parents who are coping with the disappearance or death of a child, as a result of a Criminal Code offence. This measure will come into effect in January of 2013.

[English]

The measures in this bill demonstrate our government's commitment to providing families with flexibility to balance the obligation of work with the duty to family. I can only imagine the loss or disappearance of a child as a result of a criminal act. It would be one of the most agonizing experiences a parent could ever go through. While there is no way to make this situation right, we as parliamentarians can provide financial support to parents, who then would have the ability to focus on what matters most to them without having to worry about missing a mortgage payment.

To qualify for this grant of \$350 for up to 35 weeks, applicants would be required to have a minimum level of income and have taken leave from their work. Income support would continue for two weeks after the missing child is found to allow parents to spend time with their child. Workers who take leaves of absence from federally regulated jobs to cope with such an event would have their jobs protected, as would parents of critically ill children, thanks to amendments to the Canada Labour Code.

The third component of this legislation would provide greater access to sickness benefits for new parents.

[Translation]

With this bill, parents will be able to access sickness benefits if they fall ill while receiving parental benefits.

[English]

Currently, EI claimants cannot access sickness benefits during a claim for parental benefits because of the requirement to be otherwise available for work or, for self-employed persons, to be otherwise working and to have stopped working because of illness. There are situations where a parent becomes ill soon after a child is born, while receiving parental benefits. In those cases, parents have been unable to access sickness benefits during or after receiving parental benefits because of the way the Employment Insurance Act is written. This bill would amend the EI Act to waive these requirements for claimants receiving EI parental benefits, allowing parents to focus on their own health and getting well so that they are able to take care of their children at the end of the parental leave.

The combination of these new measures in Bill C-44 is proof that our government is taking action to help parents balance work and family responsibilities. We are fortunate to have a Prime Minister

who understands the importance of families. As he has stated previously, families are the building blocks of our society.

[Translation]

It is time to stand together and support families in this country when they need it the most.

[English]

I thank the opposition parties again for agreeing to support our Conservative government with this bill, so that at a time when parents need it most they would receive support from our government while facing those challenging circumstances.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Conservative member who just spoke.

In her view, why does Bill C-44 only apply to special benefits? For example, why does it not allow women returning from parental or maternity leave to receive regular benefits if they return to work and discover that they have been laid off or that their job has been eliminated?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the changes that are being made, the Canada Labour Code would actually protect the jobs of federally regulated employees in these circumstances. The intent of the bill is to make sure those issues that had arisen before are dealt with in an effective way to protect employees. Whether they be changes to the Canada Labour Code or extensions on the ability to apply for EI in the case of critically ill children or the new grant for murdered or missing children, these are all measures to ensure families are supported in their most significant time of need.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her great speech and the good work the Conservatives are doing on this file. The improvements in the bill certainly mirror many of the comments we have heard at our committee on palliative and compassionate care.

At different times today we have heard from opposition members who are negative with respect to the fact that there are so many measures that are not in the bill.

My colleague, the parliamentary secretary, served on the committee that studied this bill. I am wondering if she could help us understand how, time and time again, the stakeholders were urging our government to get on with the bill and get it into place so that families could in fact be helped, which is the primary focus of the bill.

• (1240)

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, everyone on our committee appreciated the stakeholders who came to present. Whether it was a mom who had a critically ill child or someone who had been ill and then had a child and required support, they were all recognized. That is why all parties in the House are supporting the bill.

Government Orders

The most important action we can take here is to support families so that they can stay together in their greatest time of need. I have seen that again and again at bedsides at the Hospital for Sick Children and here at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. Children require their parents there when they are becoming well. They need them there. That is why I am delighted that all members in the House will be supporting Bill C-44.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we definitely always have questions for the member because her speeches are always very interesting, even though they sometimes lack substance.

With regard to the bill before us, did the Conservatives go to communities and did they hear what changes should be made for children with special needs, which is certainly commendable?

What else did the member hear from Canadian communities as to the changes that must be made to the Employment Insurance Act?

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that I do not meet the intellectual quota for the member opposite, but I will say this.

Parents have told us that they need Bill C-44 expediently so that they can benefit from it. Whether they be the parents of a child who is critically ill, a child who is missing or a child who has been murdered, they need that time to be with their family. That is why they want this bill in place immediately. That is why we have expedited it.

I appreciate the support of the opposition to make sure the bill is expedited so that Canadian families can benefit from it immediately.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-44, the helping families in need act, which delivers on several of our commitments to support Canadian families as we seek to help them balance work and family responsibilities.

The legislation supports parents of murdered and missing children, and parents of critically ill children. It also provides enhanced access to EI sickness benefits for parents who fall ill while receiving EI parental benefits. The amendments proposed in the helping families in need act will allow us to offer new support measures to Canadian families at a time when they need it the most.

For parents, it means they will not have to quit their jobs to care for critically ill children. For employers, it means retaining valued employees who, otherwise, would have had to give up their jobs to care for a child who is critically ill. For children, it means they can have their parents at their sides during the most difficult times they will ever face in their lives.

Children who are critically ill require not only ongoing care, but they need the love and emotional support of their parents during this time of need. I am extremely pleased to see our government taking action to help the parents of critically ill children. In fact, since I was first elected in 2004, one of my first orders of business was to table a motion calling for just this kind of support.

Before politics and after I was first elected, our neighbours had a son, Jonathan Watson, who was terminally ill with neuroblastoma. We witnessed first-hand his courageous battle, his tremendous spirit

and how he was just so loved, not only by his family but by our entire community of Teulon. They farmed just down the road from us. It was an incredible hardship for them to deal with all the emotional stress of caring for their son who for seven years fought this terrible disease, which he finally succumbed to.

Brenda, his mother, had to give up her job to be with him full time. His dad had to take on two jobs just to support the family. They did quite a bit of the surgery and care down in the U.S., because the surgeries were just not available in Canada. It took an incredible toll on the entire family, a family of very dear friends.

Jonathan wanted to raise awareness of the battle he was going through. His parents, Ken and Brenda, wanted to raise awareness of their struggle. Using the Candlelighters organization, which gave them a lot of support, along with the tremendous support they got from the community, there were fundraising events. There was also charitable giving, because we knew of the financial hardship the family was going through. We also witnessed their having to pretty much end their farming careers because they just could not afford to put the time into two jobs and the farm while Jonathan dealt with his reoccurring illness, which finally got the better of him.

One of the things Jonathan did that I was able to participate in a little bit was that he twice participated in a car push. He was the driver of a car and a couple of strong men pushed the car for an entire weekend, ongoing, to break the Guinness world record for the longest car push. It was a fundraising event to raise awareness, as well as to raise support for medical research for children's diseases. It was something he was incredibly proud of and we were all quite proud of his participation in it. It was his idea and he was able get involved with a couple of great big guys and do it over a weekend.

I introduced a motion back in November 2005. Motion No. 309 said:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should provide income support payments, expanded parental leave and tax relief to parents, legal guardians or family members leaving work to provide home care to critically and terminally ill children requiring full-time palliative care as certified in a letter from a medical practitioner.

Government Orders

I called that Jonathan's bill. I was quite pleased that in the following Parliament my seatmate, the member for Leeds—Grenville, brought forward Bill C-542 in the 39th and 40th Parliament, and again in this Parliament, Bill C-371, which called for the exact same types of support for families dealing with children who are critically and terminally ill, and also made sure that we have the EI support and employment protection reforms in place. He carried the ball on that in the Parliaments after I originally tabled the motion. It is something I am very proud of him for doing. He worked very closely with Sharon Ruth of Kemptville, a constituent of his, and she has worked hard on this issue, and I want to congratulate both of them.

● (1245)

Parents of critically ill children face difficult choices. In addition to the emotional and physical stress of caring for a critically ill child, many parents must choose between continuing to work to support their families or incurring financial hardship when they temporarily leave work to care for their child.

Are loving parents willing to take leave from their jobs in order to be with their ill children? Of course they are. Should these parents be provided with as much support as possible so they are not penalized for being with their families in time of need? Most members in the House would believe that is true. I hope all parties would support that and all members would have the same realization as we do on this side of the House. Indeed, in a 2006 study of EI compassionate care benefits, it was found that parents of children receiving curative treatments, such as chemotherapy or having major surgery, are likely to quit their jobs to be with their child regardless of the prognosis. I think all of us as parents would do the same thing.

Between 40% and 63% of families who have children with cancer lose income because they work less while they care for their sick child. Loss of income and out of pocket expenses for travel, accommodation and payment for medical supplies can account for nearly 25% of the total disposable income available to these families. As I mentioned with the Watsons, it was even higher than that because they had to go to the United States for the care, treatment and surgeries for neuroblastoma on Jonathan.

Our government wants to ensure that these parents do not suffer undue financial hardship any longer and that we support them and their families during these difficult times. That is why we have created this new EI benefit that would provide temporary income support for eligible claimants who take leave from work to provide care and support to a critically ill child. These measures would be available to parents of a critically ill child under the age of 18 and would provide support for up to 35 weeks. As I said before, we will also amend the Canada Labour Code to allow for unpaid leave for employees under federal jurisdiction to ensure that their jobs are protected if they take time off to care for a critically ill child.

These changes are not simply worth doing, they are the right thing to do to support Canadian families. I am pleased to hear that the NDP and the Liberals will be supporting the bill. The families that this legislation supports need this help as soon as possible. It is too late for the Watsons, but in talking to Brenda and Ken, they want to see that this help is there for families who are going through the

same experience that they went through back in 2005 and the seven years previous to that.

One of the areas that has not received much attention from previous governments is supporting families who have been negatively impacted by crime. This is perplexing because it is quite possibly one of the most difficult experiences a parent could ever go through: the loss or disappearance of a child as a result of a criminal act. That is why parents who work for a federally regulated employer who take a leave of absence from work to cope with such circumstances will also receive job protection under this legislation. We will also be providing financial help to parents through the new federal income support for parents of murdered or missing children. This grant is expected to be available as early as January 1, 2013.

Another portion of the bill that would have a significant economic and labour impact is enhancing the access to EI sickness benefits. Under the bill, the Employment Insurance Act would be amended to allow parents access to EI sickness benefits if they fall ill during the time they are on EI parental leave. If a parent is already on parental leave to care for a newborn and then fall ill with cancer or something that would take them out of the workforce for a lengthy period of time, they could still access those EI sickness benefits after the parental leave.

These combined initiatives, which our government is proposing in the helping families in need act, are just some of the actions taken by our government to help Canadian parents balance work and family responsibilities. The bill is in addition to the measures we have already brought in, such as expanding eligibility for compassionate care, allowing the self-employed to opt into the EI program to access maternity, parental, sickness and compassionate care benefits, and improved access to EI parental benefits for military families. The initiatives in the bill underscore our government's commitment to support Canadian families and help them through the times when they are most in need.

I want to thank the Prime Minister for originally introducing the bill and talking about it. I also want to thank the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development for bringing it to the House and, as I said, the member of Parliament for Leeds—Grenville, as well as the families and the non-government agencies such as Candlelighters that have been promoting and lobbying for these changes for so long, families such as the Watsons and the Rudys who have been affected by these unfortunate incidents, as has the hon. member for Brant with his own family.

● (1250)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the bill is a minor change for the government but it has a great impact on families. Not tens of thousands, but a few thousand families would be affected.

Government Orders

One of my constituents is on long-term disability and will never work again, but his disability cheques have EI deductions of \$27 a month. It is cutting into his food budget. I am wondering if the government would be open to other minor changes like fixing this problem with EI deductions from disability claims.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, the member's question should be raised with the minister directly. He should talk to her about the concerns he has, which are similar to ones I have had expressed in my constituency office as well. People sometimes wonder why those deductions are made. Sometimes it requires changes to the Income Tax Act as much as other legislation to see the deductions negated if people are not going to qualify for EI in the future.

Bill C-44 is about helping families in need that are dealing with some of the most difficult times in their lives, watching loved ones, their children, suffer very serious illnesses and injuries that are often terminal with no recourse. That is why it is important for us to remember those families. In my home town the Jonathan Watson memorial bonspiel will take place in the next month. That memorial bonspiel is a charity that raises funds to support health care and research for children and children's diseases. I would encourage everyone to participate in not only those types of fundraising events in my riding, but similar events right across the country.

• (1255)

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was in Vancouver when the Prime Minister announced this and I received great feedback from my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla on the issue. The previous member asked a question in regard to how many people this would help.

I would like to get on the record how many families this piece of legislation would affect each year as well as the importance of helping out families. I know the member spoke passionately about the fact that we need to continue to support these families. Could the member comment on the importance of helping people whose children are missing, possibly because of criminal acts and how the bill would support them?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I am informed that over 6,000 families are going to see a benefit from this on an annual basis. That is fairly significant when we look at how many families have to deal with this and how many families have fallen through the cracks under previous governments. It is important that we are finally addressing this and that thousands of families across Canada will have access to this type of support. Again, I applaud the government for introducing the legislation and allowing us as members of Parliament to bring forward some of these difficult stories and share them with other Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

I rise today to once again discuss Bill C-44, which, as we know, proposes changes to the Canada Labour Code and to employment insurance.

Clearly, I welcome the measures proposed by the government as good news because they provide direct assistance to Canadian families that are experiencing great hardship. What the government

is proposing will allow families to take time off and collect employment insurance benefits if their children become critically ill or if they die or disappear as a result of a crime. As I have said many times in the House, the NDP will always be there to support parliamentary initiatives that help ease the suffering of parents in need so that they can recover from difficult situations or take care of their sick child.

Although we are nearing the end of the legislative process, we must still debate certain aspects of this bill, which is a good initiative in and of itself. However, we must ask ourselves whether the bill proposed by the Conservatives is being applied in an acceptable way and whether it goes far enough. In short, although we may support the basic idea, we still think that there is room for improvement.

Bill C-44 has already been debated at first and second reading and examined in committee. Obviously, members of Parliament are aware of the content of this bill, but I think that it is relevant to review the proposals in order to shed some light on those that, in my humble opinion, should be improved.

Among other things, Bill C-44 would allow parents to extend their maternity and parental leave by the number of weeks that their child was hospitalized, and to extend their parental leave by the number of weeks of sick days taken during the parental leave and by the number of weeks spent serving in the Canadian Forces Reserves. It grants unpaid leave of up to 37 weeks for parents of gravely ill children. It also grants a maximum of 104 weeks of unpaid leave to parents of children who are killed as a result of a crime and a maximum of 52 weeks of unpaid leave to parents of children who disappear as a result of a crime. Lastly, it also extends to 17 weeks the period of unpaid leave that can be taken as a result of illness or injury without fear of job loss.

Bill C-44 also creates a new benefit that can be combined with other special employment insurance benefits, but only in the case of parents of gravely ill children.

Many of these ideas are good signs. However, in a previous debate, I expressed my concerns about the fact that the government's proposal did not do enough, since it excluded protection for women who lose their jobs after returning from parental leave, because Bill C-44 does not allow for special benefits to be combined. Unfortunately, this legislative black hole exists and is negatively affecting many Canadian families. There have been some disturbing stories in the news in recent months. It is unacceptable to abandon mothers who are dismissed when they want to return to work after parental leave.

The Conservatives are certainly missing a perfect opportunity to help mothers who are fighting tirelessly for greater justice in terms of eligibility for employment insurance. I would like the Conservatives to explain to Canadians why Bill C-44 is limited to special benefits. Why does it not allow women returning from parental or maternity leave to receive regular benefits if they return to work and discover that they have been laid off or that their job has been eliminated? How can the government justify this to these families?

Government Orders

The NDP believes that Bill C-44 does not do enough here. We will continue to fight to ensure these women have the right to employment insurance after a dismissal for which they were not responsible.

On another note, I would like to discuss the work done in committee. I would like to take this opportunity to applaud the efforts of my opposition colleagues who proposed reasonable, constructive, logical amendments that would expand the scope of this bill beyond the original version. In total, 17 amendments were proposed and studied. We hoped that after all of the meaningful debates and excellent analyses in this House in recent months, the Conservatives would be open to discussing and negotiating certain aspects of the bill that could be improved.

● (1300)

Most of the amendments dealt with the following: amending the definition of “child” in order to include dependent children over 18; extending the period of leave for critical illness by two weeks following the death of a child—benefits for parents of critically ill children end on the last day of the week during which the child dies—in order to give parents the time to grieve and bury their child, at the very least; and allowing parents of murdered or missing children to take leave in a flexible manner rather than consecutively, without increasing the total amount of leave, in order to allow them to tend to legal matters, such as the trial of the person charged with murdering their child.

Not one of the proposed amendments was kept by the Conservatives, which proves that they are not interested in the opposition's good ideas. I have to say that I deplore the Conservatives' unilateral approach in committee, when—as Canadians—we are supposed to enjoy a democratic system that allows for openness, transparency, discussion in good faith and negotiation throughout the legislative process that ultimately shapes the daily lives of Canadians.

It is also vitally important to take into consideration the testimony by experts who specialize in various fields in order to enlighten Parliament and its members in their decision making and in the drafting of bills.

At the October 23 committee hearing, Susan O'Sullivan, the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, said:

I would just add that with the Canada Labour Code, one of the things we heard from victims on this is that they definitely see it as a positive step forward, but they would offer that the category should be broadened...

We've just heard from Yvonne about the age of her daughter when she was murdered. There's this huge issue of whether your child is 18 or your child is 19, so eliminate the age requirement.

In his testimony on October 23, Bruno Serre had this to say:

A period of 35 weeks is a good start. It depends on the person and the situation, but 35 weeks is still a good amount of time.

But if these 35 weeks must be consecutive, that isn't enough. People will have to attend trials a year and a half or two years later. When the trial or the preliminary hearing starts, people must have more time. During the trial, people can't go to court and then go to work. I know this because last year, during the preliminary inquiry, we attended hearings and had to go to work two days later. It is very difficult and it takes time.

When she appeared before the committee on October 30, Angella MacEwen, senior economist with the Canadian Labour Congress,

explained that after a missing child is found, the parents have 14 days of leave; after a sick child dies, the parents' leave ends at the end of the week. She thought that according to the labour standards in Canada, leave to grieve is three days, which means that they would have an additional three days after the end of the week, which, quite honestly, would not even get them to the funeral.

I think that is almost cruel.

The Conservatives should take this testimony into consideration, and it must be debated while there is still time. I hope that in light of all of the debates that have taken place on Bill C-44, the government will embark on some thoughtful and careful reflection on what experts and the opposition are proposing. This is about the well-being of Canadian families who are already suffering through terrible tragedies.

However, I support Bill C-44, because it is definitely a step in the right direction. I would like to acknowledge the work the Conservatives did on this bill, even though it is not perfect.

A great deal of work remains to be done, but I am convinced that we are starting with a solid foundation that, regardless of ideologies and partisanship, meets a real need in our society.

● (1305)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for the great work she did on the issue of Canada Employment. I know she worked very hard.

I wonder if she could give us more details about the benefits of this bill, but also about any reservations she might have about the implementation of this bill.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I think the key to success for such a bill is flexibility. This bill is a step forward. However, we cannot respond to every situation. For instance, when people have to go to court, they can be called back six months or a year later, and people cannot always make themselves available.

Similarly, when a child dies, parents need more than just three days. Three days is only enough time to meet with the church officials, if the parents are religious, and to plan the funeral. That is about it. But that is not how grief works. I am not saying that people should be allowed two years, but we need to think about giving more than just three days.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her very interesting speech. It clarifies the improvements that could be made to this bill and the level of collaboration that was achieved, or not, in committee. Unfortunately, it was not.

The parties essentially agreed: additional help needs to be provided to families dealing with illnesses or very unfortunate events, or the disappearance or kidnapping of a loved one. We are pleased to be able to address such a serious issue with this bill.

Government Orders

My colleague has a great deal of expertise in employment insurance. I would like her to say a few words about the fact that in 2011, in their platform, the Conservatives said that funding for this measure would come from general revenues and not from employment insurance premiums. The Conservatives have broken that promise. What are the potential threats and consequences? What does my colleague think about this?

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question.

This bill has two parts. I believe that the part on missing or murdered children is covered by general revenues and the part on sick children is covered by the parents.

Let us not forget that employment insurance is paid for by employees and employers. It must not become a fund that the government dips into for social matters. We cannot end up having employees and employers pay for every social concern. If the government promised this would come from general revenues, then it should come from general revenues.

It would be better to raise corporate taxes to pay for certain social programs than to constantly take money that belongs to employees and employers.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I listened to my colleague's speech, I heard a lot of criticism and concerns regarding things but she obviously is supporting of the bill. I am just wondering what positive things in the bill she is prepared to support.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I believe that there are enough positive things for me to support the entire bill.

This is what I want. I will give the member a specific example, and I will be brief. A woman with a seriously ill 18-month-old daughter lives in my riding of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. Because of the illness, her daughter's rib cage must be expanded about every eight months. Time and again, the mother must take her daughter to hospital and remain there with her for seven or eight weeks while the daughter undergoes this procedure. You cannot leave an 18-month-old alone.

I would like the bill to go further for such special circumstances. However, I repeat that the NDP supports families and will support this bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am standing today to speak to Bill C-44, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act. We will be supporting the bill, as we have heard in the House this morning, but I do have a couple of comments that are worth noting.

First, I thank the critics on our side of the House who have been working on this and have provided us with very good information. One of my great pleasures since being elected is getting to know people and watching them work. I extend that to all members of the

House. The committees often work very well and that is another real pleasure of this job.

It is a good bill because it moves beyond partisan politics in some senses and affects families in their greatest time of need. I will say a little more about this later. In the end, we support the bill because it would ease the suffering of parents.

In terms of background, Bill C-44 is an amendment to the Canada Labour Code and would extend the leave of absence available to parents. It would allow for the extension of maternity and parental leave by the number of weeks that a child is hospitalized during the leave. I cannot even imagine what it must be like to have an ill child. This would go some way to alleviate some of the intense stress that is felt during this period. I do wonder if this includes children who are hospitalized in private clinics or abroad, because that is not specified in the bill. That perhaps is something I will leave for another day, or perhaps, as the bill becomes law and it works through administratively, the extent to which this is extended might need to be revised as we move along.

The bill also would grant an unpaid leave of absence for up to 37 weeks for parents of critically ill children and would extend the period of absence that could be taken due to an illness or injury without fear of layoff for 17 weeks. Therefore, it would provide security for workers in uncertain times. We have had an update from the Minister of Finance, who is usually rosy and perhaps overly optimistic about the Canadian economy sometimes, but we have had a warning that perhaps things are not as rosy as they are made out to be, so anything we can do to alleviate stress is important.

It is also important to note that this change would apply exclusively to federally regulated industries. Hopefully, the provinces will make these changes to their own labour codes. This happened when compassionate care benefits were introduced.

Bill C-44 would make changes to the EI Act to allow for the stacking of special benefits, such as stacking maternity, sickness and parental benefits. That is something that could probably be explored in other areas as well. The new benefit for parents of critically ill children created by the bill would, of course, be stackable with other special benefits.

We support the bill and we are also glad to see that the bill has wider support within the community. For example, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association and the Canadian Caregiver Coalition are all behind it. It is good to know and it is nice that we can all work together and move this forward.

Government Orders

There are some contextual problems that we might want to talk about a bit here, although the bill seems to be sound at this point. We are willing to overlook some of the problems in the hope that they may be amended in the future. At this point, there is a problem with funding. For example, in the Conservatives' 2011 platform, their most recent platform, they promised, "Funding for this measure will come from general revenue, not EI premiums". It is important to recognize that the devil is often in the details here and we would have preferred the program to be funded out of general revenues. It does look like the Conservatives have ignored their promise. Although they have delivered on the act in substance, the funding could have come from general revenues. This costly measure comes at a time when the EI account has a cumulative deficit of \$9 billion. We would be adding a small bit to that deficit.

More important, the government is avoiding much larger problems with the EI system in general. As we are giving comfort to those who are in need here, we also need to make amendments to the EI Act and the process by which EI is garnered by those who are out of work. We should be making changes in order to give those people comfort.

● (1315)

It is very tough to be out of work. We are in the midst of a great change in Canada where we are moving from a primary industry to a manufacturing-based industry and now much a more service-based economy where jobs are fluid. We have a duty federally, through the EI program, to ensure that people's stress is relieved as they go through the strange fluctuations in the job market. Right now, fewer than half of all unemployed Canadians are receiving EI benefits.

The other thing I want to make clear, aside from my general comments, is the idea that this is a very minor change. The minister has estimated, which we have heard in the House today, that this bill would affect approximately 6,000 Canadians per year. I do not want to at all undermine how much help this would mean for the 6,000 Canadians. Any small thing we can do to help people with critically-ill children is important, but it is a small number of people within the larger pool of 33 million-plus Canadians. There are still many unemployed Canadians who are not able to access regular EI benefits and this bill fails to address some of the larger issues at play. Since the Conservatives are willing to open the door a bit on this issue, perhaps we can open it much wider.

If we do the math, over 500,000 Canadians were receiving EI regular benefits in July of this year but almost 1.4 million were counted as unemployed. This means that there are almost 900,000 unemployed Canadians who are not collecting EI. If we think about the stress that means for these people's families, it would seem that some larger remedy is required in this instance, especially when we see unemployment rates of 7%-plus being maintained over the long term. The uncertainty in the global market, which we hear so much about from the other side of the House, means that perhaps 7% will linger for a long time or perhaps even increase, especially if the U.S. goes over its infamous fiscal cliff. That means fewer than 4 in 10 unemployed Canadians are receiving EI, which is a historic low.

I would be remiss if I did not pull this over into my own portfolio as critic for science and technology in terms of unemployment and how the government is dealing not only with unemployment but

remedies to it. On the weekend, I met with constituents and heard from a former employee of MacDonald Dettwiler & Associates. This person was involved in the RADARSAT program, a program on which the government has made a policy decision to withdraw funding, although there was an initial commitment. This a four-stage program and the government committed to the first three stages and, in the end, has decided to withdraw funding. Because of this, 60 employees were let go from the Richmond MDA offices in B.C. and there is uncertainty as to whether the hundreds of highly-qualified people will be rehired.

The other day, the President of the Treasury Board bragged about how many thousands of people he has thrown out of federal jobs. I think the number was 11,000 and that the goal of the government was 20,000. This will only move people onto the EI rolls. The best minds will, of course, leave the country but the people who were in jobs of a more technical nature will be on EI. It is really important to ensure that if the government is going to make these moves, which it should not, it should ensure that EI is accessible for the people who need it. In this case, it is short-term pain for even worse long-term pain.

While we support this bill, as it would help families the most in need, it leaves a lot of larger issues unaddressed. We call on the government to follow our suggestions and open this up to a much larger debate.

● (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is obviously difficult not to support some of these measures, particularly in the case of kidnapping. No one can oppose that.

My colleague commented on more than just this bill, and I congratulate him. I have to say that some basic changes to employment insurance will affect families. One measure is good for families, but there are other measures that will be detrimental.

I would like my colleague to explain how the changes to employment insurance will be detrimental to families.

[*English*]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, we do have a minor measure that would deeply impact in a positive way 6,000 Canadians who are suffering, which is important. However, as I just mentioned, up to 20,000 civil servants will be laid off this year by the federal government. With the changes, for example, in science and technology, we will have tens of thousands of people laid off from their jobs.

We cannot be distracted. Although the Conservatives have done a good thing here, we cannot be distracted by these minor measures when we have a much larger problem to address.

Government Orders

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to build on the comments by my colleague for Burnaby—Douglas.

There is an outstanding hypocrisy associated with the bill. The Conservatives have this innocuous apple pie, motherhood kind of a bill that would give leave to some poor family whose child might be kidnapped. However, on the other hand, they have declared war on labour and the left with this unmitigated assault on trade union freedoms in Bill C-377.

The Conservatives have declared war on the Rand formula which gave us labour peace during the entire post war era for the last 50 years. Those guys want to declare war on labour and the left and yet they want us to think that they are all warm and fuzzy, motherhood and apple pie because they will give two weeks leave to somebody whose child is kidnapped.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, it will take a few more years before I can ask a question or respond with the style and substance of my hon. colleague. I thank him for his comments and I do think he has a great point.

We need to shift this debate to a much larger look at how we treat workers in this country. I am sure that all of us in our constituency offices are being inundated with calls and visits from people who are out of work, in fear of losing their jobs or who are working two or three jobs at one time when in the past they used to have to work at only one. We need a comprehensive plan to deal with this, which is what we are doing on this side of the House. When we are government in 2015, we will show them how it is done.

• (1325)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course we support this small change in the EI program but, as my colleague mentioned, the bigger issue is how the EI system is currently working.

I hear constantly from my constituents about how difficult it is to access and get in touch with somebody on the EI side, which is due to the cuts by the Conservative government. The other issue is that a number of my constituents are having problems qualifying for EI.

Could my friend comment on this bigger issue and on what is happening in his constituency?

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent point. We would have, god forbid, families with a critically ill child or a kidnapped child who would now have to go through call centres to get their two week extensions. There would not be any face-to-face meetings. My constituents are saying that, because of front-line service cuts, access to EI has been greatly undermined.

There is a small adjustment in the written law but how it hits the ground has been radically undermined by the government.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations.

In September I had the opportunity to speak to the bill at second reading and I am happy to have the chance to speak to it for a second time now as it has returned from committee. It truly is important legislation, which cuts across partisan lines, and is something that we can all get behind and support.

Broadly, Bill C-44 seeks to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Employment Insurance Act, the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations in order to implement new measures to allow workers to take leave and draw EI in the event of a serious illness of a child or the disappearance or death of a child due to a crime.

Specifically, Bill C-44 would make a number of amendments to the Canada Labour Code to expand leaves of absence available to parents. For example, it would allow for the extension of maternity and parental leave by the number of weeks that a child would be hospitalized during the leave. It would allow for the extension of parental leave by the amount of sick leave taken during parental leave as well as for participation in the Canadian reserve forces. It would grant an unpaid leave of absence for up to 37 weeks for parents of critically ill children. It would grant an unpaid leave of absence, 104 weeks I believe, for parents whose children had been murdered as the result of a crime or had disappeared as the result of a crime, and that is 52 weeks I believe. Finally, it would extend the period of absence that could be taken unpaid due to illness or injury without fear of layoff to 17 weeks.

Bill C-44 would also make changes to the Employment Insurance Act that would allow for the stacking of special benefits only. Maternity, sickness and parental benefits are special EI benefits. Benefits paid as a result of unemployment are known as regular EI benefits. Previously, a claimant was unable to stack these benefits, meaning if an individual was collecting regular EI benefits and a circumstance arose where that a person would need a special benefit, he or she would be unable to stack the special benefit on top of the regular benefit and receive the cumulative number of weeks of EI. The bill would create a new benefit for parents of critically ill children that would be stackable with other special benefits.

The bill would also grant an exemption to those on parental leave who needed to take sick leave from needing to prove that if they were not sick or injured, they would be available for work and would allow for special benefits to be taken back-to-back or in various combinations over a maximum of 104 weeks.

Last, the changes to the Employment Insurance Act would provide for 35 weeks of benefits for parents caring for a critically ill child. This is an important component of this legislation, which will benefit many families faced with the unbearable circumstance of having to care for children with dire conditions.

Government Orders

Bill C-44 would also make changes to the Income Tax Act to prepare the ground for a new grant to be paid to parents of murdered or missing children by stipulating the benefit would be considered taxable income but would also be tax deductible.

It goes without saying that New Democrats support these changes as we believe they will help ease the suffering of parents who need help.

However, the New Democrats realize that the legislation is far from perfect. That is why our caucus members moved a total of eight amendments at committee stage in an attempt to improve the legislation to ensure we would pass the best plan possible to assist parents or custodial guardians who were placed in these traumatic and financially difficult situations. Unfortunately, although these amendments were entirely reasonable and supported by witness testimony at human resources committee, the government's tendency to reject our amendments sight unseen was once again realized.

One such amendment would have changed the definition of the child to include dependent children over the age of 18. The importance of this amendment was articulated succinctly by Susan O'Sullivan, Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. On October 23, she said:

● (1330)

I would just add that with the Canada Labour Code, one of the things we heard from victims on this is that they definitely see it as a positive step forward, but they would offer that the category should be broadened to include—and I think it reflects your comments—first of all, eliminating the age requirement.

We've just heard from Yvonne about the age of her daughter when she was murdered. There's this huge issue of whether your child is 18 or your child is 19, so eliminate the age requirement.

A second amendment put forward by the New Democrats sought to extend the leave for critical illness to two weeks after the child's death to give parents time to grieve and bury their child. According to Angella MacEwen, a senior economist at the Canada Labour Congress:

—after a missing child is found, the parents have 14 days; after a critically ill child dies, the parents have until the end of the week.

I think the labour standard in Canada for leave to grieve is only three days, so that would mean they would have an additional three days after that end of the week, which wouldn't even get them to the funeral, quite honestly.

I think that is almost cruel.

New Democrats sought to address this deficiency through the above mentioned amendment, yet the Conservatives refused to listen to witness testimony and voted against our amendment that would have given grieving parents a bit of relief during such a trying period.

Finally, New Democrats put forward an amendment that would allow the parents of murdered or missing children to take leave on a flexible basis rather than in consecutive weeks, without increasing the total, in order to allow them to deal with the judicial system. Once again, this important amendment was supported by witness testimony. Mr. Bruno Serre stated:

A period of 35 weeks is a good start...But if these 35 weeks must be consecutive, that isn't enough. People will have to attend trials a year and a half or two years later. When the trial or the preliminary hearing starts, people must have more time. During the trial, people can't go to court and then go to work....So a period of 35 weeks would be good. There should perhaps be an additional period. If the case is

postponed to a later date, there should be a supplement of a few weeks. When there is a trial or a preliminary inquiry, time is absolutely needed.

Unfortunately, as has become routine in this Parliament, the government members refused to listen to reason when opposition parties tried to improve legislation by repudiating all of the important amendments put forward by the official opposition and, from what I have heard, the amendments from the Liberal Party as well. These were good, reasonable amendments. I emphasize my disappointment that the amendments were not accepted when they might have done a great deal of good for families caught in these unfortunate positions.

I reiterate the importance of giving grieving parents a bit of respite by passing the bill as soon as possible. Although I am disappointed that the Conservatives refused to work co-operatively with their counterparts at committee to improve the legislation, I know the components of this bill will assist many families in their time of need and I hope to see it passed very quickly.

Reiterating a few points, if we look at what was discussed in committee, there were a total of 17 amendments and the overview and theme of many of these amendments was to change the definition of “a child”, which I spoke to earlier, also to extend the leave of critical illness to two weeks after the child's death, benefits for parents of critically ill children and the last day of the week the child dies to give parents time to grieve and to bury their children.

I know no parents should ever have to bury their children. What we see in the bill is a good first step to ensure we can get families the support they need during these difficult times.

● (1335)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his very interesting speech. I really liked that he focused so much on the nuances of the committee's study of Bill C-44.

The NDP proposed eight amendments that apparently were not taken very seriously by the Conservative Party. That is unfortunate. The NDP listened to the testimony and worked on amendments. These amendments were rejected or dismissed, but nevertheless, the NDP will support Bill C-44, because we believe it is a good first step.

The Conservatives often use the demagogic argument that the NDP is opposed to this or that. I think that today is proof of the NDP's good faith and its desire to work together with the government. Even though the Conservatives are not receptive to the work we are doing on this side of the House, we are prepared to look at all of the options and to support initiatives that truly help families, victims and people in need.

I would like my colleague to comment on that and talk in more detail about the amendments that were proposed in committee and their relevance.

[*English*]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, it comes down to the fact that we all want to work together on an important subject like this. We want to ensure that we pass the bill quickly so we can the support to families.

Government Orders

However, we also heard from witnesses say that what had been proposed in some cases was not good enough. This amendment would make the bill a bit better. Why would we not want to help families that are experiencing such tragedy or trauma as best as we possibly can? It speaks volumes when an opposition party brings forward an idea and it is completely shot down because it comes from the opposition.

We are trying to work together in Parliament. I do not question that we will have disagreements. However, on subjects like this, when amendments are brought forward by both opposition parties because they have heard testimony from witnesses who have asked for this to be done in the best interests of all the people in our great country and they are flat out dismissed, that is disappointing.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his excellent speech.

The Conservatives refused to work with the NDP to improve this bill that we support. Unfortunately, they rejected all of the amendments we proposed in committee. They also made promises but did not keep them.

For example, the Conservatives promised that these measures would be paid for out of general revenues and not out of employment insurance contributions, which are paid by workers. But the money provided to the parents of missing or murdered children will come out of employment insurance revenues.

I would like to know why my colleague thinks the Conservatives did not keep that promise.

[*English*]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I am sure there are many answers as to why the government did not keep that promise. I cannot guess why; I can only make assumptions.

When we are looking at the importance of the bill, what we are trying to do is assist families that are experiencing a tragic situation or family emergency.

When the member initially asked the question as to what could we do to make the bill better, we proposed eight amendments in committee. These amendments came from people who had experienced these unfortunate traumas or tragedies. They asked for specific measures to be included in the bill, which were disregarded. It makes us scratch our head and wonder why. If we are truly listening to what our witnesses have said in committee, then we should be able to make amendments and base the bills on the needs of Canadians. That is what is missing in this.

We will support the bill, but we have the opportunity to make it better.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak about Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations. Hon. members will recall that some aspects of this bill are very beneficial.

I am very happy to say that we, on this side of the House, are prepared to support this bill.

For example, this bill will allow parents to extend their maternity and parental leave by the number of weeks that their child was hospitalized, which is an improvement over the existing provisions of the Employment Insurance Act. This will make it possible for parents to extend their parental leave by the number of sick days taken during that period. The same goes for time spent serving in the Canadian Forces Reserves. This and many other aspects of the bill are quite worthwhile.

We have heard many times, particularly from the government side, that 6,000 claimants will benefit from this amendment to the Employment Insurance Act. There are well over a million unemployed workers in Canada, 870,000 of whom are not eligible for employment insurance benefits. Only 4 out of 10 unemployed workers are eligible for employment insurance benefits; 6 out of 10 ten are not eligible.

I am very pleased that the government is giving benefits to 6,000 claimants in Canada for very worthwhile reasons, and we certainly support that. However, this helps only 0.27% of all unemployed workers in Canada: those who are eligible for employment insurance benefits. There is a great deal of work to be done with regard to employment insurance. We are far from meeting the real needs of Canadians.

Allowing families to collect employment insurance benefits in difficult situations, particularly those involving their children, is certainly a good thing. We completely agree. We must help these people. The health of a child is at risk, as is the mental health of parents, children and the community in a broader sense. For all of these reasons, it is important to support this bill.

However, what is missing here is support for communities that depend on employment insurance benefits. We have not really talked about the terrible hardship that will be created by the other employment insurance bills proposed by the Conservatives. For example, let us remember that, under Bill C-38, which was passed in the spring, thousands of unemployed workers will not be eligible for employment insurance benefits next year and even this fall because of changes that the Conservatives made to the Employment Insurance Act and the pilot projects that they did away with by amending the act.

It is very troubling. I definitely want to help families in situations where they need more support. However, I also want to help communities, especially those in the regions that depend on a seasonal economy. They depend on employment insurance. In order for the economy to keep going during the summer, these people need to be compensated during the winter months.

I encourage the Conservatives not only to help families who are having difficulties because they have a child with health problems, but also to start treating other claimants and unemployed workers with the same respect. The 6,000 claimants who will benefit from this change include parents of abducted children who will qualify for employment insurance.

Government Orders

The Canadian Police Information Centre reported that, in 2011, 25 kidnappings were committed by strangers and 145 were committed by parents. That is very troubling. Clearly, that is 170 too many abducted children.

Once again, I would like to point out that there are many other needs in Canada. I would remind the House that 870,000 unemployed workers are not eligible for employment insurance. Are we also going to abandon the women who lost their jobs when they went back to work after their parental leave?

• (1345)

The bill does not go far enough. It does not permit special and regular benefits to be combined. It gives the impression of helping people, but if we look at this bill more carefully, we quickly see that many parents will not be able to benefit from the bill's generosity.

The Conservatives ignored the promises they made in their 2011 platform. Indeed, during the 2011 election campaign, they said that they would offer enhanced EI benefits to the parents of murdered or missing children and to the parents of critically ill children. However, they said the funding for this measure would come from general revenues. They seem to have ignored their promises. Most of the funding for this will not come from general revenues, but rather from the EI fund.

Governments have a hard time resisting dipping into the employment insurance fund to pay for their bills. I can see why, since it is a healthy fund, but still, the government has to be consistent. If it promises money from general revenues, then it should come from general revenues.

I would like the Conservatives to note that with this bill, they are finally agreeing with the official opposition on changes to employment insurance. During the 40th Parliament, Bill C-343 would have provided employment insurance benefits to allow parents of missing children to take leave. The Conservatives twice voted against that bill. Then there was an election. We never found out what would have happened at third reading, but we can assume that the Conservatives would have continued to categorically say no. What made them change their minds?

I am very glad that they changed their minds in 2011 and that they made a promise. The bill before us is not exactly what they promised, but at least it is a step in the right direction. Nonetheless, some good opportunities were missed in the past to address some of the problems in our society. Once again, and probably mostly for lack of consultation, the Conservatives have not really identified the other problems faced by our communities. If they had held real consultations, they would have understood that allowing extensions and access to benefits for dependent children under 18 might not be enough.

We should be discussing a bill that meets the needs of parents with dependant children or simply dependants. Often, adults have to look after people older than 18 who have mental health problems. Canada also has an aging population. More and more people have to work in addition to caring for their parents. In situations where dependants have health problems or in potentially more serious situations such as kidnappings, why not give them more benefits and support as well?

In Canada, one in 30 people who are 45 or older look after people who are 65 or older. It is estimated that by 2056, one in 10 will have that responsibility. Thus, more and more people will need more and more help. And yet, it seems that it is difficult getting them this help. The bill before us is a step in the right direction. But, quite frankly, the government could have done much more to lend a helping hand to people in need. It is about time that the Conservatives learned that when you consult people you have to take their needs into account. The Conservatives must listen and get out into our communities. I hope that the other bills they introduce will provide more support than the one we are debating.

• (1350)

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech. He raised several very good points.

For women who lose their jobs at the end of their parental leave, this bill does not go far enough and does not allow them to combine special and regular benefits. What can the NDP do? It must continue to fight for women's rights in order to obtain employment insurance benefits for women who lose their jobs immediately after they return to work. The Conservatives clearly have overlooked this aspect. They have not thought about that.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about this issue.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for the excellent work she is doing in her riding.

To answer her question, it is certain that the Conservatives could have done much more. I want to point out again that one of the current government's main problems is its lack of consultation. Parliamentary committees and witnesses bring up issues with bills. But the Conservatives often do not listen. Communities, mayors and reeves send comments to ministers, but these ministers rarely listen.

I think that one of the major problems is that the government is working in the dark. Naturally, some bills are poorly written and do not adequately address needs. The government does not take the time to listen to the public. I am very disappointed in this government for not taking the time to listen.

As for the women who want to return to work and could lose their jobs, that is a real shame. The Conservatives must absolutely do more by consulting the public and asking what it could change. Employment insurance should address the needs of Canadians.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. He raised some very important points.

First, he said that we support this bill, which helps families when they need it most, especially during exceptional or traumatic situations.

He also addressed another issue that concerns many Canadians when he spoke about the major challenges facing employment insurance. I would like him to speak to that a bit more. What challenges are Canadians facing when it comes to EI?

Statements by Members

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again commend my colleague for the excellent work that she is doing in her riding of LaSalle—Émard. Her constituents surely have not had such a good representative in a very long time.

There are many challenges associated with employment insurance. Once again, I object to the fact that the government failed to consult Canadians on the changes that it made to employment insurance. We could have been on our way to fixing the major problems with the Canadian economy with a tool as strong as employment insurance.

However, once again, the Conservatives have turned away from the road that we should be taking and are starting with small steps. Six thousand claimants will benefit from the bill before us, and that is something. The health of Canadian families is very important.

Meanwhile, the other 870,000 unemployed workers who are not eligible for employment insurance benefits are asking for our help. They want us to be there for them. The government is simply not meeting their needs. I urge the government to go to regions such as mine that have seasonal economies and see how doing away with the spring gap pilot project will have an extremely detrimental effect not only on families and their children but also on the Canadian economy in general. This is no way to manage a country.

• (1355)

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the great member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

I represent the wonderful riding of York West, a constituency that is home to an intersection that lots of people know about when they talk about crime. It certainly has a reputation it does not deserve. That is clearly the area of Jane and Finch, which I am very proud to represent.

I mention this for two reasons in particular. The first is that I like to take every opportunity possible to point out that, despite what people may have heard, the communities in and around Jane and Finch are vibrant, strong and diverse. The second reason is that I view it as a duty to help keep it that way and, hence, the reason for the comments I am making today.

Despite being a warm and caring place, the region of Jane and Finch is not without some difficulties. On occasion, crime and some of the other social ills that face many Canadian cities become a factor, which is why I am speaking on this bill today. Helping hard-working, decent people is always good policy no matter what government puts it forward. Despite the assertion made by the current mayor of Toronto, suggesting that any program designed to help those in need is a hug-a-thug effort, police and medical experts disagree every day. Experts know that providing real support to those in need can have a profound impact not just within a household but across an entire community. I see that every single day with a variety of initiatives and new programs that get set up to help many of the people in my riding find employment opportunities and showcase what we would call a caring community.

Bill C-44 is the first step on that road, and I applaud the government for taking the first step. I just wish it would take the

second and third steps. Periodically good policies come forth that we all support, but they are insufficient and need to go much further than the current one. As Liberals, we have argued that delivery of improved services to Canadians could be provided through changes to the EI system, but we continue to maintain that Bill C-44 falls short of what could be done to promote and support a workforce attachment that will aid families and individuals who have to deal with other situations of hardship, such as lost jobs, family illness and, in a worst-case scenario, the loss of a child.

Governments have a clear role to play, and it is not a hug-a-thug effort to live up to that responsibility. It is a moral responsibility to be there when people have difficulties. People who have lost children or are going through very difficult situations need to assist their family members. They cannot simply go through that process, take three days off work and think they can go back to work and function as a successful individual on the fourth day. The impact of the loss of a child, in particular, is extremely difficult and one that needs support and recognition from the kind of caring country that we all say we live in, a caring Canada.

It should be noted that it was a piece of Liberal legislation that started this process by offering enhanced access to sickness benefits during parental leave. This clearly was an initiative we heard much about from many people who clearly needed help.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The time for government orders has expired. The hon. member for York West will have six minutes remaining when this matter returns to the House.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the CBC aired an investigation last June on private ultrasound clinics. It found that most of the clinics were revealing the sex of the baby, so that those who did not want a girl could end the pregnancy. Canadians were outraged. The MP for Kildonan—St. Paul is Canada's leading anti-trafficking activist. She said: "The world has created horrendous gender imbalance through the practice of sex selection. Devaluing women and girls has resulted in 200 million missing women globally, turning them into a commodity for human trafficking and prostitution. This violent form of discrimination needs to be condemned".

I am proud of our Conservative government for condemning sex selection. I am pleased the official opposition has said sex selection has no place in Canada. I am proud this Parliament supported Canada's International Day of the Girl, opposing all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls. I am proud of Motion No. 408, a motion the House can support to condemn discrimination against women and girls occurring through sex selection.

*Statements by Members***TORONTO AIR-RAIL LINK**

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning the Clean Train Coalition began an application for judicial review of the Metrolinx decision to use diesel rather than electric trains between Pearson Airport and Union Station in Toronto. The people in my riding of York South—Weston, as well as those in Davenport, Parkdale—High Park and Trinity—Spadina, are all concerned with the air pollution that will be the result of up to 464 diesel trains travelling each day through densely populated neighbourhoods.

The McGuinty Liberals in Ontario are pushing Metrolinx to use diesel, despite the World Health Organization recently declaring diesel exhaust to be a class one carcinogen. They are pushing to make sure the project is ready for the 2015 Pan Am games. Ironically, the Olympic body responsible, ODEPA/PASO, has declared these games to be the first ever green and sustainable games. Diesel trains are neither green nor sustainable.

There is considerable federal money in this project. I would urge the federal Minister of Transportation to tell Ontario to do the right thing and make these trains electric now, as any world-class city should.

* * *

QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this weekend I had the distinct opportunity to attend a community potato bash in Big Beaver, Saskatchewan, where it was my honour to present a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal to Ron Aust, who has operated Aust's General Store for over 50 years. Where, might you ask, is Big Beaver? Well, it is nestled in the hills of the RM of Happy Valley No. 10 in the riding of Souris—Moose Mountain.

Ron Aust received his medal for his contribution, service and volunteerism to the community. Ron made everyone in the community, young and old, feel very special, and in return the community has responded by saying Ron's is one of a kind, where customer service is still a huge factor and where customers are guaranteed to get any product they request. This is a perfect award for a genuinely wonderful man. He is a treasure in the community and a very deserving recipient.

When the community thinks of Big Beaver, it thinks of Ronnie Aust. As always, everyone is welcome to Aust's General Store in Big Beaver in the happiest valley in Saskatchewan. Congratulations, Ronnie Aust.

* * *

GARTH VAUGHAN

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Garth Vaughan, the historian, author, artist and surgeon recently passed away.

Following his 1990 retirement from a long career as a surgeon, Dr. Vaughan spent five years researching the origin of ice hockey. His best selling book, *The Puck Starts Here*, chronicles the origin of Canada's national pastime in Windsor, the Nova Scotia town where Dr. Vaughan was born and where he organized the Windsor Hockey

Heritage Society and established the Windsor Hockey Heritage Centre.

In addition to his passion for hockey and history, Dr. Vaughan was an accomplished artist. He worked his way through Acadia University and Dalhousie Medical School as a sign painter and illustrator. His paintings of Nova Scotia are held in many private collections, and he often donated his works for community fundraisers.

It was through Dr. Vaughan's work that *Total Hockey: The Official Encyclopedia of the National Hockey League* recognized Windsor's place in the history of Canada's national game.

To his wife, Lauren, and to his children, Alex, Kate, Lisa, Nicola and Holly, I extend sincere sympathy on their loss. Dr. Garth Vaughan was a great Canadian.

* * *

NORTH BAY BATTALION

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after 10 long years of frustration waiting to see the return of the Ontario Hockey League, junior hockey is back in North Bay.

Last week I joined Mayor Al McDonald, city council and citizens of North Bay at the announcement that the Battalion is coming to our city. Our fans had responded overwhelmingly to the challenge of securing 2,000 season tickets in merely six days. Indeed, the Battalion is coming home to a community that is as passionate about hockey as its owner.

Congratulations to team owner Scott Abbott, president Mike Griffin and coach Stan Butler as the Battalion prepares to take up its new home in September next year. Coach Butler says hockey fans in North Bay will enjoy a level of hockey the city has not seen in some time.

I am very proud to congratulate the city of North Bay and its hockey fans on their success and celebration of our new team. Go troops, go!

* * *

● (1405)

EX-OFFENDER REINTEGRATION

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, MAP reintegration is a valuable program in Ottawa that helps get ex-offenders on the right track after their release from prison. The program pairs them up with a team of coaches to help them with their needs: everything from dealing with addiction or anger issues to finding a job and housing.

MAP is making a difference by reducing crime and changing the lives of people in our community. There are so many stories of success, like a young man in his late twenties who made a real transition in his life and is now enrolled in a college program; or a man in his fifties who, for the first time, reached out for help and has completed his parole period successfully. This is why Crime Prevention Ottawa awarded MAP with a community safety award.

Statements by Members

However, on the same night that MAP received this award, it got news from the Conservatives that they were cutting its budget. It is a total contribution of \$33,000, which is a minuscule amount for government but makes a real difference in making our community safer.

I urge the government to reverse its decision immediately.

* * *

[*Translation*]

KOOTENAY—COLUMBIA

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks, I travelled around my riding of Kootenay—Columbia and took part in many events.

[*English*]

I was in Golden for Remembrance Day, where approximately 300 people braved the cold to pay their respects to our veterans.

[*Translation*]

I went to Radium Hot Springs and Fairmont Hot Springs to announce the creation of two new community parks. The new playground will be a major attraction for tourists as well as local communities.

[*English*]

I attended the Kingsgate border crossing, where our government invested \$20 million in upgrades to ensure that this border crossing, one of the busiest in British Columbia, meets the needs of Canadians for years to come.

Our Conservative government continues to focus on jobs, growth and prosperity for Canadians. By investing in communities, we ensure that Canadians reap the rewards from a federal government that is fiscally responsible and, above all, wants Canadians to succeed.

* * *

CANADIAN TOURISM AWARDS

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to bring your attention to the Tourism Industry Association of Canada's annual congress, which is now underway in Gatineau.

This premier event brings industry and government together to both celebrate and strengthen Canada's \$79 billion tourism sector, which directly and indirectly supports 1.6 million jobs.

As chair of the parliamentary tourism caucus, I invite all members of Parliament to attend the Canadian Tourism Awards opening reception to be held tomorrow night from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Hilton Lac-Leamy's Grand Salon. I will be serving as the master of ceremonies for the awards and wish the best of luck to all nominees.

Our government recognizes that tourism is an industry at work in every region of this country. To bolster this important sector, our government is implementing Canada's federal tourism strategy, which is already paying dividends.

I look forward to taking part in the tourism awards as well as continuing our government's efforts to grow this important sector.

[*Translation*]

GEORGES ST-PIERRE

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday at the Bell Centre in Montreal, I had the great fortune and immense pleasure of witnessing the comeback of ultimate fighting champion Georges St-Pierre, or GSP, the pride of Saint-Isidore.

Before 17,000 electrified fans, GSP made a triumphant return to the octagon after an injury forced him out of competition for 18 months. Despite the long absence, all doubts were soon put to rest.

In exemplary physical and mental form, GSP delivered a magnificent performance as he defended his UFC world welterweight title for the seventh time. The “gentleman fighter”, in his typical kind, respectful and exemplary attitude, paid homage to his adversary before the most difficult fight he has faced so far. GSP is a wonderful ambassador for the sport and has brought a great deal of credibility to mixed martial arts.

Georges St-Pierre is definitely the most recognized and most popular Canadian in the world. He is a role model for the young people of his province, this country and the entire world when it comes to hard work, diligence and ethical standards.

It was quite a night and quite a fight. Our champion gave us some exciting moments to remember. Thank you, GSP.

* * *

● (1410)

[*English*]

SRI LANKA

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the report of the United Nations Secretary-General's internal review panel on Sri Lanka released last week details a litany of human rights violations endured by the Sri Lankan people, particularly during the final stages of the conflict.

While the UN report reviews and acknowledges its own failures identified in the report, the government of Sri Lanka continues to fail in its responsibility to make progress on reconciliation, accountability and respect for human rights in post-conflict Sri Lanka.

The Prime Minister and our Minister of Foreign Affairs have taken every opportunity to raise Canada's concerns with the government of Sri Lanka.

Our government will continue to reiterate the need for tangible sustained progress on the ground.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN CREDIT AND DEBIT CARD INDUSTRY

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on November 13, Quebec City merchants and business people met in Baie de Beauport to discuss problems caused by the credit card transaction fees they have to pay.

Statements by Members

The Coalition québécoise contre la hausse des frais de transaction par carte de crédit et de débit spelled out the facts to those attending the meeting. Since 2008, transaction fees paid by merchants have skyrocketed, and more importantly, managing the different types of cards has become a nightmare.

This coalition includes associations and groups of business people representing 35,000 members working in the food, retail, hotel and restaurant industries.

The coalition has been clear: the code of conduct for the credit and debit card industry is a complete failure, and the Conservative government has given in to powerful special interest lobbies. Business people no longer want to be at the mercy of the credit card companies' oligopoly. Business people want action. Last Tuesday evening, they realized that an NDP government will listen to them and act to help them.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, trade has long been a powerful engine for Canada's economy, and even more so in these globally challenging economic times.

There is no larger economy in the world than the European Union's, with its more than 500 million consumers and a GDP of over \$17 trillion. That is why our government is committed to an ambitious trade agreement with the EU. The benefits to Canadian workers and families of such an agreement are expected to be enormous, including a 20% boost in bilateral trade.

Let us put this into perspective. It is the equivalent of a \$1,000 increase in the average Canadian family's income, or 80,000 new jobs for Canadian workers. That is almost 80% of the population of my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

No government in Canada's history has been more committed to creating jobs and prosperity for Canadian businesses, workers and their families than our Conservative government.

* * *

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to Raising the Roof, on any given day there are 65,000 homeless youth in communities across Canada. The statistics on youth homelessness are shocking and public awareness is urgently needed in order to address the root causes, including poverty and a lack of affordable housing.

On June 21, 2011, I reintroduced my motion calling for a national youth homelessness awareness day.

[Translation]

Motion No. 246 reads: "That, in the opinion of the House, the government should proclaim November 17 National Youth Homelessness Awareness Day."

[English]

The idea for a national youth homelessness awareness day was originally suggested to me by Sean Gadon, president of Raising the Roof.

Richard Branson and Virgin Unite also launched a campaign to get my original motion on youth homelessness awareness day, Motion No. 504, adopted by Parliament.

[Translation]

Let us prove to Canadians that, when it comes to our youth and their well-being, we can do what it takes by setting aside partisanship and creating this annual day of awareness.

* * *

[English]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from a young age we learn there are consequences to our actions. However, the Leader of the Opposition and his party fail to recognize the consequences of their \$21 billion carbon tax scheme.

Just listen to what economist Jack Mintz has to say:

—I find it very irritating that parties might propose carbon policies without being honest with respect to their consequences for consumer prices or jobs. The NDP platform last election was a case in point.

That is exactly what our government has been communicating to Canadians, a point that the NDP would rather Canadians not know.

The consequences of a new NDP carbon tax scheme would include stifling job growth, straining small and large businesses and literally raising the price of everything. Of course, the NDP members did not mention this when they proposed this carbon tax plan in their 2011 platform.

Why will the NDP not be honest with Canadians about the consequences of their carbon tax scheme?

* * *

●(1415)

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the past four years corporate tax revenues have actually been below where they were when the Conservatives took power. However, over the same four years, Conservatives collected \$40 billion more in personal income tax. They shifted the burden so that individual Canadians now pay four times more in taxes than corporations do.

What has been the effect of the Conservative vision of the economy? According to the IMF, we have fallen behind the U.S. in growth. In fact, even Greece's economy is expected to grow faster than ours by 2015.

What is the Conservative response? Just make up stuff to attack the opposition. This was on display again last week when CTV journalist Don Martin aired a disgraceful clip of the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism being coached by a PMO flunkey on how to make stuff up about the NDP.

I say to my Conservative colleagues, do not let the PMO do their thinking and substitute fibs for facts. Cast off the shackles and show some dignity and self-respect. Why do—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Mississauga—Brampton South.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the great pleasure of meeting with my constituents and neighbours last week in Mississauga and hearing about their extreme opposition to the NDP's \$21 billion carbon tax, a tax that won a new friend and a new foe last week.

The new foe is President Barack Obama's administration, whose press secretary told reporters that:

We would never propose a carbon tax, and have no intention of proposing one...
[O]ur focus right now is on the need to extend economic growth, expand job creation.

This is good news for middle-class families, but the carbon tax does have at least one new supporter: Exxon, the gas station company.

While NDP members align themselves with big oil, Conservatives will continue aligning themselves with families, and fighting for middle-class families. The NDP's Exxon-backed \$21 billion carbon tax—our money, their pockets.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Finance informed Canadians that once again, the deficit was larger than predicted, and that his plan to balance the budget was two years behind schedule.

A few days later, the Prime Minister contradicted his Minister of Finance, saying that the budget will be balanced on schedule.

Who is telling the truth? Is it the Minister of Finance who says that the budget will not be balanced until 2017, or his boss, the Prime Minister, who claims that it will happen by 2015?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's goal is to balance the budget by 2015.

[*English*]

Our objective is to balance the budget in 2015, and we are on track to do so and balance the budget over the medium term. We have a clear plan to balance the budget. We are eliminating waste.

Oral Questions

At the same time, while our plan is clear, is working and we see 820,000 net new jobs, the NDP continues with its risky plans, not only for a \$21 billion carbon tax but also for \$6 billion in HST taxes.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a \$50 billion trade deficit and 350,000 more unemployed today than when the recession hit in 2008, that is the truth.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance are openly contradicting one another. The Minister of Finance admits that his plan to balance the budget is two years behind schedule. The Minister of Finance also claims there will be no more significant spending cuts. Yet the Prime Minister insists that the Minister of Finance's numbers are wrong and that everything is going according to plan.

How can the Minister of Finance expect Canadians to believe his budget numbers when his own Prime Minister rejects them?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what Canadians care about when it comes to numbers: 820,000 net new jobs since the depths of the recession, and 90% of them are full-time jobs. That is how our plan is working.

However, the NDP persists with its risky plans. Not content with a \$21 billion carbon tax plan, now we find them last week talking about \$6 billion annually in GST hikes. That is not the way to grow the economy. That is not the way to serve Canadians.

* * *

● (1420)

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he has been getting his talking points from the Beauce.

The European economy is now officially back in recession. The U.S. is facing a fiscal cliff that could land the American economy back in recession by the end of year.

Canadian premiers are working to meet these serious threats head on. They are meeting this week in Halifax to do just that. However, once again, just as in 2008, the Conservatives here in Ottawa are asleep at the wheel.

Will the Conservatives finally wake up, acknowledge the real risks facing our economy, and agree to join the Canadian premiers for the summit talk this week in Halifax?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we continue to get accolades from around the world for our treatment of the economy. Canadians agree with those international experts.

Oral Questions

KPMG ranked Canada the most tax competitive economy amongst mature markets, and indeed the numbers speak for themselves. Canadian business investment increased by 9.4% in the last quarter.

The numbers are in. Our plan is working. We cannot afford the risky plans of the NDP.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the provincial and territorial premiers will be meeting in Halifax to talk about our faltering economy. Since July, they have been requesting a meeting with the Prime Minister, but to no avail. Mark Carney understands the importance of this meeting. That is why he will be there.

If the Conservatives' priority is truly the economy, then why is the Prime Minister refusing to sit down with his counterparts to come up with solutions to deal with our slowing economy?

[*English*]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has actually indicated on several occasions in the House, he meets on a regular basis with all of the premiers. That is very important, that he keeps in contact with those individuals, as he does with other leaders around the world.

I would reiterate what my colleague, the President of the Treasury Board, has said, that Canada is on track to get back to balance. That is not by accident; that is by plan. We put a plan forward to increase jobs and grow the economy, and no matter what the hecklers say from the Liberal Party, we are on track.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just refuses to meet with all first ministers in one room at one time.

The fact is that our economy is only set to grow at about 2% next year. Many countries, including the U.S., are doing better.

Last week the Conservatives delivered a fiscal update with no contingency plan for our slowing economy, no plan to bring back high-quality manufacturing jobs, no plan to tackle youth unemployment and no plan to get our economy growing again.

Is the Prime Minister refusing to meet with the premiers because he has no answer for Conservative mishandling of our economy?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note that everything the hon. member reflected on is in our budget implementation bill number two, the one that those members claim is not getting adequate discussion in the House, which it is. It is in committee right now. They have indicated all along that they will vote against job creation and against the youth employment strategy to help young people get back to work. They will vote against Canadians being able to take part in this economy.

Our plan is to get people back to work and help grow the economy.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the City of Calgary applied to the crown corporation PPP for support for its sports infrastructure program and recreation centres in Calgary, the board of the PPP said that it was okay, that it was fine. The PPP website said that sports infrastructure and recreation restructure was included.

Why did cabinet change the rules, not at the beginning of the game or in the middle of the game but after the game was over? In fact, it changed the website in the middle of the mayor's press conference when he talked about how the—

• (1425)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of State for Finance.

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, most of that is factually incorrect. The original intention of PPP Canada was to fund projects such as water, sewer, roads and bridges in this country. That was the intention all along and we think that is very effective.

Unfortunately, the opposition does not think that the private sector can take part in the economic growth of this country. Over here on this side of the House we think it can.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister can call me anything he likes but I am sure he would not want to say the same thing about Mayor Nenshi.

In fact, officials from PPP Canada met frequently with the City of Calgary and encouraged the City of Calgary to continue with its application. They actually approved the application and then on the website of the organization, which the minister can see, it says that permitted projects include sport infrastructure, community recreation and fields and parks. It is the government that changed the rules, not at the beginning of the game and not in the middle of the game, but at the end of the game.

Why did you do it? Will you compensate Calgary—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will remind the member to address his comments through the Chair and not directly at his colleagues.

The hon. Minister of State for Finance.

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): I am shocked to see the hon. member standing up for my home town of Calgary, Mr. Speaker. Apparently he has actually discovered—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of State for Finance.

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I just wish the Leader of the Opposition might discover the beauty of Calgary sometime, too, because that would actually explain the way that an arm's-length organization such as PPP Canada can function.

PPP Canada has approved projects all across this country and it is helping the infrastructure in this country be built by including the private sector in a role that it can play a good part in.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my third question is for the same government.

Can it tell us exactly what it has done with regard to the extremely sad and tragic events in the Middle East to encourage a ceasefire in Gaza in the battle between the Government of Israel and Hamas.

I think it is important for Canadians to know exactly what the government has done to achieve a lasting ceasefire.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of comments made by members of the government, many in the international community, about these attacks by Hamas and that have triggered a reaction and certainly pose a threat to regional security. We have called for the end of these attacks and for calm throughout this very tense time.

As we have stated emphatically, Israel has the right to defend itself and its civilian population. It has the right to exist. We will not back away from that position.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians learned about Petronas's modified takeover bid for Progress Energy Resources from *The Malaysian Reserve*.

The Conservatives are all over the map when it comes to foreign investment. Even Republican Senator John McCain has said that Canada should have public hearings on foreign takeovers such as the CNOOC takeover of Nexen.

Why are the Conservatives refusing to be transparent? When will they unveil the new evaluation criteria for foreign investment?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member has asked enough questions in the House to know that the investor has 30 days, from the time the decision is rendered, to make additional representations.

From there, we will take the time needed to carefully examine the proposed transaction in order to determine whether it will provide a net benefit to Canada.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have more secretive midnight deals from the Conservatives.

Petronas submitted a modified deal last week but Canadians did not hear about it from their government. They had to hear about it from the Malaysian media. There was no transparency and no accountability from the Conservatives and people are noticing abroad. Even Senator John McCain said that Canada should have public hearings on foreign takeovers like the CNOOC takeover of Nexen.

The Conservatives are shutting out Canadians and refusing to listen. Why are they keeping Canadians in the dark?

● (1430)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary. My colleague has asked a lot of questions in the House and I have said several times that a decision was rendered. As part of that decision, investors have 30 days to make additional representations.

After that, the required time will be taken to carefully examine the proposed transaction to determine if it is likely to be of net benefit to Canada.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no answers, no transparency and no accountability means no respect for Canadians. Canadians deserve better than what they are getting from the government.

There are concerns about CNOOC's human rights record, the possible job losses at Nexen's head office in Calgary and concerns about CNOOC's description of itself as a foreign policy arm of the Chinese government. Even the Americans are saying that we should have public hearings on these serious concerns.

Will the Conservatives now agree to start respecting Canadians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster has the floor and I am having great difficulty hearing him.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives can try to shut us down but they will never shut us up. They just will not do that. We will speak for Canadians.

Will the Conservatives now agree to start respecting Canadians and start consulting them on the CNOOC takeover of Nexen?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not need my earplug to hear the member across the floor but I hope he will hear me this time.

I said several times that we have improved the laws. We put guidelines in place in 2007 regarding state-owned enterprises. We put in provisions with respect to national security issues. We also put in new provisions under the act in terms of communications.

What we said is that we will take the time to fully scrutinize the proposed transaction to ensure that it is likely to provide a net benefit to Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it would appear that the Conservatives are as transparent as their ministers are competent.

Oral Questions

It seems to me that the Minister of National Defence knows as little about the CF-18 replacement as the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women. In an interview with CTV this weekend, the defence minister, like his colleague, was unable to identify a single fighter jet, other than the F-35, that could be used to replace the CF-18s.

Let us try this again: what fighter jets, other than the F-35, are being considered to replace the CF-18s?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that we will not be purchasing any replacements for the CF-18s until this seven-point action plan has been completed, including an independent verification of the cost estimates for the F-35 and a full options analysis. That full options analysis will be a full evaluation of all of the choices and will not simply be a refresh of the work that has already been done. We look forward to that work being done.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of National Defence offered us an explanation for his repetitive non-answers to these questions. He said that it was the secretariat that was looking in detail at the military's needs. Perhaps the Minister of National Defence does not know the answers or perhaps he is having a tough time with the details, so I have a proposition.

The Danes, a JSF partner just like Canada, has resumed its competitive process for replacing its fighter jets. Why will the minister not do the same? That way, he will not have to worry himself with the details.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence's comments reflect a respect for the process that has been set up, a process that is about strengthening the process and about doing the proper due diligence that has been asked for by the Auditor General. We are following his recommendation, which was to bring updated cost estimates to Parliament on the F-35. Further to that, we are independently validating them, but we also will be looking at a full range of options to replace the CF-18.

* * *

[Translation]

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' script keeps changing as more information is revealed in the robocall scandal.

Even though Elections Canada told the Conservatives not to give out polling station addresses and even though they have been denying doing so for months, the Conservatives' communications director, Fred DeLorey, is now admitting that they made such calls.

Their answers are changing every day. Will they finally give us an honest answer and tell us, yes or no, whether they gave Elections Canada the list of the voters they misled?

• (1435)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already told him that, as a political party, we ran an ethical and clean election campaign. We followed all the rules.

We are working with Elections Canada to find out what happened in Guelph. What we can clearly say is that our party followed the rules, unlike the NDP, which accepted over \$300,000 in illegal contributions from unions.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think it will take another RCMP visit to the Conservative Party offices to get any real answers to our questions.

Conservative employees in Saint-Boniface said that headquarters made the calls regarding the polling stations. That is not surprising: everything is centralized with the Conservatives. That is how it works here too. The Prime Minister's Office provides the talking points and the MPs from Beauce or wherever repeat them.

But back to the election fraud. It is becoming increasingly clear that the party itself is behind this massive fraud.

We want to prevent them from pulling another stunt like this during the next election. Will the Conservatives commit to supporting the NDP's bill to give the Chief Electoral Officer more authority?

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the House before, a comprehensive package will be put forward in due course. I find it surprising that the hon. member is so concerned about election laws when it was his party that took hundreds of thousands of dollars in illegal donations from the big union bosses.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that defence by the Conservatives is starting to crumble because now we have the access to information documents that reveal that Elections Canada was so concerned about voter fraud, it believed the Conservative Party was "running a scam" and its investigators traced the calls back to a 1-800 number that went to the Conservative Party headquarters.

Now that we have a direct link between the Conservative Party and illegal voter suppression, what steps will the government take to work with Elections Canada and make the key Conservative operatives come clean?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we already indicated to the member and to all of Parliament that the Conservative Party is working proactively with Elections Canada to ascertain what exactly happened in Guelph. We ran a clean and ethical campaign, as we always do.

Oral Questions

By contrast, the New Democrats used \$340,000 in illegal union money to fight the last election campaign. They managed to keep it covered up until the election was over. Despite the best efforts by the leader of the NDP, through a courageous whistleblower that information eventually became public. Why did they not come clean sooner?

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Earth to the Tory backbench, Mr. Speaker, we are talking about Conservative voter fraud here.

Speaking of Guelph, it is funny that the Conservatives have one key operative who has gone to ground in Kuwait and another key operative who has gone to ground in, wait for it, the office of the minister for Labrador. I guess he did not think he would have to deal with anything there because he still has not come clean about the money that he spent in his riding election. He still has not explained why his ministerial budget is being blown flying around his riding.

Will he at least stand up and explain what role his Guelph operative, Chris Crawford, has as his director of parliamentary affairs? Will he explain that to us?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that they target the hon. minister. They accuse him of not jet-setting across the country enough. According to the NDP, this minister spends too much time reaching out to his constituents in Labrador. This party understands we can never spend too much time with the good people of Labrador and that is precisely why he knows that the rural people of this country do not want a \$1 billion long gun registry. Maybe if the member spent more time in his own riding, he would know that too.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have now learned that Elections Canada wrote Conservative Party lawyer, Arthur Hamilton, demanding answers about fraudulent calls that scammed thousands of Canadians three days before the election. Mr. Hamilton employed the three Conservative d's: delay, deny, deflect.

The Conservatives did that for years with the in and out, and the Conservative Party was finally convicted. Do we need to wait for another conviction before the government gets to the bottom of the election fraud scandal?

• (1440)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have gotten to the bottom of the election fraud scandal. It was a Liberal MP who was caught having made thousands of phony phone calls with a false name and a false number, for which the CRTC has now been forced to fine that member. If the colleague across the way wants to know what happened with a phony election call, she should turn and look about three rows back and ask the man who did it.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Labrador refuses to say anything in the House about his election

expenses. He then goes out of the House and says he will report everything and tell all when he goes back home. Then his office in Ottawa sends out a press release saying nothing. While the minister is out in Labrador, he tells his constituents at a meeting that this is not the place to discuss this. He will not answer questions in the House or out of the House.

Not in, not out; where is the member for Labrador?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he is right here working hard on behalf of his constituents.

Speaking about in and out of the House, this is a member who regularly claims that he is going to be bold enough to finally repeat his false allegations out of the House. However, he sneaks out of the House through the back door and avoids doing exactly what he committed to. The reason for that is he has no evidence for the allegations he is making. Therefore he has not the courage to repeat them where he could actually be held accountable for making them.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism once had a petition on his web site asking people to praise him, and now we learn that he had his department spend taxpayer money on monitoring his popularity, even in the middle of the federal election campaign.

Will the President of the Treasury Board ask the Public Service Commission to investigate and to ensure that the political neutrality of the public service was not compromised by the immigration minister's vain desire to know how popular he was?

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it does not surprise me that this question would come from the Liberal Party, which actually does not understand how it needs to work with the communities that have come to this country to become Canadians. The Liberals have made a determination that they know what is right when it comes to immigration. Every single time we have passed new immigration law in this country, including ethnic monitoring, reaching out to each and every new Canadian in this country, we receive an increase of support.

The Liberals should get on the train and they should get on the bus, because where this country is going in immigration is the right way.

*Oral Questions***EMPLOYMENT**

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday officials of the northern B.C. mining company that hired hundreds of temporary foreign workers told a federal court that they did advertise those jobs in Canada. However, what they failed to say was that they tried to squeeze Canadian workers, offering \$17 less per hour than the standard rate. Now a review of the program will not help these workers. Will the minister immediately suspend these temporary foreign worker visas so Canadian workers will have a fair chance to apply for these jobs?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians must have first crack at all the jobs that are available in this country. In terms of this specific case, because it is now before the courts it would be inappropriate for me to comment any further.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives recently closed 19 regional Citizenship and Immigration Canada offices and laid off 75 employees at the Montreal call centre. As a result, the response rate is barely 9%.

Meanwhile, the minister wasted nearly \$1 million of taxpayers' money to find out what ethnocultural communities think of him. Instead of helping people, the minister preferred to stroke his ego with taxpayers' money.

How can he now justify these cuts in services to the public?

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have done nothing of the sort. The official opposition calls it a waste of money. It is doing so while not understanding the purpose of media training and monitoring or what we do in terms of making sure we are listening to constituents across this country.

There are more than just one or two media outlets that present the news and present what the government is doing. In this case, when we are monitoring what the ethnic media is saying, we are ensuring that our policies are consistent and that they are the ones that those individuals and communities support across this country.

* * *

● (1445)

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that our diplomats posted in Moscow have to work in a rundown building that is vulnerable to terrorist attacks and espionage, all because the Conservatives are incapable of managing a simple renovation project competently.

Despite the fact that our diplomats are exposed to such threats, the Conservatives' mismanagement of this matter will cost taxpayers \$30 million in cost overruns.

Why are the Conservatives unable to keep our diplomats safe?

[English]

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government does take the safety and security of our diplomats extremely seriously. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has made it clear that we will take all necessary actions to ensure they remain safe. We will not engage in public or partisan discussions that could place the arrangements that we make for our men and women in the public service at risk. We will continue to do what is right and needful in this situation.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is about Conservative mismanagement and it is putting Canadians at risk. The leaked memo was clear. Let us go over it. It said:

The possibility of terrorist incidents in Russia is high.... Moscow is an extremely hostile environment and the current site is highly vulnerable to counter-intelligence threats.

The memo goes on to say that the current building offers "almost no protection" against a terrorist attack. Why is the government not doing more to protect our diplomats in Moscow?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2007 our government has committed over \$100 million to ensure security at our missions abroad. We are constantly reviewing security measures and any developments that require a review of these measures or risks associated with any specific mission.

With regard to the specific story that the member is referring to, we take the release of this kind of information extremely seriously and we are considering calling in the RCMP.

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HEALTH

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, prescription drug abuse is a serious issue that destroys families and lives every day. This is a complicated issue, and despite what the New Democrats and some provincial health ministers have tried to argue, politically interfering in science to ban one drug would do little to solve the problem.

Could the Minister of Health please update the House on what our Conservative government is doing to deal with this prescription drug abuse problem?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague has pointed out, the issue of prescription drug abuse is bigger than one specific pill. That is why today our government announced tough new licensing rules that will help to prevent drugs like OxyContin from being illegally distributed.

However, prescribing drugs is a provincial-territorial jurisdiction, so provincial and territorial health ministers and doctors play a major role. That is why I am also calling on the provinces and the territories and the medical professionals to look at what they can do to fight this problem. Unlike the opposition, we will not politically interfere in science.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that one would be too easy. I will not go there.

[Translation]

Not only are the Conservatives proud to announce with great fanfare the elimination of more than 10,000 jobs in the country, but they are also unable to enforce the target when it comes to federal jobs on the Quebec side of the national capital region. Gatineau has seen its share of federal department and agency jobs decrease significantly between 2011 and 2012.

Instead of patting itself on the back for laying off thousands of workers, will the Conservatives agree to meet the government target of having 25% of federal jobs on Quebec soil?

• (1450)

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I announced on Friday, I can say that we have kept our election promises and that we have succeeded in cutting the number of jobs in the public service.

[English]

We have met our first year targets. We think this is important to respect the taxpayer and also to give public servants the certainty of their position going forward. We are being respectful but at the same time it is critically important for the future of our economy that we meet our targets when it comes to government spending.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he is not answering the question on the issue of 75:25.

To be proud of eliminating those jobs is not only outrageous, but it is extremely stupid. We are talking about high-quality jobs that have major repercussions on the economy of an entire region. The people who were laid off by the Conservatives are those who provide essential services to Canadians. Cutting those jobs is the same as cutting services. And yet, people are still paying just as much in taxes for those services.

The federal government committed to meeting the 25% quota for jobs on the Quebec side. This is another broken promise. What are they waiting for to correct the situation?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the implementation of budget 2012, we have the same proportion of jobs in every region as before.

Oral Questions

[English]

I could say to the hon. member, though, that we are taking our situation seriously. We want to make sure that we can deliver as good or better services to Canadians across this country on core public services. Certainly over 70% of our reductions are in back office operations and operational savings.

We are meeting that commitment as well, far better than the risky plans of the NDP were it to be in power.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear that they are taking the matter seriously, and I look forward to some serious answers.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has been clear: it is calling for stable, long-term funding so that cities can plan properly and our roads, water treatment plants and public transit systems can continue to operate properly. If the Conservatives do not help Canadian cities renew their infrastructure, we are going to hit a wall—no pun intended.

What is the Conservatives' response to the FCM's calls? Will they continue with their piecemeal approach?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, never before has a government provided as much assistance for municipal infrastructure renewal. Never.

It is easy for the NDP to congratulate itself on funding infrastructure with a \$21 billion carbon tax. That is not what we are going to do. We are going to take into consideration the fiscal capacity of Canadian taxpayers, and we will build a new infrastructure plan that will make sense and support municipalities and provinces across the country.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is so typical. The Conservatives make up stuff about the NDP to distract us from their own inaction.

I have a question about a recent flip-flop on infrastructure. Last Thursday, the Conservative candidate in Victoria spoke out against the \$250 million investment for a secondary sewage treatment plant in Victoria. Victorians are confused, the Conservative government has supported this initiative and yet the Conservative candidate says he opposes it and disagrees with the Prime Minister.

I ask the minister, who actually speaks for the Conservatives?

Oral Questions

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government understands how important infrastructure is in this country. That is why we have launched the historic \$33 billion building Canada fund and made the gas tax a \$2 billion permanent transfer to our cities. We will continue to work with provinces and municipalities, and we will continue to support them.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, documents from the Shawanaga First Nation school principal show the minister's claim that federal per-student funding for first nations is comparable to provincial funding is simply not true. The documents show that the funding for his students is \$5,600 annually, but it costs more than \$12,000 to send students to provincial schools off reserve.

Why is a student at a school on reserve worth half of a student attending school off reserve? When is the government going to close this unacceptable and disgraceful funding gap?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is comparing apples with oranges I am afraid to say.

We spend \$1.4 billion on 117,000 first nation students across the country. There is a lot more to education than the transfer to the school. We have to build schools. We have to have a ministry. We have to have school boards. It all fits together.

When we do the comparisons, we can find that there is rough comparability, but there are differentials, which is why when we cut the agreement in British Columbia we—

● (1455)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beauséjour.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the minister defends her unfair changes to employment insurance, she seems to be saying that people in Atlantic Canada are too lazy to find jobs themselves.

What the minister does not understand is that often there are no jobs in the regions. The people know this and protested by the thousands against these changes in New Brunswick this past weekend.

Why are the Conservatives refusing to solve the real problem: the lack of stable, long-term, full-time jobs in Atlantic Canada? Why are they punishing workers?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has definitely misunderstood what we are doing. We are helping people identify and find jobs, and we are providing them with the training needed for these jobs.

We have already helped create more than 820,000 jobs since the recession, and the Liberals voted against our efforts to help these people find work.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are making some troubling decisions in the fight against crime. They claim to be champions of law and order, but that is far from evident when we look at the facts.

The Conservatives did not hold a press conference to announce that they would no longer fund the Eclipse squad, a specialized street gang unit in Montreal.

Could the Minister of Public Safety explain the twisted logic behind cutting funding for a squad that fights street gangs?

[English]

Ms. Candice Bergen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to fighting and cracking down on gangs not only in Montreal but across the country. That is why we have introduced and brought into law over 20 bills addressing organized crime. We are pleased to make a one-time investment to provide provincial police forces with the tools they need to crack down on guns, gangs and drugs.

Sadly, the NDP members never support our initiatives. We ask them to support those initiatives to crack down on criminal activity, including organized crime across the country and in Montreal.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again we see the Conservatives launching another make-belief attack to distract from their own inaction. They talk about public safety and then they cut funding for groups that help young people avoid gangs and crime.

Scarborough is still dealing with the aftermath of a tragic and violent summer. Residents are concerned. Repeated pleas for action have been ignored by Conservatives. They will not properly invest in witness protection and are slashing Public Safety staff.

When will the minister finally show leadership and help keep the GTA community safe from violence?

Ms. Candice Bergen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that member is completely wrong on every one of those points she has tried to make.

We were the ones who introduced and funded the national crime prevention strategy, which includes a fund to help young people stay out of gangs. We continue to invest in that and make it a permanent fund. As well, we invest \$9.2 million every year in witness protection programs.

We have introduced legislation, funding and initiatives across the board to crack down on crime, but every time the NDP members do not support it. In fact, they oppose it.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. Our plan is working with Canada creating 820,000 net new jobs since July 2009, with 75% of those coming from the private sector. Our natural resources have been a large part of that success, with 20% of Canada's economy dependent on the resource sector.

Would the Minister of Natural Resources update the House on how our government will continue to encourage growth in Canada?

[Translation]

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for her perceptive question.

I am pleased to announce that, although the United States is adopting a carbon tax, which the American administration did not say it intended to do, our government will never do so in Canada. We will never adopt the NDP's \$21 million carbon tax, which would cause job losses and increase prices overall. We will continue to lower taxes and stimulate job creation.

* * *

● (1500)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada-EU CETA negotiations are now at a critical stage and crucial decisions handed off to ministers. I remind the minister that he claimed it was a myth that CETA would increase drug and health costs. However, internal reports, held secret, state otherwise. With an extra billion dollars in drug costs forced—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Malpeque has the floor.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, again, the studies, held secret, claim there is an extra billion dollar cost for drugs and health care.

The minister owes Canadians the truth, or is he perpetuating a myth himself? Will he table that analysis in the House and give Canadians the real facts on the cost-benefit analysis?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have always tried to find that correct balance between protecting our innovators and also ensuring that Canadians continue to have an affordable source for the drugs they need. We continue to consult with the provinces and territories to ensure that the best interests of Canadians are reflected in the Canada-EU trade negotiations. These negotiations have been, and continue to be, the most open and transparent in Canada's history.

Oral Questions

I will remind the House that we are committed to signing an agreement only if it is in the best interests of Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Maurice Lamontagne Institute, a leader in scientific research, has already paid the price for the Conservatives' excessive and ideological cuts.

Now, its library, the only Fisheries and Oceans Canada library that services the French-speaking science community, will be dismantled. This is the most recent victim of the Conservatives' insistence on destroying our scientific institutions. The complaints are already piling up on the Commissioner of Official Languages' desk.

How can the Conservatives justify the destruction of this priceless library?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the department has made the decision to modernize its library service and to take advantage of increasing availability of information resources in digital form. Even today, most requests are received and delivered electronically.

Library collections and services will continue to be provided to departmental staff and to other stakeholders. The work is well under way and will be completed by the fall of 2013.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week we remember and raise awareness of the Holodomor, the horrific and catastrophic famine of 1932-33 that claimed the lives of millions of Ukrainian men, women and children.

The Holodomor was a genocide by starvation, perpetrated by the ruthless regime of Joseph Stalin, in an attempt to stamp out the people of Ukraine's aspirations for a free and independent country.

Communities across Canada this week will be holding memorial services to honour the memory of those who perished. Could the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs please comment on the sombre occasion?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the leadership of the member for Selkirk—Interlake and our Prime Minister, in 2008 Canada recognized the Holodomor and designated the fourth Saturday of every November as a memorial day for the millions of victims.

This week we stand with the people of Ukrainian descent across Canada and around the world to mark this sad chapter of history. The horror and tragedy of the Holodomor must never be forgotten.

Rest assured, our government will continue to speak up for democracy, human rights and freedom.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a year ago, the NDP introduced a bill on protecting French as a language of work in federally regulated businesses.

The Conservatives—even those from Quebec—voted against it and responded by proposing that a committee be set up to examine the issue. Twelve months later, we see that all the Conservatives have done is create more bureaucracy in order to ensure that they do not have to keep their promise. The minister says that it is important to take the time to do things right, so it is time for some answers.

What stage are we at in the process to set up the committee? Who will sit on the committee? What will its mandate be?

• (1505)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we did indeed commit to reviewing in committee the status of French in federally regulated businesses. We will honour that commitment in a mature and thoughtful manner, as we did last Friday with the announcement of the armoury reconstruction.

This announcement was unanimously well received in Quebec City. We preserved the historical heritage, the UNESCO designation and the French fact. This work was done well and that is our trademark. We are not trying to get out of anything and we are doing a good job.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the police officers recruitment fund was created, the Conservatives boasted that guaranteeing the right to safety was one of the government's most important responsibilities. Yet, by announcing the end of the program, the Conservatives are disregarding this priority and threatening the activities of specialized squads in the fight against crime.

The Quebec National Assembly has unanimously condemned this incomprehensible decision and is calling for Ottawa to renew the fund beyond March 2013.

Does the minister understand that the continuation of this funding is of the utmost importance, and will he respond favourably to the unanimous request of the Quebec National Assembly?

[English]

Ms. Candice Bergen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under our government, we were pleased to make a one-time investment of \$400 million to provide provincial police forces with the tools they needed to crack down on guns, gangs and organized crime.

Our government is committed to fighting crime not only in Montreal and Quebec but across Canada. That is why we have introduced tough legislation to crack down on organized crime and every time the opposition, including the Bloc, vote against it. We

actually put action behind our words. We do not just say something; we do it.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 112 petitions.

* * *

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Oshawa Port Authority has given permission to FarmTech Energy to build an ethanol-producing facility at the Oshawa harbourfront on Crown land adjacent to a sensitive wetland, which is home to species at risk, a wildlife preserve and a provincial park. However, there was no public consultation and no complete environmental assessment.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to divest the federal port authority to the City of Oshawa, halt the construction of the ethanol facility, instruct that public hearings be held and that a complete environmental assessment be conducted at the site and surrounding areas.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have several petitions.

The first petition has 38 signatures from Montreal, Vancouver and the London-Waterloo region asking the Government of Canada to, among other things, continue to staff and fund the Experimental Lakes Area at current or higher levels of commitment. The second petition is by another 36 people from the Kitchener area to the same effect.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to present two petitions from my constituents of Kitchener Centre, totalling about 150 signatures, of which half are by women concerned about Canada's 400-year-old definition of a human being. They are calling upon Parliament to amend subsection 223(1) of the Criminal Code in order to recognize 21st century medicine.

I have another two petitions to the same effect from my neighbouring riding of Kitchener—Waterloo, with about 100 signatures, of which half are from women; and another with 171 signatures from the Perth-Wellington riding to the same effect; and another with 500 signatures from the Victoria area. All of these petitioners believe that Canada should recognize 21st century medical evidence in relation to subsection 223(1).

Routine Proceedings

●(1510)

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present a petition from residents of Canada who want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that Canada's Experimental Lakes area is a unique and world-renowned facility for freshwater research and education. The ELA provides essential scientific knowledge for the development of national and international policies. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to recognize the importance of the ELA to its mandate to study, preserve and protect aquatic ecosystems. They ask the government to reverse its decision to close the ELA research station and to continue to staff and provide financial resources to the ELA at a current or higher level of commitment.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from thousands of Canadians to save the ELA, Canada's leading freshwater research station. The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to recognize the importance of the ELA to its mandate to study, preserve and protect aquatic ecosystems, to reverse the decision to close the ELA research station and to continue to staff and provide financial resources to the ELA at the current or a higher level of commitment.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present petitions from Kitchener-Waterloo and Guelph calling upon the government to provide financial resources to the ELA at the current or a higher level of commitment.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to file today. One is from the Yorkton—Melville part of Saskatchewan; a second from the western part of Saskatchewan around Kindersley and Lloydminster; and a third from all over the province, including Regina, Saskatoon, Leader, Theodore, Insinger and a whole variety of other places.

All three petitions relate to the historic tree farm at Indian Head. The petitioners call upon the government to reverse its decision to stop funding the tree farm and to provide adequate resources for the prairie shelterbelt program to continue, including adequate resources for the tree farm at Indian Head.

[*Translation*]

HOUSING

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present another petition signed by people from across Canada, people of all ages and social classes, who want the government to take action and create a national housing strategy. These people also support my bill, Bill C-400.

[*English*]

ACCESS TO MEDICINES

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition on behalf of hundreds of Canadians, many of them from Ottawa but also from the western provinces, B. C. and Manitoba in particular. The petition is by the Grandmothers

Advocacy Network encouraging members of this House and the government in particular to support Bill C-398, a bill to amend Canada's access to medicine regime to allow people in Africa, principally but not only there, who suffer from treatable diseases such as HIV-AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis to receive medicines that are not priced exorbitantly. The petition also encourages those members who voted in the past for Bill C-393, which passed the House but did not get through the Senate, to consider supporting Bill C-398.

PENSIONS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from a number of citizens across the country, including Fredericton, Sackville and Saskatoon. They are concerned about the changes to old age security and the fact that the age of eligibility has been increased from 65 to 67. They believe this will have an impact on the poorest seniors in this country. Therefore, they ask the Government of Canada to maintain the age of eligibility for OAS at 65 and to make required investments in the guaranteed income supplement to lift every senior in this country out of poverty.

●(1515)

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today. The first is yet another petition, this time on behalf of residents of Quebec, regarding the government's closure of the Experimental Lakes Area in north-western Ontario. Closing that world renowned freshwater science facility would jeopardize unique research.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in regard to my cellphone freedom act, Bill C-343. People from across Ontario ask us to support the cellphone freedom act, which would remove anti-competitive network locks on their cellular phones.

PENSIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the residents of Winnipeg North, it is a pleasure to table a petition calling upon the Prime Minister to recognize that my constituents, and indeed all Canadians, should continue to have the option of retiring at age 65. They call upon the government to reverse its decision, emphasizing the importance of our OAS, GIS and CPP as fundamental social programs that Canadians believe in. They want a government that will support those programs.

*Routine Proceedings***QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 899, 900, 904, 916, 924, 928, 929, 933, 934, 938, 940, 947, 949 and 950.

[Text]

Question No. 899—**Mr. Hoang Mai:**

With regard to the proposed new bridge on the St. Lawrence River: (a) why did the 2012 budget not include long-term planning for the proposed bridge; (b) have the cost estimates been further refined since initial estimates of between three and five billion dollars were made, and how are these estimated costs broken down, in as much detail as possible; (c) what further factors need to be taken into account to refine the estimates; (d) at what time in the financial analysis process will the Treasury Board of Canada or the Department of Finance be involved and to what extent; (e) has Transport Canada chosen the funding model and, if so, which one, and why; (f) will there be any public consultation concerning the funding model; (g) have any economic models been created to understand the financial impacts of the various options for the project; (h) is public-private partnership (P3) still an option (i) who is involved in making the decision about P3, (ii) have there been concrete steps made in order to finalize a decision, (iii) will there be any public consultation regarding P3; (i) has Transport Canada decided on the type of structure (bridge or tunnel); (j) what are the initial outcomes of the government's collaboration with the province of Québec to integrate transit onto the new bridge; (k) has Transport Canada been involved in the study of integrating a Light Rail Transit (LRT) onto the bridge, (i) at what stage in the planning process will the government define the parameters of public transportation on the bridge, (ii) how is the government coordinating the planning process with the government of Québec, the Agence métropolitaine de transport and other interested parties, (iii) when are the results of this study expected and will they be made public, (iv) is the LRT the preferred option according to the current status of the study, (v) will the government help fund a project of this calibre if LRT is chosen as the appropriate option; (l) has the number of lanes on the new bridge been established and, if not, (i) what will be the process determining that recommendation, (ii) who is responsible for making the final decision, (iii) are there any plans to include bicycle paths or pedestrian walkways; (m) has the government studied the possibility of a gradual replacement instead of the complete new bridge, such as the proposal brought forward by civil engineer René Therrien, as found at the URL <http://solutionpontchamplain.com/la-solution/>; (n) will the preliminary design and financial analysis include a team of architects to consider aesthetic aspects of the new structure, (i) what will be the process determining that recommendation, (ii) who is responsible for making the final decision, (iii) will there be an architecture competition; (o) will the name of the new bridge over the St. Lawrence remain the Champlain Bridge, (i) if not, has a name been chosen and by whom, (ii) if no name has been chosen, what will be the process in order to determine the name of the new bridge, (iii) has a timeline been specified to determine the name of the new bridge; (p) regarding the PricewaterhouseCooper-led consortium contract, (i) what type of financial services will it offer, (ii) what type of technical and engineering work will it provide, (iii) what is the total cost of the 18 month contract, (iv) will the PricewaterhouseCooper-led consortium continue to be part of the process, and will the government take into account its recommendations; (q) how will the recommendation for the procurement be accessed by the government and what type of recommendation does the procurement process and construction usually entail; (r) what are the differences between the eight new design options for the initial review, (i) will these be made public, (ii) at what time; and (s) what options are being considered by Transport Canada regarding the implementation of tolls, (i) has the government decided if the new structure will be a toll bridge, (ii) if not, when will the government make a decision on this, (iii) was the PricewaterhouseCooper-led consortium mandated to present the government with financial options that would include a toll bridge, (iv) if the government decides to include a toll on the bridge, what will the profit go towards and how will the price of the toll be decided, (v) will there be different categories of prices and, if so, how will these be determined?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on October 5, 2011, I announced that the Government of Canada will proceed with a new bridge for the St. Lawrence River in the Montreal region. The planning process for this major infrastructure project is well under way and will take several years

to complete. The government has already initiated consultations with key stakeholders, which include the Government of Quebec, regional mayors and industry representatives. The government intends to continue consulting them regularly throughout the bridge planning process.

Based on the information currently available, the cost of this new bridge, with associated work on the entire corridor, including the reconstruction of a section of Highway 15, the replacement of the Nuns' Island Bridge and a new alignment of the new bridge with Highway 10 on the South Shore, is estimated to be between \$3 billion and \$5 billion. This estimate is very preliminary and expected to be refined as work progresses and bridge designs are firmed up. All decisions will be taken in a fiscally responsible manner. In this regard, the creation of a public-private partnership to build and maintain the new bridge, as well as the use of tolls, will be examined.

Our government recognizes the importance of public transit for the residents of the greater Montreal area, who cross the bridge morning and evening. As such, the new bridge for the St. Lawrence will likely encompass a public transit component, and we will work closely with the Government of Quebec in that regard.

Question No. 900—**Mr. Hoang Mai:**

With regard to the safety and security of the Champlain Bridge in Montreal: (a) what contingency plan does the government have in case a serious emergency or other factor requires a shut-down of the bridge; (b) were there safety concerns that prompted the Nuns' Bridge announcement in July and, if so, were these concerns based on a report or study; and (c) at what time in the planning stages of the replacement of the Champlain Bridge was the elaboration of a temporary bridge included?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), the Government of Canada has funded investments for the Champlain Bridge through special programs for the maintenance of the bridge to ensure its safety and to avoid closures.

Fiscal year 2012-2013 is the fourth year of delivery of the 10-year \$212 million Champlain Bridge maintenance program. Works totalling \$ 78.3 million to maintain the bridge in a safe operating condition have been expended to date since the beginning of the program. In addition to the \$212 million program, funding of \$227.6 million for urgent works and asset preservation for a three-year period was announced in March 2011. The Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Inc., JCCBI, is completing year 2 of this program, which also includes funds for Highway 15 and Bonaventure Expressway. A total of \$94.8 million of the aforementioned amount was budgeted for the Champlain Bridge and approaches. Works totalling \$26.7 million to maintain the bridge in a safe operating condition have been expended to date.

Routine Proceedings

In response to (b), the Nuns' Island Bridge part of the Champlain Bridge corridor has been affected by deterioration similar to that of the Champlain Bridge. The structures are inspected on a regular basis. In December 2011, JCCBI retained the services of Delcan, a private sector engineering firm, to conduct a structural assessment of the Nuns' Island Bridge. This report is available on JCCBI's website. The announcement made in July 2012 to replace the existing bridge by a temporary causeway is the result of recommendations made by JCCBI following its receipt of the Delcan structural assessment.

In response to (c), in 2010, the BCDE Consortium retained by JCCBI and the Ministère des Transports du Québec, MTQ, to draft a prefeasibility report developed options, including a temporary bridge, as a preliminary phase for the definitive replacement of the existing Nuns' Island Bridge.

Question No. 904—Ms. Elizabeth May:

With regard to the loan Canada provided to China (agreed upon on November 26, 1996, and authorized by Parliament through the Supplementary Estimates in Appropriation Act No. 4, 1995-96), through Export Development Canada's (EDC) Canada Account in the sum of \$1.5 billion CAD, as part of the agreement to sell to China two Atomic Energy of Canada Limited CANDU-6 reactors for Phase III of the Qinshan project at Hangzhou Bay in Zhejiang Province, China: (a) for all monies loaned to China as part of this agreement, (i) what Canadian agency, department, or crown corporation was responsible, (ii) what was the total sum of the loan, (iii) what is the scheduled due date of the loan and on what date did the term commence, (iv) what is the current repayment status of the loan, (v) what portion of the loan has been repaid, (vi) what is the outstanding balance of the loan, (vii) what is the value of the interest to be accrued over the full term of the loan; (b) if any loan associated with this agreement has not been repaid by China in accordance with the original terms of the agreement, (i) what recourse demands have been made, (ii) what further actions has the government, or its departments, agencies, or crown corporations, taken to recover money lent, (iii) as a result of any non-payment by the debtor, what, if any, funds have been paid to EDC from the Consolidated Revenue Fund; (c) what studies, reviews, or audits have been conducted by the government of the loan guarantee associated with this agreement, including by (i) the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, (ii) EDC, (iii) the Department of Finance; and (d) for each study, review, or audit, (i) what are its contents, (ii) on what date(s) was it conducted, (iii) what actions or decisions were taken by the government or its agencies or departments in response?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a)(i), for all monies loaned to China as part of this agreement, Export Development Canada, EDC, entered into a loan agreement in an amount of \$1.5 billion in accordance with the terms and conditions of a ministerial authorization implementing a decision of cabinet. In response to (a)(ii) the total sum of the loan was \$1,497,354,054. In response to (a)(iii) the scheduled due date of the loan was July 20, 2018, and the commencing date was January 12, 1997. In response to (a)(iv) and (v), the loan has been fully repaid. In response to (a)(vi), there is no outstanding balance of the loan. In response to (a)(vii), the value of the interest accrued over the term of the loan was \$414,169,012.51 in U.S. dollars.

Regarding (b), it is not applicable.

Regarding (c)(i) and (iii), they are not applicable. In response to (c)(ii), EDC did not conduct any special studies, reviews or audits aside from its standard due diligence practices.

Regarding (d), it is not applicable.

Question No. 916—Hon. Mark Eyking:

With respect to the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty Conference held in July 2012: (a) what are the names, titles and affiliations of those who attended on behalf

of Canada; and (b) what are the details of the documents produced for the Canadian delegation in advance of the Conference?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada supports efforts to establish international standards for arms transfers in order to help prevent illicit transfers that fuel conflict, encourage terrorism or organized crime. The government has been clear, however, that it is very important that any arms trade treaty, ATT, recognizes and acknowledges the legitimacy of lawful ownership of, and trade in, firearms by responsible citizens for their personal and recreational use, including sport shooting, hunting and collecting. While we are disappointed by the failure of the July 2012 conference, and of the obstructionist tactics employed by a small number of countries such as Iran, we are not discouraged. Canada will continue to work with others to develop an ATT that respects the legal trade in arms, including the legitimate trade or use of hunting and sporting firearms.

In response to (a), the Canadian delegation to the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty Conference was as follows: Habib Massoud, deputy director, conventional weapons and space issues, non-proliferation and disarmament division, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, as head of the delegation; Paul Galveias, senior export control officer, export controls division, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada; Kim Joslin, senior policy officer, non-proliferation and disarmament division, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada; Roxane Milot, defence policy officer, directorate of strategic analysis, Department of National Defence; Major Kyle Solomon, defence advisor, strategic joint staff-plans, Department of National Defence; Lieutenant-Commander Gordon Thomson, defence legal advisor, directorate of international and operational law, Department of National Defence; Jeffrey Westgarth-Taylor, policy advisor, export controls division, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada; Saad Zia, legal officer, United Nations, human rights and economic law division, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada; and Stephen Torino, president, Canadian Shooting Sports Association.

In response to (b), the documents produced for the Canadian delegation in advance of the conference were as follows: a paper entitled "Canada's Focused Views on a Future Arms Trade Treaty", http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.217/2&Lang=E, and a memorandum to cabinet, "Mandate to Negotiate an Arms Trade Treaty", which is subject to cabinet confidence. This document was provided solely to Government of Canada employees with the appropriate security clearance.

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 924—Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:**

With respect to the closure of the Canadian Embassy in Iran: (a) what are the details of the briefing documents produced for the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister in anticipation of the closure; and (b) who else received these documents?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on September 7, 2012, Canada closed its embassy in Iran and declared *persona non gratae* all remaining Iranian diplomats in Canada. At the same time, Canada designated the Iranian regime as a state sponsor of terrorism under the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act, JVTa.

The above decisions were taken as the result of the Iranian regime's own actions, and reflect Canada's view that the Iranian regime is the most significant threat to global peace and security in the world today. The Iranian regime is providing increasing military assistance to the Assad regime; it refuses to comply with UN resolutions pertaining to its nuclear program; it routinely threatens the existence of Israel and engages in racist anti-Semitic rhetoric and incitement to genocide; it is among the world's worst violators of human rights; and it shelters and materially supports terrorist groups. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is briefed regularly, by senior officials, on the threat posed by Iran to international peace and security.

The closure of the Embassy of Canada in Tehran was also the result of Iran's blatant disregard for the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and its guarantee of protection for diplomatic personnel. Our diplomats serve Canada as civilians, and their safety is our number one priority. As such, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is briefed regularly, by senior officials, on the security of Canada's missions abroad and any developments that require a review of security measures or risk assessments with regard to a specific mission.

The specific details of materials prepared for the government concerning policy options developed in response to the Iranian threat, together with ongoing risk assessments for individual missions, are protected.

Question No. 928—Mr. Robert Chisholm:

With regard to research conducted at the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA): (a) why were Department of Fisheries and Oceans scientists recently awarded competitive internal grants on departmental priorities for conducting research at ELA; (b) was any analysis done on the impact on existing programs of cancelling funding on March 31, 2012, for the ELA and, if not, why not; (c) will the government conduct an analysis before cancelling the funding; and (d) what contingency plans are being made for research or projects that will not have been completed by the deadline?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), the termination of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's role in the operations at the Experimental Lakes Area is part of the budget 2012, announced on March 29, 2012. While budget 2012 was in development, the department was undergoing its normally established planning process for scientific research, including requesting research proposals from departmental scientists.

In response to (b) and (c), after conducting a full review of its operations leading into budget 2012, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is increasingly focusing its resources on priority areas that directly support conservation and fisheries management. The department is

now focusing on work being conducted at other freshwater research facilities across the country, which will more than adequately meet the departmental research needs.

In response to (d), managers are working with researchers on transition plans for projects at the facility. While the department is winding down operations at the Experimental Lakes Area, it is continuing to conduct freshwater research in various other locations across Canada. The department hopes to transfer the Experimental Lakes Area so that the research can continue to be conducted by another party that will benefit from it.

Question No. 929—Mr. Robert Chisholm:

With regard to decommissioning or transferring operations of the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA) site: (a) has an economic analysis been done on the cost of remediation of the site upon decommissioning to meet the criteria agreed to in the Canada-Ontario Memorandum of Agreement for the ELA and, if not, why not; (b) what is the projected cost for remediation of the site; (c) what legal advice has the government sought regarding its liability for the site at decommissioning; (d) what legal advice has the government sought regarding its liability if it transfers the operation of the site to a third party; and (e) what discussions has the government had with the Province of Ontario on the options regarding decommissioning or transferring the operation to another operator?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), (b) and (e), discussions are ongoing with the Province of Ontario, which owns the land, about the Canada-Ontario memorandum of agreement and future plans for the Experimental Lakes Area. Fisheries and Oceans Canada strongly favours transferring operations of the facility to an organization that is better positioned to conduct studies based on fundamental ecosystem manipulation. Fisheries and Oceans Canada is currently gathering information and conducting studies to support either transferring the facility to another operator or decommissioning the site. Officials from Fisheries and Oceans Canada have had several productive discussions with representatives of the Province of Ontario regarding future plans for the facility.

In response to (c) and (d), Fisheries and Oceans Canada has sought legal advice as appropriate.

Question No. 933—Mr. Dany Morin:

With regard to the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB): (a) does the 2012 Economic Action Plan (Budget 2012) include decreases in FNIHB's financial resources; (b) what amount in FNIHB's budget envelope is earmarked for on-reserve direct services; (c) what amount in FNIHB's budget envelope is earmarked for purposes other than on-reserve direct services; (d) for what purposes are the amounts in (c) earmarked; and (e) is there a study or are there reports regarding the impacts on urban Aboriginal women of policy shifts toward on-reserve direct services in Budget 2012, and, if so, which ones?

*Routine Proceedings***Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, through the economic action plan 2012, Health Canada has maintained the delivery of federal health programs, services and benefits for first nations and Inuit to help maintain and improve their health. Opportunities to create efficiencies have been identified in non-service delivery areas and through simplification of internal operational processes and structures, such as reducing and restructuring the size of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, FNIHB, headquarters office to better support regional offices and their focus on frontline service delivery to communities.

Going forward, funding for Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch will focus on direct service delivery, such as primary health care, nursing, community-based programming, and the non-insured health benefits, NIHB, program. Funding in areas such as research, building capacity, developing partnerships and networking will continue, but on a limited basis. We continue to make investments in aboriginal health, nursing and research. For example, last year our government invested over \$30 million in aboriginal health research through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. In fact, between 2006 and 2010-11, the latest year for which figures are available, we have invested over \$151 million. In June we announced an investment of \$25 million in a new long-term aboriginal health research initiative, pathways to health equity for aboriginal peoples.

Of the \$2.2 billion in planned spending for 2012-13, approximately 47 per cent will fund non-insured health benefits, including drug and vision benefits and medical transportation, et cetera, for clients both on and off reserve. An additional 41 per cent will fund primary health care programs and activities in communities, including home and community care, communicable disease control, and community health promotion and disease prevention. The remaining 12 per cent will focus on health infrastructure support, comprising planning and quality management; health human resources activities, including the aboriginal health human resources initiative; health facilities costs; health systems integration activities, including the health services integration fund and tripartite activities; eHealth infrastructure; nursing innovation; and branch overhead activities.

The non-insured health benefits program is available to all eligible first nations and Inuit regardless of their place of residence. Like all other eligible NIHB recipients, urban aboriginal women who qualify for the NIHB program will see no reduction in their benefits as a result of budget 2012. These benefits include drugs, dental care, vision care, medical supplies and equipment, short-term crisis intervention, mental health counselling and medical transportation. There are a number of other programs our government provides significant investment towards that benefit urban aboriginal women. For example, last year alone we provided \$53.8 million towards gender related research through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Since 2006 we have invested more than \$241 million in this.

FNIHB's mandate will continue to focus on providing the highest quality health services in first nation and Inuit communities.

Question No. 934—Mr. Dany Morin:

With regard to the customs project at the Bagotville Airport in Saguenay: (a) are there any government studies on (i) the feasibility of such a project, (ii) the start-up cost of such a service, (iii) the viability of this kind of customs area, and if so, which ones; (b) are any related initiatives underway in a government department or agency; and (c) are any officials responsible for working on this issue, and if so, (i) how many, (ii) what progress have they made?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a) and (b), CBSA services at each airport are set based on a formula using the number of passengers and flights processed by the agency. The air services policy framework governs CBSA services. The policy framework can be found at: <http://cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/agency-agence/csr-esb/fsum-somc-eng.html>.

In response to (c), the CBSA evaluates service requirements as per the air services policy framework. The policy framework lists the process for which airport authorities can request service changes. At this time, no officials are working on a request.

Question No. 938—Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:

With regard to court cases between the government and Aboriginal communities and organizations: (a) how many court cases is the government currently engaged in with First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities or organizations as either an appellant, respondent or intervenor, and what are these cases; (b) how many court cases is the government currently engaged in with First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities or organizations in which the government is the respondent; (c) how much is the government paying to engage in court cases with First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities or organizations as either an appellant, respondent or intervenor, broken down by (i) year, (ii) case; and (d) how many lawyers does the Department of Justice employ to work on Aboriginal court cases?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a) to (c), information regarding court cases between the government and aboriginal communities and organizations would require a manual search of all current court cases, as these cases cannot be easily separated. Therefore, the level of detail requested in the question cannot be gathered in the timeframe required for parliamentary questions.

In response to (d), this information is not possible to calculate, as Department of Justice lawyers are not assigned to work solely on aboriginal court cases.

*Routine Proceedings*Question No. 940—**Hon. Geoff Regan:**

With regard to government employment, for each department, agency, crown corporation, board, and any other Government of Canada entity, including the Canadian Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police: (a) through what methodology are numbers of employees and overall payroll tracked; (b) when, in the course of a year, are reports on the number of employees and total payroll generated; (c) are reports on the number of employees and total payroll able to be generated at any other time; (d) are statistics concerning employment and payroll able to be generated according to (i) full-time, part-time, casual, seasonal and contract employees, (ii) location of employment, (iii) gender; (e) are employment and payroll statistics able to be generated based on other distinguishing characteristics, and if so, what are these characteristics; and (f) does any department or agency compile such employment statistics for the government, and if so, (i) which department or agency compiles this information, (ii) are these statistics available to the public?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), the Treasury Board Secretariat, TBS, uses data from the regional pay system to track employment numbers for the federal public service, in particular those departments and agencies named in schedules I, IV and V of the Financial Administration Act.

Data on employees and payroll for the Canadian Forces, CF; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, RCMP; and crown corporations is maintained by each organization.

With regard to (b), there are several reports published throughout the year that contain employment statistics for the core public administration and/or federal public service. These include the annual report to Parliament on employment equity in the public service, the annual report to Parliament on official languages, and the Clerk of the Privy Council's annual report to the Prime Minister on the public service.

Also, there are several factsheets published on the Treasury Board Secretariat website, <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/res/stats/hrs-srh-eng.asp>, that contain the latest statistical information on the federal public service work force. These factsheets are reported as of March of each year and are updated annually.

Aggregate payroll and employment data for the Canadian Forces up to March 2012 is available publicly through Statistics Canada.

With regard to (c), while some statistical information can be generated at other times, reports are usually generated as of March of each year to ensure consistency and comparability.

With regard to (d), yes, employment statistics are available from the TBS on tenure, including indeterminate, term, casual, or student; work schedule, including part-time or full-time; province and city; gender and age, et cetera. TBS compiles these statistics and some are available on the TBS website.

As contractors are not considered government employees, TBS does not collect data on them.

The CF and RCMP data are not available by tenure. The data does distinguish between types. For the CF, it distinguishes between reservists and regular force. For the RCMP, it distinguishes between civilian members and regular members. The RCMP data is also available by province and gender.

Question No. 947—**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:**

With regard to each contract related to the F-35/Joint Strike fighter program: (a) what is the file or reference number; (b) what is the effective date; (c) what is the end date of the contract; (d) who are the parties involved in the contract; and (e) what is the value of the contract?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), (b), and (c), Public Works and Government Services Canada, PWGSC, has issued the following contract: number 24062-130078/001/ZQ, with an effective date of September 6, 2012 and an end date of January 31, 2013. With regard to (d), the contract was awarded to KPMG LLP by PWGSC on behalf of Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. With regard to (e), the value of the contract, including three contract amendments, is \$705,854.50.

For further information regarding this contract, please consult the following link: <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-eng.do?mthd=tp&crtr.page=1&nid=693859&crtr.tp1D=1>.

Question No. 949—**Ms. Judy Foote:**

With regard to transportation policy, (a) are there any regulations, rules or guidelines which govern the transportation of pets on scheduled commercial passenger flights and, if so, where are they enumerated; and (b) has any department or agency studied issues pertaining to the transportation of pets on scheduled commercial passenger flights and, if so, what are the dates, titles and file numbers of the studies or associated files?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), the Canadian Food Inspection Agency regulates the import and transport of live animals.

The federal health of animals regulations, part XII on the transport of animals, applies to all live animal movements into, within and outside of Canada.

Animals, including pets, travelling as cargo must also meet numerous conditions established by the airline industry itself. For example, the World Organization for Animal Health, OIE, recognizes the International Air Transport Association's, IATA, live animals regulations as the international standard for live animal transport by air. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency requires compliance with the IATA live animals regulations as a condition on import permits for the entry of animals into Canada by air.

From a safety perspective, the carriage of pets in an aircraft cabin is a service offered by some airlines. Transport Canada, TC, does not regulate this service. Matters relating to passenger comfort and service are considered the responsibility of airline management and there are no Canadian aviation regulations, CARs, specifically on the carriage of pets in the cabin. However, there is a regulatory requirement for air operators to establish a carry-on baggage control program in accordance with TC's commercial air service standards, as seen here: http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/civilaviation/regserv/cars/part7-standards-725-2173.htm#725_42.

In particular, an air operator that allows the carriage of pets in the cabin must develop its policy and procedures and ensure their safe stowage in the aircraft cabin in accordance with its carry-on baggage control program. Apart from the above, the conditions under which airlines carry pets are established by the carriers themselves as part of their terms and conditions of carriage.

Finally, the Canadian Transportation Agency has some jurisdiction over pet transportation as part of its responsibility to ensure that air carriers' terms and conditions of carriage are just and reasonable pursuant to the air transportation regulations for international transportation. The Canada Transportation Act provides for the review of domestic terms and conditions of carriage on complaint.

With regard to (b), the Canadian Transportation Agency has examined, researched and ruled in several pet cases. These include decision no. 319-C-A-2006, decision no. 227-AT-A-2012, decision no. 66-AT-A-2010, decision no. 430-AT-A-2011 and decision no. 287-C-A-2009.

Question No. 950—Hon. Mark Eyking:

With regard to the Canadian Coast Guard, what are the dates and file numbers of any evaluations, studies or assessments made or conducted and used to inform the decision with respect to the closure of each of the facilities enumerated in Question 764, in addition to the two enumerated in part (e) of the response by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the decision to close the Canadian Coast Guard marine rescue sub-centres, assessments were conducted and presented as part of the Government of Canada's strategic review process in fall 2010.

With regard to the decision to close the marine communications and traffic services centres, assessments were conducted and presented as part of the Government of Canada's deficit reduction action plan process in fall 2011.

Due to confidential nature of this material, the file numbers cannot be shared.

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[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, furthermore, if Questions Nos. 901, 906 to 908 inclusive, 910, 911, 913 to 915 inclusive, 918 to 923 inclusive, 925 to 927 inclusive, 930,

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932, 936, 937, 939, 942 to 946 inclusive, 948, 952 and 953 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 901—Mr. Brian Jean:

With regard to questions Q-513 through Q-818 on the Order Paper: (a) what is the estimated cost of the government's response to each question; and (b) what is the estimated cost of the government's response to this question?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 906—Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:

With regard to the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC): (a) what has been the growth in federal inmate population since March 2010; (b) what programming is provided by the CSC to inmates in federal custody, listed by (i) program title, (ii) description, (iii) length, (iv) availability; (c) what is the percentage of inmates who have access, before the end of their sentence, to programs which have been court ordered; (d) what percentage of federal prisoners are double-bunked; (e) how many more cells would be needed to achieve single cell occupancy; (f) how many more cells would be needed to achieve the CSC's ideal maximum counts in penitentiaries; and (g) how many new cells are being built, (i) how many cells are finished, (ii) what is the timeline for their readiness?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 907—Mr. Scott Simms:

With respect to the National Arts Centre, the Canadian Science and Technology Museums Corporation, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Canadian Museum of Nature, the National Art Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography: (a) what is the date of incorporation for each of these organizations; (b) what was the total federal appropriation for operations, broken down by organization, by fiscal year, from the year ended March 31, 1965, through to the year ended March 31, 2012; (c) what was the total operating revenue for each organization, broken down by fiscal year from the year ended March 31, 1965, through to the year ended March 31, 2012; (d) what were the total operating expenses for each organization, broken down by fiscal year from the year ended March 31, 1965, through to the year ended March 31, 2012; (e) what was the total federal appropriation for capital, broken down by organization, by fiscal year, from the year ended March 31, 1965, through to the year ended March 31, 2012; (f) what were the total capital expenditures for each organization, broken down by fiscal year, from the year ended March 31, 1965, through to the year ended March 31, 2012; (g) what was the total other federal appropriation, not related to operations or capital, broken down by organization, by fiscal year, from the year ended March 31, 1965, through to the year ended March 31, 2012; (h) what is the length of time of the current federal funding agreement for each organization and when does it expire; (i) what is the legal designation and structure of each organization; (j) what is the mandate of each organization; and (k) who are the current Board of Director members for each organization, including vacancies, (i) how often does the Board of Directors of each organization meet on an annual basis, (ii) what is the primary purpose of the Board of Directors of each organization, (iii) do the Boards of Directors report to a higher authority?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 908—Hon. Geoff Regan:

With respect to the licensing or sale of trademarks, official marks, copyrights, patents, industrial designs, integrated circuit topographies, or plant breeders' rights: (a) how much revenue has each department, agency, or crown corporation received in each fiscal year since 2006-2007 inclusively; (b) how much has each department, agency, or crown corporation spent in enforcement; (c) how many notices has each department, agency, or crown corporation issued or transmitted to third parties in respect of alleged infringements; (d) how many actions has each department, agency, or crown corporation commenced against third parties in respect of alleged infringements; and (e) what is the current status of each such action?

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(Return tabled)

Question No. 910—Hon. Geoff Regan:

With regard to content removal requests issued to an internet search engine, aggregator, web hosting service, or other internet service provider, but not including Google Inc., since January 1, 2006, how many such requests have been government issued and what is the (i) date of each request, (ii) originating department, agency, or other government body, (iii) recipient of the request, (iv) detailed reason for the request, (v) outcome or disposition of the request?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 911—Mr. Scott Simms:

With regard to government announcements on or around September 14, 2012, in relation to the awarding of battle honours to regiments with ties to units who participated in battles during the War of 1812: (a) what were the total travel and accommodation costs associated with the announcements or related meetings and events for all individuals who participated, including those of staff members or other government employees; (b) other than travel and accommodation costs, what were all other costs for (i) the Prime Minister in Saint-Paul-de-l'Île-aux-Noix, Quebec, (ii) Mr. John Williamson, Member of Parliament for New Brunswick Southwest, in Fredericton, New Brunswick, (iii) the Honourable Rob Nicholson, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Member of Parliament for Niagara Falls, in St. Catharines, Ontario, (iv) Mr. Phil McColeman, Member of Parliament for Brant, in Brantford, Ontario, (v) Mr. Royal Galipeau, Member of Parliament for Ottawa—Orleans, in Brockville, Ontario, (vi) the Honourable Fabian Manning, Senator, in St. John's, Newfoundland, (vii) Mr. Dave Van Kesteren, Member of Parliament for Chatham-Kent—Essex, in Windsor, Ontario, (ix) the Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of National Defence, in Toronto, Ontario, (x) Mr. David Sweet, Member of Parliament for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, in Hamilton, Ontario, (xi) Ms. Susan Truppe, Member of Parliament for London North Centre, in London, Ontario, (xii) Mr. Ed Holder, Member of Parliament for London West, in London, Ontario, (xiii) Mr. Guy Lauzon, Member of Parliament for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, in Cornwall, Ontario, (xiv) Mr. Parm Gill, Member of Parliament for Brampton—Springdale, in Brampton, Ontario, (xv) Mr. Scott Armstrong, Member of Parliament for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, in Truro, Nova Scotia; and (c) other than travel and accommodation costs, what were all the costs for persons named in (i) through (xv) in any other location?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 913—Mr. Scott Simms:

With regard to content removal requests to Google Inc. prior to April 1, 2011, how many such requests have been government issued and what is (i) the date of the request, (ii) the originating department, agency, or other government body, (iii) the detailed reason for the

(Return tabled)

Question No. 914—Hon. Wayne Easter:

With regard to the case of *Jodhan v. Canada* (Attorney General): (a) how much has the government spent across all departments to pursue this case, at all levels of court proceedings, between January 1, 2007, and September 16, 2012; and (b) what specific steps has the government taken since May 30, 2012, to comply with the Federal Court of Appeal's requirement that the government bring its websites into compliance with the accessibility requirements of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 915—Hon. Wayne Easter:

With respect to government advertising: (a) what has been the overall budget for advertising, broken down by department, agency, or crown corporation, including references to the bicentennial of the War of 1812, (i) in print, (ii) on radio, (iii) on television, (iv) on the internet, (v) other medium; and (b) what are the (i) date, (ii) medium, (iii) cost, (iv) subject matter of each individual advertisement?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 918—Ms. Judy Foote:

With regard to programs promoting women's rights and the rights of gay and lesbian people and other sexual minorities outside Canada: (a) what are the total expenditures spent by the government in this regard; (b) what are the details of each program, broken down by program; and (c) what are the grants or contributions allocated for this purpose, and for each grant or contribution, what was the (i) recipient organization, (ii) recipient country, (iii) purpose of the funding, (iv) date of the funding?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 919—Hon. Scott Brison:

With respect to government advertising at the 2012 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, including the opening and closing ceremonies: (a) what was the overall budget for advertising in (i) print, (ii) radio, (iii) television, (iv) internet, (v) other medium, broken down by department, agency, or crown corporation during any television broadcast; and (b) what are the (i) dates, (ii) medium, (iii) cost, (iv) subject matter of each individual advertisement?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 920—Hon. Scott Brison:

With respect to government advertising mentioning the 2012 Summer Olympics and the 2012 Summer Paralympics, or licensing official Olympic or Canadian Olympic Committee marks: (a) what was the overall budget for advertising (i) in print, (ii) on radio, (iii) on television, (iv) on the internet, (v) any other medium, broken down by department, agency or crown corporation; and (b) what are the (i) dates, (ii) medium, (iii) cost, (iv) subject matter, broken down by individual advertisement?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 921—Hon. Scott Brison:

With respect to expenditure review: (a) what are the dates and file numbers of all contracts, agreements or statements of work between Deloitte Inc. and the government since January 1, 2010; and (b) what are the dates, file numbers and titles of any reports, documents or other work submitted to the government by Deloitte Inc. in association with expenditure review?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 922—Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:

With regard to the upcoming cuts to the public service, how many positions are to be eliminated, broken down by (i) department, (ii) branch, (iii) municipality, (iv) administrative region?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 923—Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:

With respect to the Correctional Service of Canada, at each federal correctional facility, in each fiscal year since 2006-2007 inclusively, what was the number of (i) full-time staff, (ii) part-time staff, (iii) casual staff, (iv) inmates?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 925—Mrs. Carol Hughes:

With regard to all cuts to government spending announced since Budget 2012: (a) how will announced service cuts affect Aboriginal organizations, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, non-status Indians or people living off-reserve; (b) how will announced program or core funding cuts affect Aboriginal organizations, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, non-status Indians or people living off-reserve; (c) how will announced staff cuts affect Aboriginal organizations, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, non-status Indians or people living off-reserve; (d) what consultations took place before the cuts were announced with groups representing Aboriginal organizations, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, non-status Indians or people living off-reserve; and (e) what analysis has been done on the possible effects of service, program and staff cuts to Aboriginal organizations, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, non-status Indians or people living off-reserve?

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Question No. 926—Ms. Judy Foote:

With regard to maritime transportation, for each of the following Canadian-registered motor vessels in passenger, vehicle ferry, or cargo transportation service in Newfoundland and Labrador, namely Ahelaid, Apollo, Astron, Beaumont Hamel, Captain Earl W. Windsor, Challenge One, Flanders, Gallipoli, Grace Sparkes, Green Bay Transport, Hamilton Sound, Hazel McIsaac, Inch Arran, Island Joiner, Marine Eagle, Marine Voyager, Nonia, Northern Ranger, Northern Seal, Sir Robert Bond, Sound of Islay, Terra Nova, and Winchester: (a) what regular inspections have been carried out since January 1, 2005; (b) what special inspections have been carried out since January 1, 2005; (c) what were the dates and file numbers of those inspections; and (d) what deficiencies, if any, were found at each inspection?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 927—Ms. Judy Foote:

With regard to the reconstruction, relocation, replacement, or renewal of airports or airstrips, what are the titles, dates, and file numbers of any reports, studies, files, or dossiers held by any department or agency, created, submitted, or modified at any time since January 1, 2006, at (i) Nain, Newfoundland and Labrador, (ii) Hopedale, Newfoundland and Labrador, (iii) Makkovik, Newfoundland and Labrador, (iv) Postville, Newfoundland and Labrador, (v) Rigolet, Newfoundland and Labrador, (vi) Cartwright, Newfoundland and Labrador, (vii) Black Tickle, Newfoundland and Labrador, (viii) Charlottetown, Newfoundland and Labrador, (ix) Port Hope Simpson, Newfoundland and Labrador, (x) St. Lewis, Newfoundland and Labrador, (xi) St. Anthony, Newfoundland and Labrador, (xii) Deer Lake, Newfoundland and Labrador, (xiii) Stephenville, Newfoundland and Labrador, (xi) Blanc Sablon, Quebec?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 930—Mr. Robert Chisholm:

With regard to internal services for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans: (a) what have been the expenditures on internal services for each of the last five fiscal years; (b) what are the expected expenditures on internal services for the next two fiscal years; (c) have the locations of any internal services been moved in the last two years; and (d) will the locations of any internal services be moved in the next five years, and if so, what are (i) the timelines for these moves, particularly for accounts payable, accounts receivable and procurement, (ii) the new locations for these services, (iii) the costs of these moves?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 932—Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:

With regard to the Aboriginal Women's Program under Canadian Heritage: (a) for each year from 2004 to 2012, which organizations received funding, and how much did they receive annually; (b) what are the criteria for receiving funding; (c) what changes have been made to the criteria for receiving funding in the past six years; (d) what kinds of consultations were held before the changes were implemented, including (i) a list of those consulted, (ii) dates and formats of consultations; and (e) what kind of accommodations were made based on those consultations?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 936—Ms. Megan Leslie:

With regard to the cancellation of the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA) program and discontinuance of funding: (a) what initiatives or programs are being cut; (b) for each initiative or program, what are the amounts of the planned decreases in human resources and funding; (c) will positions be eliminated and, if so, how many; and (d) which initiatives and/or programs will be eliminated by Budget 2012?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 937—Ms. Megan Leslie:

With regard to the cancellation of the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA) program and dismantling of the Experimental Lakes Area science team: (a) what assessment led to the termination of the ELA program; (b) what was the review process; (c) which departments led the review; (d) who made the decision to terminate the program and on what date; (e) does the ELA research program align with the

Department of Fisheries and Oceans' priorities, and if not, how does the ELA research program fail to align with the mandate; and (f) does the ELA research program align with the mandate of Environment Canada?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 939—Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:

With regard to funding for First Nations, Inuit and Métis, for each department and program in the last five years, how much funding was spent on: (a) operating costs, broken down by (i) salaries and benefits for government employees, (ii) salaries and fees for consultants hired by the government, (iii) other enumerated costs; and (b) transfers to First Nations, Inuit and Métis, broken down by (i) payments made to First Nations, Inuit and Métis organizations, (ii) payments made to First Nations bands on-reserve, (iii) other enumerated transfer payments?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 942—Ms. Laurin Liu:

With regard to the Federal Partners in Technology Transfer (FPTT) and intellectual property management in the government, between 2000-2001 and 2011-2012: (a) what was the full amount of federal funds allocated to FPTT each year; (b) how many patents were requested, granted and obtained each year; and (c) to whom does the government plan to entrust the functions performed by FPTT?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 943—Mr. Sean Casey:

With regard to government publishing after the transition to exclusively electronic publications: (a) what are the government's plans or procedures to ensure the preservation, for posterity, of (i) publications published by the Publishing Program, (ii) publications provided by departments to the Depository Services Program; and (b) concerning such preservation, what are the dates, titles, and file numbers of any reports, studies, or dossiers prepared by, for, or on behalf of (i) Publishing and Depository Services, (ii) Public Works and Government Services Canada, (iii) Heritage Canada, (iv) Library and Archives Canada?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 944—Mr. Sean Casey:

With regard to passport services: (a) what are the dates, titles, and file numbers of all studies, between 1997 and 2012, conducted by or commissioned on behalf of (i) Passport Canada, examining the prospective financial performance of a Passport Canada Office in Prince Edward Island, (ii) the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, examining the prospective financial performance of a Passport Canada office in Prince Edward Island, (iii) Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, examining the prospective financial performance of a Passport Canada office in Prince Edward Island, (iv) Passport Canada, examining the prospective cost of implementing emergency passport services in any passport office in Prince Edward Island, (v) the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, examining the prospective cost of implementing emergency passport services in any passport office in Prince Edward Island, (vi) Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, examining the prospective cost of implementing emergency passport services in any passport office in Prince Edward Island; (b) what are the costs incurred, from fiscal year 2001-2002 to the current fiscal year, (i) by Passport Canada in providing passport services to the residents of Prince Edward Island, broken down by service location, (ii) by Service Canada in providing passport services to the residents of Prince Edward Island, broken down by service location; and (c) what are the costs incurred for the operations of Passport Canada locations, from fiscal year 2006-2007 to the present, in (i) Halifax, Nova Scotia, (ii) Fredericton, New Brunswick, (iii) Regina, Saskatchewan, (iv) Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, (v) Kelowna, British Columbia, (vi) St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador?

(Return tabled)

Government Orders

Question No. 945—Mr. Sean Casey:

With regard to Treasury Board guidelines, or any other government-wide conflict of interest or ethical guidelines or policies for Ministers of the Crown who travel on official Canadian government business: (a) are government Ministers, while on official duty either in Canada or abroad, excluding while in their own residences, required to stay in a hotel, motel or an equivalent commercial entity used as a place of temporary abode; (b) what is the conflict of interest disclosure policy for Ministers who, while on official duty, forgo normal accommodations, such as a hotel, motel, or an equivalent commercial entity used as a place of temporary abode and choose to stay instead in private accommodations; (c) are Ministers required to disclose the names of the individuals with whom they have opted to stay so as to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest; and (d) in lieu of normal accommodation such as a hotel, motel or an equivalent commercial entity used as a place of temporary abode, what is the financial disclosure requirement for the use of private accommodation while on official government business?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 946—Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:

With regard to the conservation or health of the George River caribou herd, since January 1, 2006, has any department or agency taken part in any study, hearing, conference, meeting, or process and, if so, what are the file numbers, dates, titles and other details of these studies, hearings, conferences, meetings, or processes?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 948—Hon. Wayne Easter:

With regard to government announcements on or around October 1, 2012, in relation to red tape reduction: (a) what were the total travel and accommodation costs associated with the announcements or related meetings and events for all individuals who participated, including those of staff members or other government employees; (b) other than travel and accommodation costs, what were all other costs for (i) the Minister of Industry in Quebec City, Quebec, (ii) the Minister of National Revenue in Halifax, Nova Scotia, (iii) the President of the Treasury Board in Mississauga, Ontario, (iv) the Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism) in Verdun, Quebec, (v) the Minister of Veterans Affairs in Vancouver, British Columbia, (vi) any other Minister or Parliamentary Secretary; and (c) other than travel and accommodation costs, what were the total costs for persons named in (i) through (vi) in any other location?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 952—Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:

With regard to the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA): (a) has the government had any meetings or discussions with representatives of companies or organizations in the natural resources sector regarding the transfer of the ELA, and, if so, (i) who were the representatives, (ii) where did the meetings take place, (iii) when did the meetings take place; (b) what benefits, if any, does the government see in transferring the ELA to the natural resources sector; (c) how would the Canada-Ontario Memorandum of Agreement be affected in the event of (i) ELA site transfer to the private sector, (ii) site transfer to a university or consortium of universities, (iii) the shuttering or mothballing of the site, (iv) the permanent remediation of the site; (d) has the government's moratorium on the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Major Resources Support Program affected the ability of the government to transfer the site to a university or consortium of universities; (e) would any potential new operator of the ELA have to assume liability for the remediation of the ELA site, and what is the approximate projected cost of site remediation; and (f) is the research done at the ELA primarily the responsibility of the public sector or the private sector?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 953—Hon. Ralph Goodale:

With regard to the Canadian Armed Forces: (a) how many active members are currently enlisted in the Canadian Forces, broken down by (i) Royal Canadian Air Force, (ii) Royal Canadian Navy, (iii) Land Forces, (iv) location of current deployment, for each of (i) through (iii); (b) what is the net change in strength of each branch since 2006; (c) how many Canadian Forces members are officers and how many are non-commissioned members; (d) of the officer ranks, how many are senior officers and how many are general staff; (e) of the active Canadian Forces members, how many are employed in (i) the trades of the combat arms, namely artillery, armoured, or infantry, (ii) non-combat roles; (f) of the active Canadian Forces

members deployed during the combat mission in Afghanistan, how many were employed in (i) the trades of the combat arms, (ii) in a supporting or logistical role; (g) how many public servants are currently employed by the Canadian Forces, broken down by location of employment; and (h) since 2006, what is the yearly change in strength of (i) the regular force, (ii) the reserve force, (iii) civilian employees of the Department of National Defence?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, finally, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

HELPING FAMILIES IN NEED ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act and to make consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: The hon. member for York West has six minutes left to conclude her remarks.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to continue speaking to this very important bill, Bill C-44. It is an issue that was looked at when the Liberals were in office and something that we had also committed to improving had we become the government in the last election. Therefore, I am pleased that the government is at least picking up the issue. I am not satisfied that the Conservatives have done enough, but at least they are moving forward with baby steps.

As Liberals, we continue to believe that families must not be financially ruined because of an illness or when providing care for a family member who falls ill. I and many other parliamentarians, I am sure, have sat down and talked with families who are in that situation and have had to quit work to stay home and care for a sick child or a dying parent or relative. That is just not the way it should be. This belief is why we campaigned for a family care benefit through EI during the last election. That program would have delivered improved support to Canadians when they clearly needed it most.

We also believe that additional enhancements to the EI system should be studied, including increasing sickness benefits and creating a part-time benefits system to help support people with illnesses and disabilities such as MS. These suggestions would not be difficult to implement, even at this stage in the legislative process. We proposed a number of amendments during the committee's study of Bill C-44 and would be pleased to elaborate on them today, because they are very important. Perhaps this could be an item on which we all work co-operatively and deliver something good to the collective benefit of all of our constituencies and all Canadians.

Government Orders

I would again suggest looking at extending the leave of absence for a parent of a critically ill child from 32 weeks to 52 weeks. This would align with the amount of support a parent of a missing or murdered child is entitled to under Bill C-44. It is just common sense that we would have the two of them aligned, rather than having one at 37 weeks and another at 52 weeks. People have a hard enough time managing and accessing government programs and systems as they are, so why not try to keep things a bit similar? It seems to me that for parents of a child who has been killed or murdered or dies from a serious illness or other very serious issues, these benefits should naturally be consistent.

Also, we should consider extending the period for which a parent of a critically ill child could continue to receive benefits, from the last day of the week on which the child succumbs to 14 days after the child passes away. This proposed extension would acknowledge the period of grief following the loss of a child and would provide parents with additional support during a period of bereavement. We surely cannot ask employees to return to work and expect them to be productive after losing a child, never mind losing another relative.

We also called for a reduction in the labour force attachment hours required of EI claimants, from 600 hours over six months to 420 hours over that same time. Reducing the number of hours required would have the effect of extending benefits to part-time workers who would not otherwise qualify for this special EI benefit.

These are only a few suggestions that could make Bill C-44 a far better bill, and I would again call on the Conservatives to consider them. This is a bill that we can all stand and salute and say that we all had a part in it, because we are providing an important service to Canadians.

I understand that some of these ideas fall outside the technical scope of this bill, as determined by the government majority on the committee. However, I also know that this House has several procedural options available to it, if there were a will to do it correctly. What would be lost by looking at other ways to help Canadian families and parents who are facing some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable?

Today we have a choice. We can stand in our places and enact measures that would truly help those we are all here to serve, and whom I believe we want to serve. We can extend a hand-up to people like those living in my community at Jane and Finch, or we can continue to accept mediocrity. I would like to think that this particular issue is one on which we can all gather together and make a true statement about the kind of Canada we want, that we want a compassionate and caring Canada that is economically strong but knows that when things are difficult we are there to help the people.

● (1520)

I truly hope members of the government, particularly those on the back benches, are listening and are prepared to do the right thing by going along with these amendments so we can ensure that Canadians truly have an alternative in difficult times ahead.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we do support this particular bill. It would help a number of people in that bracket. However, there is a bigger issue around the EI program itself. In my riding, people have had a hard time reaching out to Service Canada to fill out their claims. They are having difficulty

reaching somebody at Service Canada, which is because the Conservatives have cut the EI program for many years. Four out of 10 people who need EI are having trouble qualifying for it.

Has my colleague heard similar complaints about EI issues in her riding?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I have heard a variety of complaints about people having difficulty accessing the various services. Clearly, the closing down of so many offices around Canada makes it difficult.

I recently visited Service Canada and the lineup of people was out the door. The number of people who did not know how to use a computer and were asking for help was quite overwhelming. If people have sick children or ailing loved ones and they need to go to the government for help, it should be easy to do. What I saw last week and what I am hearing from my constituents and colleagues is that it is very difficult to access it. It is great for the 20-year-olds but I saw an awful lot of people last week who were probably in their late thirties who do not work with computers, were not able to access the system and had to wait in a long line for Service Canada people to help them.

● (1525)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the one thing that stands out in my mind is the way the Conservatives have ushered this legislation through. I know my colleague supports the spirit and intent of this legislation. Who would not as it would probably help 6,000 to 7,000 Canadians each year. However, it could have been better. Had the government provided an opportunity for amendments at second reading, some changes could have improved the lives of Canadians because a lot of them will be excluded.

Canadians would require 600 hours of work in order to qualify for this benefit but more and more Canadians are working part time now. The Conservatives like to pat themselves on the back for the jobs they have created, but the fact is that where it used to be that one in eight jobs in Canada were part time, it is now one in seven jobs. More Canadians are working part time and, if they do not qualify, they will not benefit from this support.

The Conservatives presented a technical briefing at the end of second reading. Does the member see this is another example of the government abusing the process of the House in order to pass the legislation it wants to pass? It is an abuse of the procedures of the House. This could have been a better piece of legislation to serve more Canadians.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, it is not the first time, so we should not be surprised at the government's tactics on a variety of things.

Government Orders

There are thousands of people who are not eligible to access the EI program and others. The government can say that it did this but who is eligible? It is a very small pocket of people who would be eligible. It can brag about how it brought in this great program but very few people can access it. This is not the first time. We have seen it happen with many other programs. The government likes to tout about all the wonderful things it does but when we get beyond the press releases, it really is not doing very much.

The Liberals are supporting this legislation because it is tiny step toward rectifying a huge problem if we want a compassionate and caring Canada.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from York West said, we are supporting the legislation, the helping families in need act. Just the title of the act shows that it is the kind of legislation that one would be inclined to support. Obviously, as my colleague said, it is a step in the right direction but so much more could be done.

The legislation would modify the Canada Labour Code to enable employees to take leave if their child is critically ill, dies or is missing as a result of a criminal act. In addition, Bill C-44 would make substantive changes to the Employment Insurance Act to allow ill claimants receiving parental benefits to also access sick benefits. Finally, the bill introduces a grant of \$350 per week to parents who earn a minimum of \$6,500 annually and are forced to take leave from their employment because they are caring for an ill child or their child was murdered or is missing.

None of us would ever want to be in that particular position. As my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso said, there is so much more that could be done. What we are trying to do here is convince the government that working together we can make a difference. We could do so much more with a bill like Bill C-44.

Overall, it is a step in the right direction. This has gone on for too long. The legislation is badly needed but it can be improved, and this is what I want to speak to. The government can and must do more to ensure that parents receive financial flexibility during extremely difficult times such as caring for a child who suffers from a critical illness or the tragic death or disappearance of a child.

Bill C-44 legislates two tiers of tragedy by enforcing different supports depending on the unfortunate circumstance. If a parent takes leave from work to care for a dying child, he or she is guaranteed up to 37 weeks off work under the amendments to the Canada Labour Code, but if a parent takes leave because his or her child is missing, the individual gets 52 weeks off work. While away from work, a parent would receive \$350 per week.

It is impossible to even imagine the pain and fear that a parent in any of these tragic circumstances would be forced to endure. I cannot even put myself in the place of parents who find themselves in such circumstances. I most certainly support the 52 weeks guaranteed for parents of a missing or murdered child, and I am sure we all do. However, I believe that parents who are caring for a critically ill child and are suffering from many of the same uncertainties should also be permitted 52 weeks instead of only 37 weeks as would be permitted under this legislation.

I agree with the intent of the bill but I believe that the supports must be stronger and more equal. That is why the Liberals introduced amendments at the committee stage that would have improved and strengthened the supports that Bill C-44 would provide. Unfortunately, the committee, as we all know, was comprised of a majority of Conservative members who voted these measures down. Sadly, it appears that some on the committee could not rise above petty partisanship to deliver for Canadian families. In spite of the lack of co-operation that we found on committee, which my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso referenced, we support the bill.

While I welcome the specific improvements this legislation would make to the EI system for Canadian families, Bill C-44 is part of a larger conversation about the EI system and its failure to meet the needs of Canadians.

For many Canadians, the EI system provides supplementary benefits beyond the unfortunate case of loss of employment. For example, the EI system also provides maternity and parental benefits to individuals who are pregnant, have recently given birth, are adopting a child or are caring for a newborn. In addition, EI provides sickness benefits to individuals who are unable to work because of sickness, injury or quarantine.

● (1530)

Yet the question remains, are Canadians receiving the benefits they pay for, and in some cases require, in the manner to which they need them? The simple answer is no. I think if we ask anyone in the House who is familiar with the situations that Canadians find themselves in when they need to access EI, a program they have paid into, in essence their program, we would find that they are not being treated fairly.

Bill C-44 would enhance benefits to those who would find themselves in a very unfortunate and particular circumstance, but it would not solve many existing problems with the inability of the EI system to conform and adapt to the way Canadians need to use it.

Although, from time to time, some may make it seem like the benefits provided by the EI system are gifts from the Government of Canada, the fact is it is a system that is paid into by Canadians. It is in fact a fund that is put in place by Canadians. It is a crime when those Canadians are unable to access EI when they need to and in terms of the amounts that are required.

Because of this critical but often maligned fact, it is extremely important, as members of Parliament and representatives of our constituents, that we take part in a larger conversation with Canadians about how EI benefits are delivered and how they can better be delivered. This is where we really do need to engage Canadians. That is what is missing from the discussion.

Government Orders

The fact is that decisions are made and we design legislation without really doing the proper consultation with the Canadians who will be impacted. No one really knows whether they will be impacted by it. Therefore, it is very important to recognize, as members of Parliament, our constituents who may be working today but may lose their job through no fault of their own. It is that consultation that is missing here, that discussion with Canadians about the EI system and how it can best be administered to deliver for Canadians in the way in which it should be delivered.

One area where benefits need to be looked at is sickness benefits. Currently those who are eligible for sickness benefits are entitled to up to 15 weeks of benefits if they are unable to work because of their illness. Unfortunately many Canadians who are sick are forced to refrain from going back to work long after their benefits expire.

For example, a woman diagnosed with breast cancer is forced to take leave from work so she may undergo treatment. She will face a gruelling treatment regime that is often longer than the 15 weeks allowed for by the current regulation, leaving her stranded, unable to work while receiving treatment and unable to access more EI benefits even though her sickness has left her in a difficult position. In this case, the goal to provide support while she is receiving treatment is not being met fully. Clearly, in a situation like this, and in other similar situations, there is a gap in the program delivery.

How do we explain to people in that situation that we really cannot respond in the way that we should? We know they are going through a difficult time, we know it is a program they have paid into, but we are not there to meet their needs.

More generally, but equally important to this conversation, Statistics Canada reports that from 2010 to 2011, the most recent data available, access to EI benefits was at its lowest level in nearly a decade. According to Statistics Canada, one reason for the decreasing access to EI benefits was the lack of available full-time jobs.

Although all employees pay into the EI fund, only those with a certain number of hours worked can access the benefits for which they pay. That is one of the many reasons why Canada needs a government that spends less on political advertising and actually does more to create the desperately needed full-time jobs that far too many Canadian families are struggling to find.

● (1535)

Instead of focusing on creating full-time jobs, the government hiked the employment insurance rate on job creators, essentially raising a direct tax on employment, not to mention the Conservative government's declaration of war through its changes to the EI system on many of my constituents who are without a job through no fault of their own. This can be found in a lot of rural areas. While people want to work, unfortunately full-time jobs are not available.

Furthermore, with 14 million phone calls from Canadians trying to access their benefits, automatically hung up on by Service Canada that does not have the resources to respond, we are finding they are not getting the services they need.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague that under the Conservative government we have seen cuts to the EI program, where people are having a hard

time accessing it. Not only that, only four out of ten people who are unemployed qualify for EI benefits.

Would my colleague agree with me that we used to have a \$54 billion surplus in the EI program? What happened to that under the Liberal government?

● (1540)

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question, but the reality is that there was a surplus and the auditor general of the day actually recommended that we use that money in terms of general revenue.

To try to suggest that the Liberals did something that was outside of what should have been done is really being a little deceptive. I would really appreciate it if the hon. member recognized that. If he did not know this, then I appreciate that as well.

Clearly, we have to ensure the fund is available for our constituents, Canadians from coast to coast to coast. When they need it, it should be there for them.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite expressed concern over employers that were required to pay more toward the contributions, as well as the employees on their deductions. However, in the previous budget, and extended into this one, our government provided a \$1,000 tax benefit to employers so they could encourage more employment. From one tax year to the next, if employers pay up to \$1,000 more in employment insurance, that can be reduced.

Why did the member not vote in favour of that budget measure the last time or this time?

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member wants to know why we could not vote for a budget that had so much thrown into it. This is a prime example of the kind of manipulation the government undertakes when it throws so much into an omnibus bill. The government makes it impossible for members to vote for anything for which they would like to vote.

Whether I would vote for that measure or whether I would vote for something else, the member knows only too well that what has to be done is we have to have a budget bill that deals just with the budget, not a bill that has so much thrown into it, which makes it impossible for anyone to vote, no matter how they would like to vote.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to say that it has created 800,000 jobs since it took power.

I just got back from Fort McMurray. Any jobs that have been created are in Alberta and Saskatchewan, as well as some in Newfoundland. That is where the jobs are being created. They are not in Ontario, Quebec or anywhere else in the country.

The guys in Alberta know that it was because of the regulatory regime that was brought in 2002, and they refer to it as "Chrétien's fix". That is why there are five new plants out there creating jobs.

Government Orders

The jobs that the government has created are part-time jobs. Those guys failed to make provisions in this legislation for people working part-time. If the legislation had been brought in like it should have, so that changes could be made through second reading, then maybe we could have helped those Canadians, but they did not.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree with my colleague more. He has made a very valid point.

That is what we are saying about Bill C-44. While we think it is a step in the right direction, it really does need to be improved upon, and we have recommended amendments and improvements to the bill.

We hope the government will recognize that we could be in this together. We could ensure that Canadians have the best possible EI system they could have. They are paying into it. It is their system. Let us work together. Let us not treat it as something that only the Conservatives, or the NDP or the Liberals are doing it. Let us work together and do what is in the best interest of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the Question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

● (1545)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I ask that you defer the vote until the end of government orders tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The vote stands deferred until the end of government orders tomorrow.

* * *

SAFE FOOD FOR CANADIANS ACT

The House resumed from November 7 consideration of Bill S-11, An Act respecting food commodities, including their inspection, their safety, their labelling and advertising, their import, export and interprovincial trade, the establishment of standards for them, the registration or licensing of persons who perform certain activities

related to them, the establishment of standards governing establishments where those activities are performed and the registration of establishments where those activities are performed, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill.

Hon. Ted Menzies (for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Ted Menzies (for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I am in before you in support of our safe food for Canadians legislation. This is a bill in which I firmly believe.

This is also a bill that finds virtually unanimous support among stakeholders. Let me read some quotes.

The Food & Consumer Products of Canada says, "These changes will further enhance Canada's reputation as a global food and beverage product safety leader".

Martin Unrau, president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, says, "The CCA commends the government for bringing this ambitious but necessary legislation forward".

Ron Bonnett, president of the CFA, says, "The Canadian Federation of Agriculture views the introduction of Bill S-11, the Safe Food for Canadians Act, as an important step to enhance and modernize Canada's already reputable food safety system".

Our government is committed to making food as safe as possible for consumers. As I have said before, Canada's food safety system is world class. However, some of the legislation that governs it needs to be modernized. It is legislation that functions well, but it can be improved.

In this case, change is both needed and good. We must always ensure that the authorities granted by legislation are adequate for our goals of good governance. As well, we must look at our operating environment to see if things have changed so we can adapt and keep pace.

Government Orders

In light of the 2008 report of the independent investigator, Sheila Weatherill, regarding listeriosis, there is a need to strengthen and modernize much of the legislation that governs the activities of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. I should add that when our government introduced Bill S-11, we fulfilled the final recommendation of the Weatherill report. This demonstrates how seriously we take food safety.

[*Translation*]

I would like to explain how the safe food for Canadians act will strengthen and modernize our legislation. I would like to focus on five main points. The first involves strengthening the ability to trace and recall foods. The second has to do with consolidating our inspection and enforcement authorities. The third point involves providing stronger import controls. The fourth aims to modernize the certification of exports. Finally, the fifth point aims to protect Canadians from things like tampering, hoaxes, and deceptive practices.

First of all, let us look at how passing this bill will strengthen Canada's ability to trace and recall foods. There has been a lot of talk recently about food recalls, and everyone wants to know how products can be recalled more effectively. This bill is designed to fill those gaps.

I would like to ask the following question: who among us has not found some leftovers in the fridge and wondered how long they have been there? Although we know that bacteria attack food before we can taste or smell them, we inspect our leftovers by checking for mould and bad smells. As long as it seems okay, we think about keeping the leftovers for a little while longer.

● (1550)

[*English*]

Of course, cleaning out a refrigerator is one thing and getting unsafe food commodities off the shelves in our retail outlets is something else altogether. Here is how our bill would improve our capacity to recall and trace unsafe food products.

Our proposed legislation would give strengthened authority to the CFIA to develop regulations related to the traceability and recall of food commodities and the appropriate tools to take action on unsafe food as the need arises.

Our proposed legislation also includes prohibiting the sale of food that has been recalled. These new powers would go a long way to strengthening the CFIA's ability to keep consumers safe from potentially harmful food. Also included would be the authority to require regulated parties to establish a traceability system.

However, it is not up to the CFIA alone, and I wish to point out that our food safety system is a partnership between government, industry and consumers. We all have a role to play when it comes to food safety.

[*Translation*]

This leads me to consolidating our inspection and enforcement authorities. What exactly does that mean?

As I said earlier, Canada's food safety system is world class; however, we must recognize that it is getting old.

Take for example a wonderful recipe handed down by your great-grandmother. Over the years, every generation modified the ingredients and added comments in the margin. It is still a good recipe, but it is kind of difficult to follow.

Over the past 50 years, we amended food safety legislation as the need arose to take into account changes, including changes in technology. It was a good approach in that the intentions were good, but the results varied. I will provide an example.

When it comes to illegally imported food products, meat inspectors do not have the same powers as fish inspectors. A meat inspector can order that the product be removed from Canada, but a fish inspector cannot. It does not always make sense nor is it always practical for different powers to apply to different food products. After all, some companies produce both meat and fish, and there are inspectors in charge of examining a range of products.

Of course, the inspection work gets done, but it could be done more effectively. What we really need to do is incorporate various legislative provisions on food safety into one law, which would establish a subset of rules that everyone could understand and follow easily and that would apply to all food products. This streamlined process would have many benefits.

It would allow the current inspectors to do their job better and it would simplify training for the next generation of inspectors. It would also allow the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to be more efficient and effective and the inspectors to manage risks more consistently, whether we are talking about meat, fish or other food products. That is precisely the purpose of this bill: to establish a subset of powers that will make all food products and regulated parties subject to the same inspection rules.

Since the 1960s, many cooks have changed the recipe to control food safety in Canada. They did excellent work, but the time has come to adopt a new version of the recipe.

● (1555)

[*English*]

Our proposed legislation also addresses strengthening import controls, and here is why.

Thanks to our globalized marketplace, consumers can purchase almost any food they desire in Canadian grocery stores. With so much of our food coming from abroad today, many consumers are asking good questions. At the end of the day, they want to know whether imported foods are really safe to eat.

Government Orders

This bill and our government's planned overhaul of our food safety system would address some gaps in our legislation with regard to food imports. First, a specific clause in the legislation would prohibit the importation of unsafe food, thereby stopping it before it makes it to the marketplace. Second, we would licence importers. We need to ensure that we sustain the parity that exists, in terms of standards and compliance, for both domestic and imported food commodities, and that is what we plan to do.

These are just some of the tools we can use to do that: keep unsafe food out of Canada more effectively; track food importers and remove unsafe imports from our shelves more efficiently; and impose tough new penalties on importers who break the law. Together, these measures would better protect the health of consumers and would give Canadians greater confidence in the safety of imported food.

[*Translation*]

Let us now talk about export certification. While the bill is geared towards import, or keeping unsafe foods out of Canada, it is also geared towards export or certifying that Canada's products leaving this country are of the highest quality.

I have noticed that, when Canadians talk about food safety, they often ask questions about what is coming across our borders from other countries. But, frankly, what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If we demand high standards in food safety from our trading partners, then they have the right to demand the same of us.

That is why, around the world, the idea of food certification is taking hold. Many countries, including Canada, have been insisting that food imports be certified to give consumers an added layer of confidence in the safety and quality of the food they are buying.

Some of you might be thinking this is one more burden on the food industry. The fact is, despite the high quality of our food, some foreign markets have been closed to Canadian producers. Armed with an official seal of approval, our food exporters may finally be able to pry these markets open. So certification will heighten our capacity for food exports, not hinder it.

But there is a major stumbling block to certification. At the moment, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency can only certify some foods for export. We need to expand that authority to encompass all food commodities. In this way, all Canadian food exporters can get the edge they need to go after new foreign markets.

The proposed legislation would allow the CFIA to certify all food destined for export. Essentially, this would create a level playing field and show potential export customers that the food we are offering them is every bit as safe as what we consume ourselves. In so doing, we could be helping more Canadian food producers to gain a foothold in international markets.

[*English*]

Last, but definitely not least, let us have a word about protecting the Canadian public from food tampering, deceptive practices and hoaxes.

Canada is blessed with one of the world's best food safety systems, but the confidence of Canadians is based to a certain extent on faith. We trust that the system works effectively and that our food

is safe to eat. When Canadians hear that someone has tampered with a food commodity, it can cause alarm. We worry not just about the product or the brand in question; we start to think that if it could happen to this brand, it could happen to any brand. Even if the threat turns out to be a hoax, the damage is done. Our faith in the food safety system has been called into question.

Until now, in Canada, tampering with food, threatening to tamper with food or falsely claiming to have tampered with food was dealt with through the Criminal Code. However, we think there is a better way. Passing the bill would mean that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency could act immediately when there are reasonable grounds to believe that this type of activity has occurred. That could save time and potentially lives.

We need to update and modernize food safety in the country. I am proud to say that our government is taking action. This new food safety legislation would allow the CFIA to go after those who put hazardous foreign objects into food, those who threaten to tamper with it, or those who knowingly or recklessly communicate false or misleading information to strike fear into the hearts of consumers. Those culprits could face prosecution. The proposed legislation would provide new authorities to address immediate food safety risks and would build additional safety into the system, from the producer or importer to the consumer.

We need to work together. That includes making Bill S-11 into law. Previous governments, both Liberal and Conservative, have tried to enact legislation with similar aims. The NDP recently voiced support for what the bill strives to accomplish. At agriculture committee, and during previous debate in the House and in the other place, both opposition parties made a point of voicing their support for our legislation.

During an agriculture committee meeting, the member for Welland said "hopefully, it will become a standard across the country for food safety". At another meeting, the member for Guelph exclaimed "everyone around this committee table supports Bill S-11".

I now call on the opposition members to make good on their word and help pass this important bill.

Some have claimed that because this important legislation was dealt with efficiently at the House of Commons agriculture committee and no amendments were made to the bill there, the government has not done its due diligence. However, the fact is that this legislation has been debated numerous times in both the other place and in the House of Commons.

Government Orders

•(1600)

Bill S-11 has been studied in both the Senate and House of Commons agriculture committees for over 20 hours during which 46 witnesses appeared, including the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food on two occasions. Both the Senate and House agriculture committees have, indeed, done their due diligence in their study of the bill.

While journalists and opposition members are entitled to their opinion as to whether proposed opposition amendments to Bill S-11 would improve the bill, the expert legal advice offered to our government was that these amendments were not necessary at best and would be an encumbrance to the CFIA and the food safety system at worst.

When it comes to the safety of Canadians and their food, our government listens to the experts.

[*Translation*]

The changes we are proposing would go a long way toward strengthening and modernizing our already robust regime. Passing this bill would give Canadians even more confidence in the safety of the food they eat.

With so much good will and good intention from my honourable colleagues, I see no reason why we cannot deliver on this bill to provide Canadians with a modern food inspection system and the protection they deserve.

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not slip out of the Christmas spirit which seems to be emanating from the other side from the parliamentary secretary as he warmly, at least initially, was quoting me and then, of course, went on to say that we were an encumbrance. I guess the Christmas spirit began and ended and the Grinch came back.

The parliamentary secretary wants to know whether we support this legislation. For the record, as we said earlier, we are and I will be voting in favour of the legislation.

The parliamentary secretary said that tampering was addressed by the Criminal Code but, because the Criminal Code was too slow, that the government needed to address it in this legislation. However, when I put forward the amendment at committee that talked about whistleblowers, the Conservatives said that the Criminal Code would take care of that. Would that not actually slow it down? It seems to me that not only is the burden of proof that becomes judicious because it is the Criminal Code, surely would that amendment not so much encumber but would be expeditious. The parliamentary secretary told us that the Conservatives want to expeditiously deal with tampering, and he is correct, would not whistleblowers who would say they saw someone tampering be an expeditious use of that amendment, if only the government side had said yes?

If it is not good on one hand, would it also not be good on the other hand? Are we not simply taking a process to be expeditious and actually slowing it down?

•(1605)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank my colleague for his support for the bill both throughout the committee process

and here in its final reading in the House. It is important for Canadians to see that MPs are working together to modernize and improve our food safety system.

With respect to my colleague's question, when we talk about the Criminal Code, it is rather broad and it more often than not refers to mischief, and it tends to deal with mischief as related to property. Under this bill, we are talking about food tampering specifically. We want to give the CFIA and the CFIA inspectors the tools to address food safety specifically. When the matter of whistleblowing came up at committee, the member put that question, as did his other opposition colleagues, to our expert witnesses who explained that whistleblowing was adequately covered by the Criminal Code.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary continually says that his government has completed all of the 57 recommendations of Sheila Weatherill when in fact they have yet to do that. Clearly, the seventh recommendation is an independent third party comprehensive audit, independent of the CFIA and outside sourced so that it can be objective.

When asked about that issue, Mr. Albert Chambers, the executive director of the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition, argued that it had become very common in the food industry to use an accredited certification body to provide a third party audit to a food safety management system.

Even the former president of the CFIA, Carole Swan, said that only a survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers has been done, which is quite different than an independent third party audit.

One of the problems we have perpetually is not knowing whether the CFIA is properly resourced and has the proper support. While we support Bill S-11, the problem is that the Conservatives continually refuse an independent audit. Why do they refuse an independent third party audit?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, we have implemented all of the recommendations made by Sheila Weatherill in her report. The member continually raises this issue as sort of a crusade, but it is a solo crusade. The response is that there has been a thorough review done of inspection staff, inspectors and their responsibilities within the CFIA. This is posted on the CFIA's website and I invite the member to go there.

Our government has taken seriously its responsibility to ensure that the CFIA has both the financial and personnel resources necessary to carry out its responsibilities. In the last number of budgets, we have increased funding for the CFIA significantly. In the 2012 budget, we increased funding by over \$50 million for food safety and in the 2011 budget by over \$100 million. In terms of inspectors and human resources, we have increased the number of inspectors at the CFIA by more than 700 net new inspectors.

Government Orders

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the hon. member across the way, it is not a solo crusade by one member on this issue. I have heard from many constituents in Thunder Bay—Superior North who are very concerned that there will not be third party independent comprehensive resource audits of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency instead of an internal five-year survey.

There are many constituents and members in the House and the other place who are concerned about this oversight in what is otherwise generally a bill going in the right direction.

• (1610)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I wish the member would speak with and consult with industry, as we have. There were, as I mentioned, over 45 witnesses who appeared at both our committee and the agriculture committee in the other place. We heard 20 hours of testimony. The only member raising this issue is the member for Guelph and that is what I mean by a solo crusade.

We have implemented all of the recommendations made by Sheila Weatherill, 57 of them, and the last step in the process is passing this legislation to modernize the food safety system. Canadians want parliamentarians to work together to improve and modernize the food safety system. That is what we are doing today and I ask the member for his support.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, certain events in recent years, such as the listeriosis outbreak and, more recently, the E. coli outbreak, have had a disastrous impact on beef producers across Canada. It would be truly irresponsible not to take away some lessons from what happened.

The question has been asked. Nevertheless, I will ask it again. Why will the government not allow a third party to evaluate what happened and make recommendations to ensure that it will never happen again?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, this bill will modernize our food safety system. Many provisions of this bill will strengthen our system and enhance the powers and the mandate of our inspectors while protecting the safety of Canadians' food.

Furthermore, I hope that my colleague has read the bill, because one of the clauses explains that a comprehensive review will be conducted every five years.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank goodness the member for Guelph is asking tough questions because all we hear from the government side are the trained seals on the back benches who take their direction from the parliamentary secretary, which is one of the problems with this place. My colleague from Welland asked pretty tough questions at committee, too.

I have one simple question. We support the bill. In fact, an even stronger bill was introduced by the Liberal government in 2004 or 2005, which was Bill C-27 at the time. The bill has a nice sounding name. Yes, it is good to have all the powers and authorities that the bill recommends, but what about the resources? We know about the budget cutbacks in terms of financial resources. Could the

parliamentary secretary tell me the total number of inspectors working within the CFIA to inspect imported food coming to Canada and to the stores, which they are not really doing, and those kinds of areas? Could he give me the numbers?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I already gave some numbers in a question I answered earlier but I am glad to repeat them.

When we look at the CFIA and its personnel resources, since having been elected in 2006, we have increased the number of inspectors working at the CFIA by at least 700. The unfortunate part is that the member who just asked the question and who desperately wants to see the resources increased for the CFIA voted against those measures.

We have also increased the funding for the CFIA for food safety by hundreds of millions of dollars in budget after budget. The only thing consistent about the member is that he has voted against each and every budget in which we have increased resources for the CFIA.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, Aboriginal Affairs; the member for London—Fanshawe, Pensions; the member for Vancouver Kingsway, International Trade.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to debate Bill S-11.

Sincerely, and with great deference to the other place or at least with as much deference as I can give the other place, I believe it should have been Bill C-whatever number we would have given it. The bill should have started in this place, not the other place. The 120 days that the other place took should have been spent in this place with us studying the bill, rather than the paltry number of days that the government has decided we should have simply because the other place had it for a period of time.

Whether the other place debates it or not is of no consequence to New Democrats and it is certainly of no consequence to this member for Welland. What is of consequence at the end of the day is the House debating the people's legislation, because this is the people's House and this is indeed where the legislation should have started. That is why I have called the government to account on that particular aspect.

To get back to the bill itself, at one point in time we had an emergency debate, and I will not use the reference the minister suggested and the colourful language that he used to describe the debate. At one point in time I actually said to my friends across the way that when one cannot take yes for an answer, it is still yes. It was yes then and it is yes now.

Government Orders

The unfortunate part for my colleagues across the way is that they could not find a way to say yes to any of the suggestions that this side of the House had. According to the parliamentary secretary, they deferred to the “experts”, when indeed it was simply a question of someone parroting verbatim the good things that the PMO suggested they parrot.

Ultimately one gets back to Sheila Weatherill's report. I had the great pleasure of serving with my colleague from Malpeque on the subcommittee on listeriosis and that was when I first came to know about food safety. I came to know first-hand the devastating effects that food safety, when it is not followed in the way that it needs to be, can have on Canadians. We saw that with the great tragedy in 2008 when those folks died from listeriosis.

That is why it was so eminently important for us on this side to make this legislation as good as it possibly could be. That is the one shortcoming we find on this side. What we had said from the beginning was that we would be supportive, encouraging, helpful, proactive and bring forward what we believed would be good suggestions. We held to our word along the way, even though the government curtailed the amount of time we actually had to work on it.

When I was on the subcommittee during 2008, the government decided to call on Ms. Weatherill and do a parallel investigation. The irony of the investigation, which by the way cost the Canadian taxpayers millions of dollars, was that all but a handful of the recommendations were exactly the same, almost uniquely identical. We saw the same things.

One of the things that we saw in the CVS, the compliance verification system, that Sheila Weatherill also saw was that the compliance verification system was flawed and in need of “critical improvements related to its design, planning and implementation”. She went on to say it was “implemented without a detailed assessment of the resources available to take on these new [CVS] tasks”.

It was not just a question of adding up the numbers of how many people were there. Ms. Weatherill said that we had to audit the design, the planning and the implementation. That is what recommendation number seven said. It was not that we go out to PricewaterhouseCoopers, a nice place that adds them up and says, “Today, there are 22. Tomorrow there will be 24, and now we are done.”

The entire system needed to be looked at because the CVS was a pilot project. That is all that it was, leading up to 2008. It was started in 2005 by the previous government as an attempt to do food safety differently. There was nothing wrong with the pilot project. There was nothing wrong with making that attempt. What was wrong was verifying that the verification system actually verified what it was intended to work on. No one ever answered that question because no one audited it.

● (1620)

We are still left with the question hanging over our heads. Was the compliance verification system actually verified to see if it does what it was intended to do in the first place? We added up the number of folks who might be in it and we received a number. The government

still does not really tell us the actual number. It uses this number of 700.

Let me offer a little help to the government. There are 170 new inspectors in the ready-to-eat meat sector. That came out of two places: the subcommittee that recommended that additional people were needed in that field and Sheila Weatherill who said the same thing. Since we are in the spirit of being nice, let me commend the minister for taking on and fixing the ready-to-eat meat sector and putting 170 new inspectors there.

That did not happen at XL. None of those new inspectors who went to the ready-to-eat meat sector are in those abattoirs. There are no additional inspectors in any of those abattoirs. The XL meat plant certainly has more today than two years ago. It simply filled the vacancies of the folks who left, because there is a great turnover in that plant as all of us now know. Sheila Weatherill actually went through that.

Carole Swan, who at the time was the president of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the actual person in charge, said about this audit, which was supposedly conducted and the one that the government stands today and still defends as an audit, that:

They didn't conduct it as an audit. An audit is a very specific process. It was a detailed review.

Number seven of Sheila Weatherill's report has not been completed. Parts of it have been done. The government counted the number of people but it did not audit the design, the plan or the implementation because it never asked PricewaterhouseCoopers to do that. It did what it was asked to do and that is fair. It is fair for the government to say that it counted the number of people but it is unfair for the government to suggest that it did a strategic audit of the recommendation, which was fundamentally critical to ensuring that the CVS actually worked. We can have as many people as we like in CVS but if it does not work, it does not mean anything.

Consequently, the government has not lived up to fulfilling all of the recommendations of the Weatherill report, let alone the recommendations coming out of the subcommittee. Some of the recommendations were done and some were not. Some of the recommendations were just left out because the government did not really like them.

When it comes to resourcing, the government loves to tell us one number and play with another one. Let me quote again for the House what we know to be true. On May 8 of this year the Minister of Agriculture said, “Planned Spending is declining by approximately \$46.6 million and 314 FTE's”, which in human resource jargon means full-time equivalences. What that means is that over the next two years there will be 314 less jobs now than the before.

The government loves to tell us about the \$100 million, but it neglects to tell us that it is actually over five years, not this year. It neglects to tell us that it has actually only spent \$18 million of that \$100 million already. It should have spent far more than that because it has been out there for over a year. The resourcing that the Conservatives' continually talk to us about is not always wholly there because it is the jig of the number. They throw numbers out and somehow they might look similar or perhaps not.

Government Orders

We do know the facts because we did read the budget, although I sometimes wonder about my friends on the other side. We did read that lovely book that the government gave us in budget 2012 that says the three-year outlook for food safety indicates a projected cut of \$56.1 million annually.

• (1625)

That is the Conservative's budget. I am not making it up. I am just reading the stuff they gave us. Of course, if the other side is now telling us the book is not true, that they no longer believe that page of the budget is going to be enacted, then I think they would have to amend it. Surely they would have to retract it and tell us something altogether different. However, they have not done that.

It is unfortunate, as this is a bill that the House seems to want to pass. I have heard my colleagues from the far end and my colleague for Guelph, who works on the committee with us in the spirit of co-operation to make food safety the priority that we all believe it is. This is about safe food for Canadians, for the children and people out there who may be immune suppressed and for the elderly who we saw get sick once before and some in fact died. We want to ensure that we do not have that happen again. All members in the House believe this to be true.

Therefore, in the spirit of co-operation, the official opposition went to committee and told the government side that we could help make the bill better. We put amendments forward because we wanted to help make the bill better. No one person or one party is blessed with all the best ideas. Unfortunately, some may think that perhaps they are. The irony is that we all know that.

I know the member but I always mispronounce his lovely riding, so I won't go down that road. It is a wonderful place in New Brunswick, Tobique—Mactaquac. Every now and again Glaswegians can get their mouths around funny words. However, it was with that spirit of working together that we entered into making sure that this legislation came back to this place in an expeditious fashion, unlike the other place that hung onto it and then went on vacation for the summer, which is how important its members thought it was. They went on vacation.

Meanwhile, some of us worked on the special co-op committee during the summer, which was our vacation. I see some of my colleagues from all sides of the House who were there working. It was the members of the House who went to work during the summer and the members of the other place could indeed have done that. If they did not want to do that, they should have passed the bill to us.

There were a number of amendments that we put forward. Some were as simple as defining a container. In the legislation it says "containers" and then goes on to define a cargo container. What is a cargo container? Is it a box car? Is it a shipping hold? We suggested that we should better define it and talk about pails, totes and baskets to give it further definition. We thought that would be understandable so that when folks saw the legislation they would get a sense of what it was about, rather than having to wait for the regulations to come out for the definitions.

The Conservatives said no, but I have to give them credit, they had a reason. For the first four amendments we put forward they had some reason why they did not like it. However, on the other seven

amendments, they just voted no. They did not seem to have any reason or they ran out of reasons, I am not sure which.

Clearly, the opposition side of the agriculture committee, including the member for Guelph who was supportive, felt that the two responsible factors were the compliance verification system and the audit. We felt an audit should be done now because in five years when we go back and look at the system, the problem is that we may not know where we started.

As I said in committee, if I want to drive to Edmonton and I do not know where I am when I start, in five years from now I will be somewhere. It might be Edmonton but it might be in Malpeque, which is a wonderful place in Prince Edward Island. When I get there I know the member for Malpeque will say to me, "Member for Welland, you actually drove in the wrong direction. Turn around and go back the other way and then you will get to Edmonton". However, I would then get there in ten years instead of five years.

Therefore, doing an audit now would give us a benchmark of where we are and where we are going to start from. In five years, we would know if we were better, worse or the same, and whether we need as many inspectors. Part of the government's problem is that when we say those things, it thinks we want to have more inspectors in five years.

• (1630)

Maybe we need fewer. Maybe the system is working so well and is so efficient that there are too many people doing that and we need to transfer them to where they are not doing quite as well. That would be the value of the resource. That would be the value of legislation.

Of course, my friends across the way on the government side just voted no. They did not really have a reason. They just voted no. Then when we suggested whistleblower protection, their response was that the Criminal Code covers that off.

We heard the parliamentary secretary say that the Criminal Code covers tampering but that it is not the best way to do it. Instead, it should be in the legislation. We agree. We think that is the best way to do it, as we do with whistleblower protection.

In the last crisis we just faced, there were workers who said that had they been protected, they might have come forward sooner, and we may not have had a crisis. That is "may". We are not certain. However, any opportunity that would have prevented it would have been good for the cattle ranchers across the country. They suffered needlessly because of the failure of someone in the system. Whistleblower protection may have indeed helped those ranchers not suffer the unintended consequence of what happened when it came to that crisis.

We saw the government rely on the Criminal Code, but it did not rely on it for this one aspect of the bill because it believed it was better, more expeditious and made more sense to do it that way.

Government Orders

As for fundamental protection for people who want to come forward and tell the government something it ought to know, it is telling them to take their chances in the courts and see if they can convince a crown attorney to go ahead with the charge and see if they can get a conviction. What the government did not talk about was whether they could get their jobs back afterwards. They are more likely to be fired while going through the court system. Of course, if people won that one, they would have to go through civil proceedings to try to get their jobs back. Therefore, they would go to court twice, and along the way, would have to pay for lawyers.

However, if the Conservatives had put simple whistleblower protection into the act, it would have talked about people who make vexatious claims against a company because they are mad at the boss. This was about real claims to help prevent another food crisis for Canadians across the country.

We want to make food safety better. We want to help this legislation be the best it can be for two simple reasons. The first is that this may be the last opportunity for quite some time to do something with respect to the food safety act as we amend three acts into one. More importantly, this is about food safety for Canadian families, children, the elderly, and all of us. All of us eat differently. Some of us graze, and some of us do not.

At the end of the day, this was about making fundamentally good legislation. It started out as decent legislation. It could have been great legislation, because all of the hands at the committee were indeed onside to make it so. The government side brought forward a bill that in its sense was pretty decent. All sides of the House at that committee, including my friend from Guelph, were bound and determined to try to make it better. There were no egregious amendments or poking sticks in eyes. There was none of that. This was about making it better from the day it showed up at committee. The unfortunate part is that as good as it is, the bill could have been so much better than it is. That is the shame of not having all sides work together.

When the government puts a hand out and asks that all sides work together, it should recognize when the hand comes from the other side to work with it to make it better. Our hand was extended to the government to make it better. Unfortunately, it decided to say no, and that is truly unfortunate.

• (1635)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Welland for his thoughtful and quite accurate observations and for his efforts, and the efforts of his party, to make it better.

During those hearings, motions were brought. I debated them and argued them. Members of the official opposition, including the member for Welland, argued and debated them. They were all trying to make it better. There were points when the government members did not even participate in the debate. They were not interested. They just called on the chair to call the question. It was absolute intransigence at the highest point of arrogance.

When asked about the adequacy of resources and training for CFIA at XL, Bob Kingston, from the Public Service Alliance of Canada, said, "The answer is actually simple. The CFIA cannot afford to deliver training any faster and does not have enough

inspectors to relieve those away while being trained. As well, resources are often diverted to address crises, which further derails training".

Does it not make sense to have a third-party audit so that we know what their needs are?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Of course it does, Mr. Speaker. It is one of the fundamental questions that has been asked for quite some time.

It is true, and the government can check the facts, that not everyone in every abattoir across the country who should be compliant in CVS, the compliance verification system, is trained to be compliant in CVS. Yet CVS is the foundation, the cornerstone, the backbone of the food safety system the government is relying on. If it is the cornerstone of the system, then everyone has to be that cornerstone. We cannot have some who are not. That is the problem. A full audit would have told the government how to get it done. If the government had enacted it back then, it would be done by now.

Yes, the government has added inspectors, but what it has not done is made them all compliant with CVS. We know that to be true, and the government knows that to be true.

If we are not able to judge whether it has been done correctly, the government should just do the audit. It will cost some money. It will save a lot of heartache in the end, when there is not another crisis, because the system will have worked the way it is supposed to work.

Therefore, I would again ask the government side, through the parliamentary secretary to the minister, to just do the audit. Let us not pretend one was done. Just go ahead and quietly do the audit, show the results, and all will be well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his work as the agriculture critic for the official opposition.

Throughout the XL Foods crisis, we noted the working conditions, lack of training and high turnover of employees. I believe that an even more in-depth audit by a third party would have been worthwhile.

I would like to hear more from my colleague about the lack of resources. He referred to this when speaking about training. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is said to be in dire need of resources.

I would like to hear more about his concerns in this matter.

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that what we have seen over the last while when it comes to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, going back to the listeriosis crisis and the lack of inspectors, is a rush to try to make some changes. There was not a holistic approach taken as to what is needed elsewhere.

Government Orders

When Sheila Weatherill's report came out, and in fact, when the subcommittee's recommendations came out, we said exactly the same thing about the need to do an audit of CVS to improve the program. We actually said that as parliamentarians. It was not done. If it had been done then, we would have had the folks trained and the proper resources in place. Perhaps we would not have seen another crisis.

The only good part of the crisis, if there is a good part, is that to date, no one has passed away. That cannot be said for the 2008 listeriosis crisis, when 23 people died. People cannot measure that crisis against another, nor should they. This is about a system that did not live up to its expectations. It failed. We need to fix that piece. The fix is in front of us. The issue is whether there is a willingness to take that fix and make it so that the system actually operates as it should.

The decision is the government's alone. We are simply saying to the government that it has an opportunity. It should take the opportunity. The system will be better for it. More importantly, Canadians will actually thank them for it.

• (1640)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the member for Welland's remarks, because he hit the nail right on the head in terms of the audit.

The government continues to fail, and I have to ask him why. Why do the Conservatives continue to misrepresent the fact that they have not done a complete audit, which the Weatherill report asked for, as did the member for Welland and others in the work they did on the listeriosis study? Why do the Conservatives continue to misrepresent the facts in that regard?

They talk about the numbers they have added. In my particular area, what we are seeing from CFIA is a heavy downloading of costs to the farm community. We are seeing fees go up. We are seeing that on the weekend, when CFIA inspectors willingly wanted to work for time off, farmers now have to pay time and a half on Saturdays. The system was working, and the government changed it.

Why does the government continue to misrepresent the facts, and why would it not work with opposition parties to make the bill better? Why does it have to be so intransigent?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Malpeque, whom I had the great pleasure of working with on that committee in 2009.

It is bewildering why the Conservatives continue to say that they did something, when Carole Swan said that they did not. I find that absolutely astounding. I understand that the government spent some money on a particular piece when it went to PricewaterhouseCoopers. At the end of the day, they were asked to do something specific, so they did it. It was an arithmetic exercise. They counted up some people and gave the number. They did not tell them where or what they would actually do.

The only thing I can think of is that the government deluded itself into believing that it did what it thought it was supposed to do, even though we have continually said that it did not. Perhaps it does not want to hear results that mean it may have to invest more money. Instead of the \$56 million it is withdrawing over the next budget

year, it will actually have to put it there and maybe add more. Perhaps the government does not want to hear that either in its year of austerity. However, austerity and food safety are two terms that should never come in close contact with one another.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to work with Malcolm on this file on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I have a lot to learn and I continue to learn.

I would like him to talk about fines. This bill provides for steeper fines. Will the imposition of harsher and stricter penalties help strengthen our food safety?

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the member for Welland, I would remind all hon. members not to refer to their colleagues by their given names, first or last.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, some members on the government side are working with us. The fines have increased. There is nothing wrong with increasing the fines. The issue becomes what they do with them when half the time they do not impose them and the rest of the time they reduce them. They can charge whatever they like, but if they do not intend to apply them, they are of no value other than that it looks good on a piece of paper. It is unfortunate that the Conservatives have decided to do that rather than be willing to enact the fines rather than just increase the money.

• (1645)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to again speak to Bill S-11, the modernization of Canada's food safety system. This is, undoubtedly, a timely issue, especially given that we are hardly two months removed from the beginning of the largest beef recall in Canadian history caused by a collapse in monitoring and sanitation measures at XL Foods in Brooks, Alberta.

I also note that there has been no delay in addressing the bill. I last rose and spoke to Bill S-11 on October 22, not even a month ago. In fact, and I will address this through my remarks, I believe we may have proceeded a little too quickly, by only a few days perhaps, for how serious a matter this is.

We know there is widespread support for modernizing our food safety system. When the Canadian Food Inspection Agency was first created in 1997, it was understood that the agency was only the first step in a multi-step process that also involved consolidating its legislative framework. The first attempt to do this was by a Liberal government in 2004 through Bill C-27 and it has been tried a couple of times since.

Witnesses who appeared before the committee generally spoke well of the need to proceed with this legislation but were also sure to voice their concerns, concerns that we share and that are important to be heard because of how serious an issue food safety remains. When it is time to vote, we will support Bill S-11. However, it is important that our concerns and the concerns of stakeholders across the country get raised and discussed.

Government Orders

We all know the context that makes this legislation more potent: the remarkable failure at XL Foods in Brooks, Alberta, where beef left the facility destined for the United States contaminated with E. coli 0157, a harmful pathogen that can cause serious illness when consumed by humans, especially those most vulnerable, like young children and seniors. The facts are pretty clear. Whether the Americans caught it first and let us know or the CFIA discovered it independently on September 4, Canadian officials would have known that day that there was an outbreak of E.coli at Establishment 38. Right then and there, bracketing should have caught any further contaminated meat. It did not.

During testimony by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, he stated:

The initial find, the problem, was that they had a discovery but then had not bracketed properly. That's taking production on either side of the affected batch out of the food cycle as well. They had not done that, and until CFIA was back in there doing the trend analysis, that was not discovered.

The government can argue that none of these shipments that the Americans stopped and that XL Foods tested on September 4 got out, but that E.coli contaminated meat from XL Foods made it to store shelves means it is playing word games and that tainted meat from that batch or not made it to consumers and made 18 Canadians ill. Semantics does not take the meat off the shelves. It was a recall issued on September 16, about two weeks later, that did.

The minister makes it clear in his statement that meat got out because XL Foods was not bracketing, nor was it monitoring E.coli trends. Why not? More still, we ask day after day what the delay was to no avail, until eventually we heard that only under Bill S-11 would inspectors finally have the power to compel conveyors and processors to supply the necessary documentation requested by inspectors. That is curious.

I will remind members that subsection 13(2) of the Meat Inspection Act states quite clearly:

The owner or person in charge of a place or vehicle referred to in subsection (1) and every person found in that place or vehicle shall give the inspector all reasonable assistance to enable the inspector to carry out his duties and functions under this Act and shall furnish the inspector with any information the inspector may reasonably require with respect to the administration or enforcement of this Act and the regulations.

That is the law now.

It also states in paragraph 13(1)(c) that inspectors may:

...require any person to produce for inspection, or for the purpose of obtaining copies or extracts, any book, shipping bill, bill of lading or other document or record that the inspector believes on reasonable grounds contains any information relevant to the administration or enforcement of this Act or the regulations.

That is the law now without Bill S-11.

•(1650)

Moreover, as recently as this past February, the CFIA made its regulations concerning inspectors' powers clear through the processor's guide to inspection, reinforcing the legal requirement to provide information to and assist an inspector when requested.

When I shared this concern with the CFIA president, George Da Pont, he assured me that while the Meat Inspection Act presently does provide these powers for inspectors, the new bill adds phrases

like "timely" to the act, which will create an authority to provide documents in a certain timeframe.

Both acts have consequences for non-compliance and the addition of "timely" would not have changed what happened. In fact, much of our concern with Bill S-11 comes from what is not written and what will be incorporated by reference later on. We may very well see the appropriate timelines put in place but there is no way to know that now.

We are supporting this legislation because the language surrounding inspector powers will slightly strengthen and be made more clear but it remains abundantly clear that this bill is not a magic bullet that would have prevented 18 Canadians from falling ill last month.

What we all really require to augment our food safety system is the knowledge that the CFIA is adequately supported with sufficient staff and resources. I am not the sole voice on this issue. The only objective way to achieve this is through an independent comprehensive resource audit, such as the one requested by the independent investigator into 2008's listeriosis outcome, Sheila Weatherill. In her report the following year, which addressed measures necessary to help prevent another outbreak like the one in 2008 that killed 23 people and made many others sick, Ms. Weatherill was concerned with some of the information she received and stated the following:

Due to the lack of detailed information and differing views heard, the Investigation was not able to determine the current level of resources as well as the resources needed to conduct the CVS activities effectively. For the same reason, we were also unable to come to a conclusion concerning the adequacy of the program design, implementation plan, training and supervision of inspectors, as well as oversight and performance monitoring.

A full account of resources is absolutely necessary to not only ensure the adequacy of staffing but the effectiveness of training and allocation. I think members opposite are really concerned that we want to employ hundreds more inspectors. While we were justifiably concerned with their cuts to inspectors and the CFIA in the budget, some \$56.1 million in cuts, which ostensibly have an impact on front-line resources, we thought they would like to know, that they need to know, if there are real efficiencies that could be attained once we know if everyone is adequately trained and where there can be redistribution. It is the smart way to run a business.

Given her concerns, Ms. Weatherill went on to recommend:

To accurately determine the demand on its inspection resources and the number of required inspectors, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency should retain third-party experts to conduct a resources audit. The experts should also recommend required changes and implementation strategies. The audit should include analysis as to how many plants an inspector should be responsible for and the appropriateness of rotation of inspectors.

That is pretty clear. We know that the CFIA did not do this because, in 2010, then CFIA president, Carole Swan, indicated that while it retained PricewaterhouseCoopers to conduct a review, she was very clear when she stated:

They didn't conduct it as an audit. An audit is a very specific process. It was a detailed review .

Government Orders

This means that not all the Weatherill recommendations were complied with. This means that even before the government's cuts in this year's budget, neither the agency nor the government had any clear impression of its resources and how best to allocate them. While cutting blindly may not have led to the E.coli contamination in Brooks, it certainly will not help the already compounded problem of inspectors in facilities who still do not have the necessary training in the compliance verification system, nor will it facilitate the transition of individual meat, fish and other agricultural product inspectors into a consolidated Jack of all trades and masters of none.

● (1655)

This very issue was highlighted during the Senate hearings on Bill S-11 when Bob Kingston, the president of the Agriculture Union of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, told members of that committee:

You will be interested to know that in the XL plant, only a small portion of the inspectors are actually trained in CVS. That is right; for more than four years after CVS was introduced, most inspectors there have not been trained in how to use it. Why, you might ask? The answer is actually simple. The CFIA cannot afford to deliver training any faster and does not have enough inspectors to relieve those away while being trained. As well, resources are often diverted to address crises, which further derails training.

To me, this is a clear statement that the CFIA lacks the resources and support to carry out its mandate.

According to the CFIA's website, the compliance verification system reads:

The CVS is a task-based inspection tool that:
is based on the CFIA's regulatory requirements,
provides clear and consistent direction to CFIA inspectors,
is capable of adapting to rapidly-changing program requirements, and
can be applied to any inspection activity, in any commodity's inspection program.

This is particularly important to me because it is not only verification of industry compliance but of consistency in inspection. In fact, a specific example on the CFIA website, and I can provide the website address to my colleagues opposite if they would like to check it out for themselves, reads:

For example: inspectors must regularly check a plant's sanitation records, employee hygiene, cooking temperatures, ingredient controls, and lab results for pathogens like Listeria, Salmonella, and E. coli.

Instead of the authority to request documents within a certain time, which they had, what it sounds like the inspectors really needed to prevent the outbreak at XL was adequate training on CVS and enough staff to cycle them off while training. This revelation strikes right at the heart of the often repeated myth that the Conservative government has hired more inspectors than ever. It can have record numbers of inspectors and even if we believed more inspectors were hired, which no one does anymore, how can they perform their functions fully without adequate training?

It is another clear indication that while the government is willing to build a car, it will not pay to hire a proper driver or, in this case, train one. Instead, it is adding an additional burden to inspectors who are responsible for keeping us safe.

Mr. Kingston continued in his testimony to say:

This situation is not limited to XL. As a matter of fact, ...we found the exact same scenario throughout Quebec.

This is yet another example of industry self-policing gone wrong because the CFIA is not adequately resourced to verify compliance. Does the government even know how many of its inspectors are adequately trained?

Since the beginning of October, when the hon. member for Toronto Centre and our leader, wrote to the Auditor General to commence an immediate audit and our now retired colleague from the other place, Senator Robert Peterson, moved an amendment for an audit function to be placed in the bill, we have argued the absolute necessity of this comprehensive study into the CFIA. Despite all of this, when I proposed an amendment to commence an immediate and comprehensive resource audit at committee, the Conservative members voted it down. All this, despite the fact that there was not one witness who thought it was a bad idea.

They love quotes on the other side. Karen Proud of the Retail Council of Canada said:

I can't see that our members would object to such an audit. It's always a good thing to look internally at whether you have the right resources to match your requirements and your mandates and, especially given a new piece of legislation, whether you've matched up the right resources.

Similarly, during a meeting of the Senate committee on agriculture and forestry, Mr. Albert Chambers, the executive director of the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition argued:

It has become very common in the food industry to use an accredited certification body to provide a third-party audit to a food safety management system.

● (1700)

In fact, at the June 21 meeting of the same committee, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food replied in response to a question about a third party audit that he would entertain the idea. In the weeks that followed the E. coli outbreak, he strangely became more and more resistant to the idea.

Sadly, Conservatives on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food voted against every single amendment put forward by opposition members. As a matter of fact, there were not many. We used our opportunities judiciously, hoping to work collaboratively to make good legislation better.

Despite asking us to work with them on a bill that everyone agrees is a good start, the Conservative members refused to follow their own express wishes. In a spirit of mindless partisanship, they even blocked an amendment of mine that would have seen the clock start ticking for the five-year limited review, which is there now and the act does provide for, immediately upon royal assent instead of waiting an unknown number of months until the rest of the act came into effect.

Government Orders

There was not an inch given to improve the bill. Despite our co-operation, Conservative committee members were determined to vote against us at every turn. Towards the end of the study, I requested two additional days for us to speak to departmental officials and get their answers to questions and concerns posed by other witnesses and for us to shape strong, wholesome amendments to further improve a bill that we all support. It was so important to our food security that we needed the opportunity to get it right and to address all of our concerns the first time around. Alas, that never happened.

However, we remain optimistic that on some day, this arrogant, dismissive way of the government will give way to better, more responsive legislation.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will make a few comments about my colleague's speech.

First, he felt that more time was needed. He did a real disservice to committee members when he moved his motion on the last day witnesses appeared before committee. We had told our colleague from Guelph and other opposition MPs that if they needed extra meetings, we were ready to book them. We would do it at whatever time of night or day we could possibly arrange for all committee members to come together. We were sincere in that offer, but the member did not ask until the closing moments of the final meeting with witnesses. Only then did he say that he needed more time, that we needed to have more witnesses.

I think we have all agreed that this legislation needs to move forward to better protect Canadians. I would like to know why this member did not ask for more meetings when he was offered more meetings earlier in the committee process.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, in fact I did ask for more meetings. I asked for two more days.

What I suggested was that because a lot of the stakeholders came in first, they never had the opportunity to place their concerns before the experts who should have been at the committee at the same time so that those questions could be answered.

What is really frightening is that this is exactly the kind of attitude demonstrated at committee; it is dismissive. Instead of working collaboratively, Conservatives just go on the attack, notwithstanding any gesture of goodwill and good legislation.

I am hearing from more and more Canadians, and certainly the people of Guelph, that they are sick and tired of this dismissive, arrogant attitude of the Conservative government, displayed right here in dealing with this legislation.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture insists that this legislation will provide inspectors with the power to get information from companies in a more timely fashion.

Is it not true, I ask my hon. colleague, that the powers have always existed under section 13 of the Meat Inspection Act? Could my hon. colleague comment on that.

● (1705)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, my friend is absolutely correct. Section 13 of the Meat Inspection Act says unequivocally and very clearly, as all inspectors and industry were reminded in bulletins sent out as recently as this February, that the CFIA has the power to request and the industry must comply and accommodate that request.

How do we know the current legislation is adequate on that particular issue? The CFIA shut the plant down. There was non-compliance and the CFIA shut the plant down. That is proof that it works. Proof that it works is the fact that there are hundreds of abattoirs out there that do comply with CFIA regulations and do honour the requests of CFIA inspectors.

The existing legislation on that point adequately addresses the concern now, and this legislation will do little to improve that point.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the factual remarks by the member for Guelph. He laid out quite a number of facts that the government has basically misrepresented time and time again. One of those facts concerns section 13 of the Meat Inspection Act, where the the government has always had the authority it requires. It tries to portray Bill S-11 as needed to deal with the latest serious food recall in Canada, the second under the present minister's watch. The government really had the authority.

Bill S-11 was not a priority for the government, although it is now claiming that it was, because the government put it in the Senate. It was not an issue then. It was just luck that it happened to be there when this crisis developed.

The second major area where there seems to be government messaging that misrepresents the facts is that of auditing, which is important not just for what has happened but also going forward.

Could the member enlighten us why the government constantly misrepresents the number of inspectors and the facts by claiming it did an audit when it really did not do the kind of audit the Weatherill report called for? Why would the government go to these lengths to say it did something that it really did not do?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, it absolutely befuddles everyone on this side of the House and every Canadian why the government opposes a third-party audit. Private industry does it. Other corporations, though not crown corporations, do it.

I can only surmise the following. We have seen the Auditor General audit the F-35s and embarrass the heck out of the government for its misstatements and hiding the real costs of the F-35s. Kevin Page, the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer, did a study and disclosed the facts to the government. The government was embarrassed again.

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The government does not want an independent audit because it will lose control of the messaging, that fine, unequivocal, unadulterated, absolute control over messaging. The Conservatives fear that. They fear that a third-party audit will disclose things they do not want to hear and that they will lose the messaging.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to work with the member for Guelph on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Could he talk about the addition that would protect whistleblowers? Workers at XL Foods may have noticed problems at the plant but were afraid to voice their concerns. Could my colleague provide more information on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the official opposition for raising the whistleblower amendment at committee. My colleague is quite right, that if whistleblower legislation were put in this legislation, it would establish a threshold of proof that is not absolute, in other words, not beyond a reasonable doubt. It would establish on a balance of probabilities whether someone has violated the law. That would have been helpful because a whistleblower wants to blow the whistle without fearing that his or her employer would suddenly be charged, possibly with criminal charges. Employees would be liberated by such whistleblower legislation in the bill, knowing that they could blow the whistle and that any consequences as a result of their employer's failure to do something would result in non-criminal charges. I am saddened that the government has not included whistleblower legislation in Bill S-11.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech. He mentioned that amendments suggested in committee were simply dismissed, even though the opposition parties worked hard to develop those amendments.

Earlier today we were debating Bill C-44. What I find funny is that although everyone agreed on the principle of the bill, the opposition's suggested amendments were also rejected, without any real argument or debate.

That is unfortunate, because the NDP has been clear that Bill S-11, as it stands right now, might not have prevented the major beef recall we had recently—the largest beef recall in Canada's history—or the 22 deaths resulting from the 2008 listeriosis crisis.

The amendments proposed by the opposition deserve to be seriously considered, which the Conservative government did not do. That is unfortunate. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend raises a good point, something that this Parliament was victimized with the moment the Conservatives gained power in 2011, that they we will do things their way or no way. They are not interested in reasoned amendments, not on omnibus Bill C-38 or Bill C-45, and not on this food legislation Bill S-11.

There were many thoughtful amendments brought forward, not for the purpose of stage playing or any purpose than to make a good bill better, as my friend from Welland said. However, the Conservatives are not interested. As I said earlier, even at committee when I was moving my amendments, there was no response from the governing party. The Conservatives just asked the chair to call the question because they were not interested in discussing it.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Joliette.

I rise today to speak to Bill S-11, An Act respecting food commodities, including their inspection, their safety, their labelling and advertising, their import, export and interprovincial trade, the establishment of standards for them, the registration or licensing of persons who perform certain activities related to them, the establishment of standards governing establishments where those activities are performed and the registration of establishments where those activities are performed.

The bill would streamline a range of existing food safety legislation under one act. Among other legislation, it would repeal and replace the Fish Inspection Act, the Meat Inspection Act, the Canada Agricultural Products Act and the food provisions under the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act.

Bill S-11 would raise the potential maximum fine for food safety infractions to \$5 million, a 20-fold increase over previous maximum fines. This of questionable value, given that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency does not have a rigorous history of enforcing fining of companies due to limited resources. In 2011, no fines exceeded 20% of the maximum fine.

The bill would streamline inspectors' powers and procedures for all types of food. Previously, these were different according to whether the product was fish, meat or another agricultural product.

The bill would provide for the availability of official certification for exported foods and also would require food importers to comply with the licensing regime. It would allow the CFIA to suspend or revoke the licence of an importee instead of prosecuting for non-compliance. This could provide for more timely response in the advent of international recall.

The bill would allow for traceability requirements to be introduced through regulation at a later date. The New Democrats support enhanced traceability, particularly for meat, fish and fresh produce in the advent of a recall.

Government Orders

Finally, the bill includes a prohibition against tampering with products or selling products that might risk the health of Canadians or that have been subjected to a recall.

However, we in the NDP have some concerns with this bill.

It would provide a new due diligence defence that could significantly insulate companies from taking responsibility for any risk. This could diminish the Canadian public's confidence in our food supply and undermine the European Union's confidence in our exports. The United Kingdom recently rejected similar legislation for this reason.

It would do nothing to protect workers in meat processing plants with regard to whistle-blowing protection.

It also would include provisions that may inadvertently disallow certain products for Canadian export. The proposal to incorporate by reference standards could permit conflicts of interest to influence policy making and could abdicate government oversight entirely in some cases. There is no clause to address possible material conflicts of interest.

It would also do nothing to address problems with fraudulent nutrition information, despite the enormous health and financial toll of nutrition-related illness. The CFIA considers irregularities in nutrition labelling to be lower priority quality issues, not health and safety issues. According to the fines information published on CFIA's website for the period of January 2010 to September 2012, not a single fine was levied for inaccurate nutritional information on food labels, despite the fact that at least two of CFIA's own product sampling surveys demonstrated significant widespread inaccuracies in nutrition information provided in pre-packaged foods and restaurant websites and brochures.

By streamlining inspectors' powers for all types of food, there is concern that inspectors will have insufficient knowledge and/or experience to undertake this task. There are very different products with very different hazards associated with them.

The bill would create an internal review mechanism that regulated parties could use to seek review of certain inspection decisions or deal with complaints, rather than the current judicial review process. This should be monitored for transparency with resources given to public interest interveners.

• (1715)

Finally, the bill would give the minister power to grant, suspend and revoke non-transferable licences or registration for persons and establishments as well as any conditions that the minister might choose to prescribe. This represents more centralized power in the hands of the minister.

Let me talk about cuts to the CFIA budget in 2012. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency report on plans and priorities signed and tabled by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food himself on May 8, says, "Planned Spending is declining by approximately \$46.6 million and 314 FTE's from 2012-13 to 2014-15—REF-CFIA Report on Plans and Priorities". This comes from section 1.51 the financial resources and human resources CFIA report on plans and priorities.

The Conservatives like to say that they have invested \$100 million additional funds to the CFIA. That claim is false. The \$100 million is projected over five years and only \$18 million have actually been allocated this year. In budget 2012 the next three-year outlook for food safety indicates a projected cut of \$56.1 million.

Let me turn to auditing the CFIA compliance verification system, CVS. New Democrats believe that the CFIA processes such as the central verification system, need to be audited immediately. Bill S-11 was amended in the Senate so that a CFIA audit was required within five years of its coming into force, but this is not enough. Given repeated failures in the food safety system, we cannot wait five years. This is why we put forward an amendment at committee stage that would require an immediate audit in order to get baseline information to be applied in future reviews. Unfortunately, the Conservative members of the committee voted against it.

In January 2009, Sheila Weatherill was appointed by the Prime Minister to investigate what led to the listeriosis outbreak that left 22 people dead during the summer of 2008 and recommended how to avoid a similar tragedy. The compliance verification system was a new pilot inspection program adopted by the CFIA in 2005. Weatherill found that the CVS was flawed and was in need of "critical improvements related to its design, planning, and implementation". She also found the CVS was "implemented without a detailed assessment of the resources available to take on these new tasks".

In the aftermath of the 2008 disaster, it was discovered that Maple Leaf was under no obligation to report to the CFIA test results showing contamination in the plant. In a system which increasingly relies on companies to police themselves, this shortcoming was not addressed.

XL Foods, one of the biggest meat processors in the country, had also ignored this requirement to notify CFIA of test results. The CFIA does not have the resources in place to fully understand what was going on in that plant.

Important pieces of the Weatherill report were never fully adopted by the government, including a substantive internal audit that addressed CVS, the pilot reporting system being used for food inspectors during the Walkerton crisis that continues to be used today. A financial audit of the CFIA was completed by PricewaterhouseCoopers, but it did not address the systems and the processes recommended by the Weatherill report.

There is much more I could say about the resources to the CFIA, on penalties that one would say are adequate but not enforced, and on further resources. However, let me summarize what we are looking for.

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• (1720)

New Democrats have a serious number of concerns with the bill, however, we support the bill moving to third reading. We know the Conservatives need to accept responsibility for gutting food safety resources. They have been proponents of increased self-regulation. Inspectors look at paperwork, not at meat. This is a direct result of fewer resources provided to CFIA, and we are seeing those consequences now.

There should be no super events that catch us unaware. Given the increased complexity and centralization of the food system and greater volumes handled by any single facility, resources for food inspection should be increased to ensure the safety of Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

This government has implemented austerity budgets, and we are seeing the disastrous consequences, especially in agriculture, which we are debating now. There have also been cuts to Fisheries and Oceans and other public service sectors from scientific research to Service Canada. All of this has a significant effect on Canadians' quality of life.

I would like my colleague to expand on this issue and explain how Canadians are paying the price for the austerity budgets.

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, these cuts are in fact having direct impacts.

When we look at the food security issue in our country, we can see that these cuts have a direct impact. As the member mentioned, when we are talking about, for example, our fisheries industry, we are seeing the impacts to departments trying to carry out the good work, for instance enforcement. That is being hampered by fewer and fewer resources.

We are not alone in our comments in our criticizing of the government. Let me quote Bob Kingston, the president of the Agriculture Union. He says:

—CFIA did not have resources in place to fully understand what was going on in that plant at the time....After all, the minister has assured everyone that there are more inspectors working at that plant than ever. You will be interested to know that in the XL plant, only a small portion of the inspectors are actually trained in CVS.

He goes on to point out more concerns that are as a result of fewer resources.

• (1725)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are speculating here. It is so obvious that a third party audit would be a good thing, an independent and comprehensive audit that would tell us what is there, what resources are needed to ensure its mandate is exercised.

Could the member speculate on why the government would refuse and be so intransigent on that one point?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. It is part of an amendment that we as New Democrats put forward in

committee. We wanted to see an independent audit system implemented immediately.

This is a reasonable request. I am not sure why the Conservative government would resist or refuse this very reasonable request to having an independent audit system take a look at how the system is operating. This would be good information that would benefit not only the government, but it would also benefit the department and Canadians in terms of food safety and food inspection, knowing they had a good system that operated properly.

This is obviously not the case. This tragedy led to the largest beef recall in Canadian history. This must be averted. One way is by having independent information and oversight.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about Bill S-11, but before doing so, I would like to provide a bit of background.

A few months ago, I rose in this House to speak out against the disastrous consequences of Bill C-38 to implement certain provisions of the budget. Among other things, I pointed out that the bill far exceeded its mandate. The Conservatives have brandished this bill like a magic wand to implement their ideological austerity agenda.

I also spoke out against cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency that would allow private companies to carry out inspections. After repeated attempts by the NDP to convince the government to provide more information about this bill, the Conservatives proceeded. I sat for 22 hours straight in protest. It was in vain. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency budget was cut by \$46 million, and 314 full-time jobs will be eliminated by 2015.

While it is true that the number of inspectors at the CFIA has declined steadily on the Conservatives' watch, I would be lying if I said that I do not support Bill S-11. Like my NDP colleagues, I immediately saw this as a step in the right direction that would give Canadians greater food safety.

I must say that the NDP did not expect any less: we have been demanding that the agency be modernized since Sheila Weatherill's report was released in 2009. Now that the bill has reached third reading, I still support it. Nevertheless, the Conservatives' attitude is unfortunate.

It is unfortunate because the witnesses we heard at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food confirmed our fears: Bill S-11 would not have been enough to contain the crisis that recently struck XL Foods in Alberta. The government did not bother to listen to the NDP's recommendations, and our amendments were rejected without any discussion. The Conservatives missed an excellent opportunity to shed their reputation as an autocratic government and demonstrate a little co-operation.

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The important thing to remember is that the government's reckless cuts are putting Canadians' lives at risk. In many areas, cuts are irrevocably affecting people's lives across the country. When it comes to food safety, it is a matter of life and death.

And if life is not important enough to the Conservatives—except, of course, the lives of the unborn—we must recognize that there is also an economic benefit to food safety. How many E. coli crises like the one that struck the community of Brooks, Alberta, can our economy withstand?

The NDP supported XL Foods from the very beginning. What did the minister do during the crisis? He took days to respond, burying his head so deep in the sand that he probably found new oil reserves.

The Conservatives' reaction to the XL Foods crisis shows that they do not hesitate to mislead Canadians by saying things in the House that are not true. On October 2, the minister himself assured us that the CFIA had added 700 new inspectors since 2006. The minister included in that calculation hundreds of people who have nothing to do with protecting Canadians from unsafe food products. What is more, the facts show that there was no new meat hygiene inspector position at the CFIA. How do they come up with it?

The only time the Conservatives added inspectors to the meat processing program was following the listeriosis crisis, another crisis that Canadians could have done without. The government added 170 inspectors to calm things down, but cut 314 a few years later.

Let me put this into words the members opposite will understand: do the math.

• (1730)

Looking at these sorry past decisions makes us wonder, and rightly so, whether Bill S-11 is just a smokescreen.

Among the amendments unilaterally rejected by the Conservatives was one that guaranteed anonymity to an employee who blows the whistle on a practice that contravenes CFIA rules. At XL Foods, some employees who saw that standards were not being met chose not to say anything out of fear of losing their jobs. That is why the CFIA should have guaranteed this necessary anonymity, but the Conservatives refused.

Another amendment seemed necessary to me, and it called for the immediate audit of the Canadian food system with the coming into force of the bill. We then proposed that an identical audit be done every five years to verify whether all the objectives set out in the legislation had been met. If not, the government could have made the necessary changes, but the Conservatives refused.

In closing, I would add that Canadians will not be fooled by the dramatic increase in food safety-related penalties. They have been multiplied by 20 for the sake of appearances, but historically at the CFIA, the maximum fines have never been applied at current levels. In 2011, for example, the average fine was just 5% of the maximum fine and none exceeded 20%. Instead of being tougher, such increases might put a damper on the regulatory environment and decrease the number of penalties.

I could continue for some time listing the problems with this bill. That being said, I can only commend this initiative and confirm my support for it, for the welfare of the community.

Even though it is a step in the right direction, unfortunately it looks more like a dance step.

• (1735)

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

We will support the bill. It is a step in the right direction, but from what I understand, it does not solve the problem. I have a problem with a bill that is a step in the right direction but does not solve a crisis.

We are used to this government playing political games and rejecting all of our amendments. Nevertheless, I would like to ask my colleague what should have been added to Bill S-11 to make it worthwhile and to ensure that we do not see more crises like what we saw at XL Foods.

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I think that if an XL Foods employee, for example, sees a violation of the regulations, he will lose his job for pointing it out. I think that the CFIA has to protect employees so that they do not lose their jobs. This would be a way to ensure food safety for all Canadians.

I think that should have been in the bill.

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Joliette is on the agriculture committee and she contributes significantly.

My question, which I keep repeating, is about the third party independent comprehensive audit as opposed to a survey. We know the Weatherill report requested it and the previous president, Carole Swan, of the CFIA said that there was no audit. Therefore, we know we are not being told the truth by the government. We know that the head of the Public Service Alliance, Bob Kingston, indicated a lack of resources and support at the Brooks plant to ensure that everyone was trained in CVS. Every meaningful organization that has these kinds of responsibilities is willing to have an independent audit, an objective look-see, so they know exactly what they need.

Do you agree that there should be an independent audit? Also, could you speculate why on earth the government would not welcome an independent third party audit? Does she think, as I do, that maybe it will lose control of the messaging and would rather control the kind of survey that will be undertaken?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would remind hon. members to direct their questions and comments through the Chair.

The hon. member for Joliette.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Guelph.

Inspections must absolutely be carried out by a third party to ensure food safety. The least we can do to protect Canadians is to ensure that people are not inspecting themselves.

I agree with my colleague that this should be included in the bill. Why did the government decide otherwise? We can ask the Conservatives and maybe we will get an answer.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question will be brief.

This government is a half-measure government, and I think this is another half measure. People became sick because of poor management on the part of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Canadians and Quebecers expect more. They want a bill that will truly resolve the problem and a government that will act quickly in the face of a crisis such as the E. coli one.

I would like to hear my colleague comment on that.

Ms. Francine Raynault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question.

This bill is definitely missing some elements that would help it to really meet the needs of Canadians. It is not good enough.

We are going to vote in favour of this bill but, in 2015, we are going to improve it in order to protect Canadians and ensure food safety.

● (1740)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course, I am going to support this bill, but once again, it does not go far enough.

This is a very important bill. It affects Canadians across the country because we eat every day. In Canada, one in eight jobs is related to agriculture. With regard to the markets, it is a multi-million dollar industry. We must therefore protect Canada's food safety system. Yes, this debate is important and the amendments that we proposed in committee were really good, but I was disappointed in the way that this took place. Yet, here we are today.

Bill S-11 is a first step in the right direction to improve and modernize the food safety system, and the NDP has been calling for the modernization of this legislation since Sheila Weatherill's report was published in 2009. However, Canadians need the government to invest more resources in the food safety system, rather than just streamlining the regulations. Although we support the content of this bill, we do not think that it goes far enough.

The witnesses who appeared before the Senate committee that conducted a more in-depth examination of this bill said that the bill would not have prevented the E. coli outbreak at the XL Foods plant in Brooks, Alberta. Although the NDP believes that this bill is essential to improving Canada's food safety, we also believe that passing this bill without taking into account the amendments proposed by the opposition once again demonstrates the government's ill will. This is nothing new. We see it here almost everyday.

Every day, we represent our constituents here in Ottawa, and we are proud to do so. They are the ones who voted for us. We are here because of them. So, each day, I try to do my best to stand up for their interests. This seems only natural. However, I get the distinct impression that the members opposite often forget this basic principle. I will explain why.

Let me begin with a brief review of the facts. On October 17, the safe food for Canadians act, Bill S-11, was passed by the Senate. The purpose of this bill is to increase the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's resources and tools. At the beginning of the month, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food did a clause-by-clause review of the bill. As a member of that committee, I am very disappointed with this government's attitude toward this bill.

Today, the parliamentary secretary talked about this bill and all the good things that will come out of it, but it is the opposition MPs who keep talking. The parliamentary secretary was the only government representative to speak in favour of this bill. We have done our homework. All the witnesses who came to committee worked hard and shared their time and expertise with us. We worked very hard to propose constructive amendments, but, unfortunately, none of them were adopted. That is very disappointing, because the primary purpose of this bill is to ensure optimal food safety for all Canadians.

I would like to talk about some of the suggestions we made in committee. We thought it was important to add whistleblower protection measures that take into account the fact that the Criminal Code authorizes these types of measures. Allow me to begin by saying that other acts of Parliament explicitly present protection measures for whistleblowers that go beyond those in the Criminal Code, which is a good thing.

● (1745)

The purpose of this protection is to allow employees to come forward and feel secure—I repeat, feel secure—with this idea that they can tell inspectors things that they may not be able to see. In the case of XL Foods, we heard that this could have helped them.

During the latest tainted beef crisis, the largest beef recall in Canadian history, the workers said that they were aware of what was happening and knew that things were happening in a way that they did not believe was right, but because they felt vulnerable, they did not dare blow the whistle.

That is why we want whistleblower protection. I think we need to have a closer look at that. It is a standard model that can apply to many statutes that are enacted.

Accordingly, people can feel comfortable coming forward with a reasonable complaint, a complaint that has merit and that can be addressed in a way so that they do not feel their employment or their advancement is jeopardized, or any of the other things that people might feel vulnerable about.

We believe that in the case of XL Foods, such a measure would have limited the damage or perhaps even prevented the situation altogether.

That is the rationale for whistleblower protection.

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I think this proposal made a lot of sense. It did not take anything away from the bill. On the contrary, it contributed something and enhanced the bill's effectiveness.

I really would have liked to see some openness on the part of the government, my Conservative colleagues. I like when we work together. I think it is important to do so here in the House. I would have liked us to work toward the same end: to improve a bill that is so important to food safety and consumer protection.

Year after year, on the Conservatives' watch, the number of food inspectors has decreased. Meanwhile, the food industry is more and more at risk.

At the committee stage, we proposed an amendment that called for an immediate audit as soon as the bill came into force. Clearly, food safety systems need to be reviewed regularly. We simply cannot allow another E. coli outbreak in the next five years. Unfortunately, the Conservative members of the committee voted against that amendment. It is really too bad, because in five years, we will have no basis for comparison. I think this is a waste of time.

If we do so now, if we create a basis and carry on, I think this will help us. This will be an improvement, not something that will harm the bill. The amendments we proposed made positive changes to the bill.

I would like to draw your attention to an excerpt from the testimony that Bob Kingston, national president of the Agriculture Union, gave before the Senate committee on October 2. I would like to point out that Mr. Kingston has 25 years of experience as an inspector and 15 years of experience as a supervisor, so he is someone who knows his stuff. He said:

I urge the committee to amend this bill to make such a review mandatory. I do note that an amendment has been put forward by the government, but it does not require a resource audit of the CFIA until five years after the bill becomes law. It is sort of like crossing your fingers and hoping nothing bad happens for five years. We already know that the CFIA has a problem; do not wait for another outbreak before addressing it.

We thus proposed several amendments to strengthen the bill. We never opposed this bill. Our sole objective was to strengthen and improve Bill S-11 by making clarifications and giving it more teeth.

We also asked for a mechanism related to stakeholders who represent the public interest on the arbitration board. We want to strike a balance between the interests of companies and the defence of public health.

● (1750)

It is a way for all voices to be represented and defended when it comes to food safety. Our amendment was rejected without any discussion, questions or explanation.

Another important amendment that we proposed asked that, on the coming into force of this section, the minister undertake an audit that includes an assessment of the resources allocated to the administration and enforcement of this act in order to get baseline information to be applied to reviews undertaken every five years. We need a basis for comparison right away, otherwise we will have to wait 10 years, which is a long time, before we can see the effects of these changes.

Bob Kingston also said:

If we are not careful, the successful enactment of Bill S-11, as well as the CFIA's new inspection modernization initiative, could fall victim to these pressures, as did the compliance verification system, or CVS, before them.

If you cast your memories back to the summer of 2008, just months before the Maple Leaf Foods outbreak, you will remember that the CFIA had just launched CVS. Without a serious pilot phase and before any lessons learned in development could be implemented, the agency had no idea how many inspectors were needed to do the job under CVS or what skills and training they might require.

That is what Sheila Weatherill recommended in her report on the 2008 listeriosis crisis, and that is what we asked for following the E. coli crisis. Unfortunately, we will have to continue asking because the Conservatives rejected that amendment.

Following the E. coli crisis this fall, members on both sides of the House knew that we would have to take action to ensure that this does not happen again. The Conservatives tried to make us believe that Bill S-11 was a solution. I have already said that I completely disagree. This bill does not go far enough and does not address a major problem at CFIA: the budget cuts that are forcing food inspectors to do their job with fewer resources.

When we discussed Bill S-11 at second reading stage, I informed my Conservative colleagues that we would move amendments in the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food. I had hoped that, in committee, with the evidence of expert witnesses and the time to concentrate on each clause, we could have a constructive, positive and honest discussion that would improve the bill. When I arrived here 18 months ago—time passes so quickly—I was somewhat naive. I believed that we would work together to improve things for Canadians. We were elected to protect the interests of Canadians, and I honestly believed that we would work together. That is not at all the case. It happens once in a while, but it all depends. On this file, it is not at all the case.

We moved a number of reasonable amendments that would have improved food safety in Canada, mainly by providing more clarity, preventing conflicts of interest, deterring companies' risky behaviour and providing more protection for CFIA workers and inspectors.

Since I have five minutes remaining, I will talk about the people who support our position, since there are many. The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food dedicated three meetings to examining Bill S-11, and since we did not have enough time to bring in witnesses, I often had to refer to what happened in the Senate.

● (1755)

If Bill S-11 had first gone to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food, it would have been our pleasure to study it.

I will briefly explain what we want. But before I do that, I would like to say something about the crisis at XL Foods. We are not the ones who discovered the E. coli bacteria; it was the United States. It has mandatory testing that can detect the bacteria, which is not the case here in Canada.

Why does Canada not have that mandatory testing? I do not know, but that is something we are looking at.

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I will now briefly explain what we want.

We want a comprehensive audit of the compliance verification system, as recommended by Sheila Weatherill.

We also want measures to adequately protect workers at meat processing plants who sound the alarm. We want to ensure that whistleblowers are protected.

We want to ensure that the CFIA has adequate resources and that it has the authority and independence it needs to do its job.

We want to strengthen the traceability requirements for meat, fish, fruit, vegetables—for all fresh foods.

We also want better and more transparent monitoring. During the E. coli crisis, there was a huge lack of transparency with respect to XL Foods, which was disappointing. We noted a lot of problems. In the House, we asked questions about XL Foods in order to understand what had happened, what would be done and what would be the future of the CFIA, but it was very hard to get answers. I think that transparency is very important, especially when it comes to food safety in Canada.

Although I did not talk about it, the question of labelling is also important. More and more, people want to know where their food comes from. They are increasingly curious about and interested in their food. Better oversight of labelling is therefore very important.

Those were our concerns.

Another person who agreed with our amendments was Neil Peacock, a member of the National Farmers Union board and a cattle producer from Sexsmith, Alberta. He remembers the 22 people who died and the 57 people who got sick during the listeriosis crisis in 2008 at Maple Leaf Foods. He wonders if the situation at XL Foods is not further proof that food safety and sovereignty in Canada are in danger.

I think there are lessons to be learned from all this. Yes, there were problems. Yes, perhaps some mistakes were made. However, I am thinking about the future, and Bill S-11, which I have right here, is a good bill if we bring in the amendments. We proposed 11 amendments, which I think are all good.

I am a little disappointed, but we will continue to think about the future.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to my colleague's speech, she made reference to the fact that she felt that more time was needed for the committee to study this matter.

When I gave a speech earlier today, I pointed out that this bill has been debated over years but that in this last few months it has been debated in the agriculture committee both here in the House and in the other place.

When it comes to our agriculture committee, we had offered to the opposition, both parties, that we would sit whenever they felt we needed to sit in order to hear more witnesses and to have more time to study the bill if that is what they wanted.

I would like to know why the member is raising, now, that she needed more time when she did not raise it when we actually made a very sincere offer to sit additional hours as an agriculture committee in order to hear from more witnesses and to hear more testimony.

I am wondering if the member could answer that question here in the House.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture for the question.

The lack of time was not the most important point in my speech. I talked about the 11 amendments proposed in committee.

However, this brings a question to mind. If we had had more time and had explained our amendments in greater detail, would you have voted in favour of them? Would you have agreed to one of our amendments if we had had more time? That is a good question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would remind hon. members to direct their comments and questions to the chair.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that our food system is of critical importance to all Canadians. Former prime minister Jean Chrétien is the one who brought in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. We recognize how critically important it is for a number of different reasons, the most obvious being food consumption. However, there are other benefits.

There was a sense of disappointment in how the government ultimately reacted to the most recent beef recall, which the member has correctly identified as the largest single beef recall in the history of Canada. However, it has a very profound impact in many different ways, not only on the health of Canadians but also on the industry and individuals who rely heavily on those quality jobs, and the loss of opportunities.

When we look at this bill, the member is right in saying that it does fall short, and we recognize that, but we also see that it is a step, although somewhat small, but still a step forward. We, therefore, will be supporting the bill.

In terms of the food safety system as a whole, yes it is important that we emphasize the quality of food products and the important role that it plays in there, but it also protects the industry as a whole. Could the member provide a comment on that?

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, quite a few things come to mind. I am new to the agriculture file. I have been here for about seven months so I am learning a lot and visiting a lot of farms.

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We have a lot of rules and regulations in Canada and I know our producers and farmers work hard to meet these standards. However, when something like this happens, it is sad because they have done everything. When there are problems at the meat transformation plant after they bring in their animals that really hurts the producers. It also hurts when we try to sell our meat abroad in other countries. This has a big domino effect. We need to focus on having a healthy environment.

I have worked in restaurants. I have been a manager and I know the responsibility to create a good workplace environment. We need to have trust and transparency, and we saw a lot of problems with that in the XL Foods fall-out recently.

We have a lot to do and this bill is a step in the right direction, but when we are going to do something why not do it right? This bill will pass no matter what, and I will vote for it, but why not add our amendments? Why not make it as full and as good as it can be? We should give it our all.

[Translation]

Ms. H  l  ne LeBlanc (LaSalle—  mard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her speech and her work as deputy agriculture and agri-food critic.

I was very glad to hear her talk about the amendments that were proposed and unfortunately rejected at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. One of those amendments consisted in creating a workplace where workers feel safe and able to report any potential breaches where working conditions are difficult and where 4,000 animals might be slaughtered in one day. That is a lot.

How does she explain that the government rejected an amendment that would have created conditions conducive to the protection and safety of food?

•(1805)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question.

It is very important, because what we saw at XL Foods revealed a major lack of transparency. I felt like I was working in the dark because we kept asking questions, but we never got any answers. Where is the ministerial accountability of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food? I do not think he had any then.

We must protect whistleblowers at processing plants. The Conservatives justified their position by saying that this was not necessary since it already exists in the Criminal Code and that is enough. After seeing what we saw, we know that it is not enough. People felt very vulnerable. They were not comfortable saying that they saw a problem and that something needed to be done.

Whistleblower protection would help them. It would create a healthier, more transparent environment. That is exactly what we need when it comes to food safety: transparency and safety.

We must stand up for our workers with the proposed amendments.

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to ask a couple of questions. I was on the committee when the Weatherill report was put together, in which 57

recommendations were made, and the government has now moved on them, as we know.

I am on the international trade committee right now. Just after the XL issue, the committee heard from delegates from Japan and some government people. We are working to build a trade agreement with Japan but, as we all know, Japan requires and demands premium products.

The XL Foods issue just occurred. How does that affect Canada's reputation on the world stage? Canadians recognize that we have some of the safest food in the world and that there is a process in place that ensures our food is safe. When I asked if this was a detriment to us in terms of moving forward, the answer was that it was not because we have a safe food program in place. It is a positive thing when talking about international trade.

I am wondering if the member would comment. Canada is looked at as a leader and the member is saying that it is not. She seems to be concerned that we do not have safe food in Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

In Canada, we have strict rules. Our food safety system is good, but without a doubt nothing is perfect in life. In light of what happened at XL Foods, I believe that there was a problem at the plant, a problem at CFIA and perhaps also a problem with the number of inspectors. There were a number of problems. However, it is obvious that there was a lack of transparency. We do not know what happened. I believe we have lessons to learn from what happened at XL Foods. We can do better. It was an important lesson. So why not accept our amendments in order to do better?

Our food safety system is good, but we want it to be better. The opposition members are the only ones speaking today. I believe we had a few questions from the Conservatives, which is good, but why are they not talking about this important bill?

If this is a concern for them, I would like them to talk about this important food safety bill that affects all Canadians.

•(1810)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have read the bill that the government has named the safe food for Canadians act. I also took the time to read the Library of Parliament briefing notes that were made available in association with the bill for the assistance and guidance of the committee. I read the explanation of the bill through clause-by-clause analysis and also the House notes prepared by my colleague, the member of Parliament for Welland, who I should stop and recognize and pay tribute to for the work he has done in representing the interests of Canadians in the pursuit of true safe food for Canadians legislation. It might give them some comfort to know that there are committed advocates on the opposition benches who are seeking to address the lamentable situation of the food inspection regime in this country.

Government Orders

Having gone through those various stages of familiarizing myself with the bill, the first and most striking thing is something that has not come up at all in any of the speeches. I even listened to the rather vapid platitudes of the parliamentary secretary in the speech that he made regarding the bill, but no one has pointed out the elephant in the room and that is the front page, the cover of Bill S-11. Any member of Parliament in this place who considers himself or herself a true democrat, surely should be offended by the fact that we are standing here today at this late hour on Monday afternoon in Ottawa in the House of Commons, in the elected chamber, dealing with a piece of legislation that comes from the unelected, undemocratic, unaccountable chamber, the Senate of Canada.

No one elected senators to make legislation for Canadians. I argue they have no right to generate legislation from the other chamber. I argue that as members of Parliament if we had any dignity or self-respect, we would bar the legislation at the gates of the door here. We would ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to block them, to tie the doors and stop the introduction of pieces of legislation such as this into the chamber because it has no business being here. Senators have no right.

If there ever were any semblance of utility to that place, if we could even believe at any given time that there was some value to the Senate of Canada, they forfeited that in the last Parliament when they unilaterally and arbitrarily, I would argue, jettisoned two of the most worthy pieces of legislation I have ever had the honour to work on in this chamber. One of them was the only piece of climate change legislation in the Parliament of Canada, a western, developed nation with no position on climate change. Through five years of laborious negotiation and give-and-take, we passed a piece of climate legislation through the House—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification on a point of order.

Hon. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, do you think that has relevance to food safety? I would ask you to please use your own discretion and judgment on this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Members will know that members presenting speeches in the House are given a great deal of liberty in terms of how they wish to draw these arguments in respect of relevance to the bill before the House. I am sure that the member for Winnipeg Centre will be coming around to the point of relevance of the bill in due course.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I was simply pointing out the origin of the bill by the unelected, undemocratic, unaccountable Senate. No one chose them to create legislation on behalf of the Canadian people. No one gave them the right. In fact I question what they do over there. All I ever see of them in are parliamentary friendship committees. They seem to clutter up every parliamentary friendship committee like a bunch of globe-trotting quasi-diplomats, gallivanting around the world on behalf of Canada, trying to pretend that they are actually—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. The hon. minister of state on the same point of order.

Hon. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, that rant had nothing to do with food safety. It was a point the member wanted to make on the Senate, obviously, but I wanted to know if you could rethink your last judgment.

• (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): As members know, members are afforded a great deal of liberty. The member for Winnipeg Centre clearly is making some points with respect to the origins of the bill that is before the House. He will surely, I am certain in the time that has been provided him, draw those ideas and relevance to the question that is actually before the House.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I intend to address the relative merits of the bill, but I wanted to first point out the origin of the bill.

The Conservatives appointed the party president to the Senate, then the chief campaign manager of their election, then the chief fundraiser and then the communications director. The entire Conservative war room is now sitting in the Senate doing purely partisan work and the Canadian taxpayer is paying for it and their staff and their travel privileges. It is an atrocity. It is atrocious that the House of Commons does not rise up and finally deal with Senate reform because it is an international embarrassment.

As I said, the Conservatives lost any credibility when they killed the climate change bill without a single witness being heard and without a single hour of debate in that chamber. It took five years to get it through the House of Commons through careful delicate negotiations and it passed at all stages in the House of Commons.

In fact, that is the direction things are supposed to go. We develop the legislation, the Senate is allowed to check it for spelling mistakes and then we get it back. We do not deal with its legislation, it deals with our legislation.

The best thing to do with legislation like this that has an “S” on the front is to tear it up and throw it in the air. That is all it is good for.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague who raised a very important point.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture pointed out that this is an important bill, a good bill, and that food safety and inspection are a priority for this government.

In my colleague's opinion, if this is such a priority for the government, why is this bill called Bill S-11?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for recognizing and acknowledging the fundamental problem I was trying to address in the limited time that I had.

Government Orders

The problem is that those guys are running roughshod over everything that is good and decent about our parliamentary democracy. In the one case, they are sliding legislation in from the Senate or through private members' business when the convention has it, and in fact our Westminster parliamentary democracy has it, that legislation originates in Parliament with the full scrutiny and oversight of the Canadian people subject to rigorous debate and subject to amendment to accommodate the legitimate concerns of the official opposition and the other opposition parties.

I do not care who one is, nobody has a monopoly on good ideas.

The Conservatives won a razor thin majority with 38% of the vote, of those who chose to vote. Some say that in fact they stole that election through election fraud and that they have no mandate to govern whatsoever. However, that is yet to be proven and I am not alleging anything of the sort.

Tradition dictates and in fact this fragile construct of our Westminster parliamentary democracy depends on the accommodation of legitimate concerns brought forward by the opposition through amendments to legislation. We brought 11 legitimate amendments to the table at committee. How many did the Conservatives allow? Not one. In fact, they have never allowed a single amendment to any legislation in the 41st Parliament.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, speaking of democracy, I would like to thank the hon. member for his very passionate speech.

This afternoon, we noticed that, with the exception of one Conservative member, only NDP members rose in the House to speak.

I am wondering why the Conservative members did not rise in the House to participate in the debate. Is it because they cut the CFIA's budget by \$56.1 million? I think we have to ask ourselves that question.

The hon. member also mentioned the amendments that we proposed in committee. One of those amendments pertained to the average 5% fine imposed by the CFIA. The NDP proposed that the maximum penalty be increased to \$5 million, which would have greatly improved this bill.

Can the hon. member comment on the NDP's proposals?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, it is quite true that the government moved hastily in getting through the analysis of this bill because its positions would not stand up to true rigorous scrutiny and oversight otherwise. Many of the amendments that we brought forward would have improved and enhanced the legislation and made it the best possible.

When we are dealing with a subject matter such as food safety, it is incumbent on the ruling party to make sure that the bill is as good as it could possibly be. The 62% of the population who voted for the opposition members had some legitimate points of view to bring to the table that they wanted accommodated.

The Conservatives are making a serious mistake, a serious oversight, by saying that no one else has any contribution to make to anything that we ever do in this Parliament, even a single amendment to a single piece of legislation. It is absurd to think that they have all of the ideas on the side of the angels on all these issues. We had a legitimate contribution to make with eleven meaningful amendments and Liberals with four, which would have enhanced the bill and made it better.

If the Conservatives learned to play nice we would have better legislation. Vigorous debate would have tested the mettle of their arguments—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as many of my colleagues have mentioned, very few Conservatives rose in the House to defend their bill or to ask the official opposition questions.

What is more, this bill originated in the Senate. We must therefore wonder who is working for whom, and who is in charge of strategy when it comes to bills.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Conservatives are running roughshod over everything that is good and decent about our parliamentary democracy. They are cutting a swath through tradition, precedent and so forth by asking the Senate to check their bills.

We in the House generate the legislation. The people of Canada elected us for the express purpose of generating legislation in this chamber. The Senate is allowed to check the spelling and make sure it does not offend the Constitution in any way and can send it back for a modest amendment if it sees fit. It does not get to write the legislation. That is not normal. I do not want the people of Canada to think that is normal or right, or that it can even serve the interests of Canadians.

The other piece of legislation that the Senate unilaterally and arbitrarily killed, which is why I believe the other chamber has lost any credibility whatsoever, is the drugs for Africa bill. The Stephen Lewis Foundation and the Grandmothers Advocacy Network to get generic drugs to Africa—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. Questions and comments. We usually try to keep the time for responses about the same time.

The hon. member for Sudbury.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his impassioned speech, questions and answers.

In listening to the debate we heard that eleven amendments were presented by our party and four by the Liberals. The opposition was coming up with ideas to try to make the bill work better for Canadians. Instead what we have is a bill from the Senate, and we know how the member feels about the Senate.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, when talking about food security and food safety, we also wonder about the loss of the Wheat Board. There was no sober second thought from that other place when it trashed that.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague's comments.

• (1825)

Mr. Pat Martin: That is a good point, Mr. Speaker. The Conservatives unilaterally, arbitrarily, absolutely cancelled one of the most significant and important pieces of legislation to come out of the Commons in a decade, the climate change bill.

It was Jack Layton's bill. He actually gave it to that ungrateful guy from Thunder Bay North. He let that guy from Thunder Bay handle it because he was so pouty and it gave him something to do so it was not in Jack's name, but it was Jack Layton's bill.

It hurts me to this day to see the Conservatives trample all over five years work and committed improvements. Back in the days when Parliament used to work, we worked hard to make that good legislation. They abused their authority and, I argue, lost any right to enjoy any credibility of the Canadian people.

Imagine the Conservatives appointing their party president and the campaign manager. Hacks and flacks and bagmen is what it has come down to, doing purely partisan work. The Conservatives have long strayed from any credible, legitimate function and role. They are more a hindrance than a help. They are an obstacle to democracy. They do not enhance democracy in any way. They are a barrier to democracy. We should not be—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech was powerful and moving. He is always a pleasure to listen to and his points are very valid. I find it hard sometimes being heckled and laughed at by the Conservatives. It is not always a fun thing.

Could my colleague speak to ministerial responsibility, what happened with XL Foods and what happened afterward?

I found there was a huge lack of transparency and communication on the part of the government. Could my colleague elaborate on how important it is to be transparent, honest and open, especially when it comes to the safety of Canadians every day?

Mr. Pat Martin: Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, this is what has led to the heightened level choleric in this debate. It is the subject matter of the bill that we are dealing with today.

We are talking about the Canadian food safety act. We are talking about what we put on our children's' plates. We want to be able to ensure that as a western developed nation, we can trust the health and the safety of the food we eat. Therefore, it is particularly galling to lose any opportunity to have meaningful input, debate and witnesses being heard.

We could not hear from a single witness at the XL Foods plant, the workers at the actual plant who may have had some guidance to offer as to the day-to-day operations of the plant that could benefit from the oversight of members of the House of Commons.

It was flawed legislation by its very origins, the fact that it came from the other place. The process was then flawed. The parliamentary secretary keeps saying that we could have met as many times as we wanted. When the motion was put forward to extend committee hearings, it was defeated. I do not know what kind of Orwellian doublespeak those guys—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. That will conclude the period for questions and comments.

Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

• (1830)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be delayed until tomorrow following government orders.

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

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have another chance to speak to this particular issue. When I asked my question in June, the report on the regional health survey from the First Nations Information Governance Centre had just been released. It highlighted the bleak living conditions that are a daily fact for far too many first nations people in Canada. We were told how one in four first nation adults live in overcrowded houses, how half of this population live in homes with mildew and, incredibly, how one in five have been forced to reduce the size of their meals simply because there is not enough food.

When I asked my question, I was told that concrete actions were being taken on a number of issues. This was just a few months after the crisis in Attawapiskat. We saw at that time the government had a parochial view of its responsibility to first nations. The imposition of third party management did nothing to address the housing crisis, just like much of the legislation that is before the House does nothing to address the persistent problems that plague too many first nations.

We have legislation that incompletely addresses drinking and waste water on first nations, legislation that creates a bureaucratic burden for reporting band finances in a format that most people will not even make use of, and legislation that deals with property issues on first nations.

What we have not seen is money and nothing else is going to solve the problems related to housing on first nations or the implications those problems have to overall health, wellness and productivity.

We know that the demographics for first nations are not the same as we see in Canada's non-aboriginal population. First nations communities are, on average, younger and the population is growing as compared to the aging population in the rest of Canada. Government policy has to take this into account but it has not, as we see in the 2008 INAC evaluation report on its housing policy. That report claimed that although housing conditions on first nations were worse than in the rest of Canada, there had been some improvement between 1996 and 2006. It suggested that maintaining the status quo would lead to gradual improvements to housing, which would be great, but it is not happening because the report ignored the growth in population that is going on for those same first nation communities.

Also, the houses on first nations reflect the tight budgets they were built with. The average home built on reserve is habitable only half as long as one off reserve. Poor construction and limited funding for construction and renovations are limiting factors here and show that the answer is not just more housing but better housing as well. In fact, the report showed that almost 40% of first nation adults live in houses that are in need of major repairs. More than two-thirds of first nations adults reported that their household was in need of some type of repair. This compares to one-quarter of the general Canadian population.

Simply put, we need to find a way to help first nations build more houses to address a 20,000 unit shortfall. There is a pressing need to improve the condition of many existing on-reserve houses as well.

There is too much at stake. When will the government finally take this problem seriously and do something that will improve living conditions on first nations?

● (1835)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened quite intently to the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing. To say I respectfully disagree with her assertions would be rather mild.

I would like to assure all members of the House that our government continues to improve the quality of life of aboriginal people with a robust and targeted approach to investments. Economic action plan 2012 contained \$175 million for schools and \$331 million for water infrastructure. That is significant funding aimed at improving the living conditions of aboriginal people in areas such as housing, water and education.

Our government recognizes that access to safe and affordable housing is essential for improving economic and social outcomes and for supporting healthy, sustainable first nation communities. Since 2006, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has allocated more than \$1 billion to support first nations in meeting their housing needs. We will continue to work in partnership with first nations.

As I mentioned, economic action plan 2012 includes over \$331 million over two years to build and renovate water infrastructure on reserve and to support the development of a long-term strategy to improve water quality in first nation communities. Last winter we introduced Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act, to ensure enforceable drinking water standards for first nations on reserve.

Just this past summer, our government announced funding for new water and waste-water infrastructure for several bands across Canada. Our combined investment in just two of these projects was close to \$8 million. By 2014 our government will have invested approximately \$3 billion in water and waste-water facilities in first nation communities. Any assertion that our government is not spending money in first nations communities is simply false.

I question the hon. member when she says that the mechanisms for delivering this money are somehow too burdensome or too cumbersome. What is wrong with having a system that ensures value for the taxpayer dollars being spent?

Adjournment Proceedings

Our government supported the completion of 24 major projects. We have upgraded first nations water and waste-water systems. Overall, 402 major and minor first nation water and waste-water infrastructure projects will be supported this year. Another 139 capital projects are planned for 2012-13.

On top of that, we have an educational initiative for which we are spending \$275 million, announced in budget 2012, which of course, the hon. member voted against. Education is at the heart of expanding opportunities for first nations people to fully participate in the economy. Education is crucial for success, as it provides a solid footing to expand the economic opportunities available to first nations people.

Any Canadian listening to this tonight can see that we are improving the lives of first nations communities through targeted investments. These examples are but a glimpse into the vast breadth of initiatives that have been undertaken by our government to improve the lives of aboriginal people by improving their living conditions.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the First Nations Information Governance Centre report shows clearly that there is a strong relationship between improved housing and health. Inadequate, unsuitable and unaffordable housing has been linked to chronic health conditions, such as asthma and poor mental health. The report shows how improvements to housing can have a dramatic and measurable positive impact.

Nutrition is a significant building block for good health as well. The regional health survey made it clear that there is a problem to be addressed. One in five on-reserve people are forced to reduce the size of their meals simply because there is not enough food. HungerCount 2012, which reports on hunger and food bank use in Canada, reveals that first nations, Métis and Inuit people make up just 4% of our population. Yet they account for 11% of individuals using food banks. This is a problem related to poverty. More than one in three first nation adults has a household income of less than \$20,000 a year, and that number is growing.

What is the government going to do to work with first nation communities to combat poverty, inadequate housing and the terrible effects they have on the health of those people affected? When will the government keep up with the times? When will it keep up with this growing demographic?

• (1840)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member speaks with some passion in her voice. We would then expect that she would support the initiatives that our government has taken to improve the lives of first nations instead of consistently, every single time, voting against these initiatives.

Our government has consistently shown our commitment to aboriginal people through significant investments to enable them to participate, contribute to and benefit from Canada's prosperity. We are taking concrete actions on education, housing, child and family services, safe drinking water and other important and pressing issues to first nations communities.

At the historic crown-first nations gathering, the Government of Canada committed to creating conditions to accelerate economic

development opportunities and maximize benefits for all Canadians. With our partners we are working to build a future in which first nations are self-sufficient and prosperous, making their own decisions, managing their own affairs and making strong contributions to the country as a whole. Together we will deliver tangible and lasting results by working to meet the needs of first nations in Canada.

The hon. member has a paternalistic, old-fashioned view of first nations. It is time she got into the 21st century.

PENSIONS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague across the aisle to clarify her statements last June. She claims to be taking action to create sustainable programs. I want to know what programs she is talking about. Canadian seniors are not seeing the benefits.

This is the government that brought in cuts to OAS and GIS by increasing the age of eligibility. This puts seniors who are struggling to find employment or unable to work at risk. The \$300 million added to the GIS last year has failed to address seniors' poverty. In fact, poverty rates among seniors has not budged at all. Today's rates remain at the 2011 level, before any changes were introduced.

Seniors are struggling. More and more reports are coming in from food banks across the country showing a marked increase in the number of seniors visiting those establishments. These are people at risk who have no ability to make extra money.

The government has also begun an all-out attack on public sector pensions. New hires will be in a second-tier pension plan and will have fewer advantages than their previously hired colleagues. We should be improving pensions in this country and bringing everyone up to an acceptable level, not knocking down decent pensions. We do not need a race to the bottom.

The government's only attempt at improving pensions in Canada is the PRPP, which is a complete failure. Not one province has taken up drafting implementation legislation. Provinces can see that the PRPP is just a tarted-up RRSP and will do very little to help people save for their retirement. The PRPP, like RRSPs, benefit the banks and other financial institutions, leaving people's savings at risk in the stock market. Sadly, PRPPs are not a good investment for low-income seniors and leave them vulnerable, because any meagre benefits are clawed back.

What we need is to increase the CPP. We can, with modest increases in contributions. We are talking about a few dollars a week. We can, if we do this, double Canadians' CPP benefits when they retire. This is the most fair, most generous method for ensuring retirement security for Canadians. We need the government to get to the negotiating table with the provinces and hammer out a deal. Canadians need retirement security and doubling CPP benefits is the way to do it.

Adjournment Proceedings

My second concern is in regard to elder abuse and I will give some credit to the government because it introduced a program. The program has ended now, but it introduced a program to increase awareness about the abuse of seniors. The government also increased the penalties for those convicted of crimes against older persons.

The Conservatives, however, have failed to address the key issue, the root of the problem, the root of the causes of abuse. Punishing people after the crime is all well and good but preventing those crimes from being committed in the first place is key. One of the best ways to combat elder abuse is to ensure seniors have the financial independence they need and the power to make their own decisions about how they spend their money.

The government has failed to ensure that seniors are treated fairly in this country. They richly deserve retirement security. We can afford it. We need to do it. Retirement security for every Canadian should be the government's first priority instead of banks and other financial institutions.

• (1845)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows full well that our government is providing unprecedented levels of support to Canadian seniors. I will take a moment to review what our Conservative government has done.

Thanks to the actions of our Conservative government, Canada's poverty rate for seniors has fallen from 21.4% in 1980 to 5.3% in 2010. That is one of the lowest rates in the industrialized world.

[*Translation*]

The government is determined to support low-income seniors.

[*English*]

For instance, the guaranteed income supplement for low-income seniors was increased in 2006 and again in 2007 by a total of 7% and that was over and above indexation. In addition, budget 2008 increased the maximum GIS earnings exemption from \$500 to \$3,500 to ensure that GIS recipients who choose to work can keep more of their hard-earned money without a reduction in their GIS benefits.

Just last year, budget 2011 enhanced the GIS for the lowest income recipients by providing an increase of up to \$600 annually for single seniors and \$840 for couples for over 680,000 seniors across Canada, something the NDP voted against. This was the greatest single increase in the GIS in a quarter century.

[*Translation*]

Our government is taking the necessary steps to protect the retirement benefits paid to today's and tomorrow's seniors.

[*English*]

Our country is experiencing a major demographic shift which we simply cannot ignore. The baby boom generation, those born between 1946 and 1964, are among the largest age cohort in history and the baby boomers have begun to turn 65. Canadians are also living longer and healthier lives. In 1970, life expectancy was age 69 for men and age 76 for women. Today, it is age 79 for men and age

83 for women. As a result, the ratio of working-age Canadians to seniors is expected to fall approximately four to one in 2011 to two to one in 2013.

[*Translation*]

In other words, today there are four working Canadians for every senior, and in 20 years there will be only two.

[*English*]

This means that today there are four working Canadians for every senior and 20 years from now there will be only two.

Our government has ensured that the changes to the old age security program will be done gradually to allow Canadians to adjust their retirement plans. Our government is making reasonable changes to ensure the long-term sustainability of the OAS program to ensure it is there for future generations of Canadians. All these initiatives support low-income seniors and seniors across the board, all of which have been supported by this government and, when put forward, voted against by the NDP.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, of course we have a baby boomer demographic coming but that means we plan for it, we do not cut baby boomers off at the knees by destroying OAS.

The member had a number of things to say. She suggested that we did not support her government's initiatives. She may well ask why and I can tell her why. The reasons are very clear. We will support any initiatives that would benefit seniors, not banks. We will support initiatives that will help lift seniors out of poverty. The government did not. However, we will not support initiatives couched inside bills filled with poison pills. We will not support initiatives for seniors that do not provide a benefit to them, in particular those living below the poverty line.

The NDP will be happy to support the government when or if it starts to work for the better interests of Canadians and stops working for the interests of large corporations and its buddies in the financial institutions. The time has come. Let the government put its money where its mouth is.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I am quite amused by the hon. member's comment about supporting any initiatives for seniors. I guess that is why the NDP voted against the increase in the GIS, the largest increase in the last quarter century. I guess that is why the NDP voted against every senior's initiative we brought forward in the House of Commons. That is really supporting initiatives for seniors.

I am not sure what else I am supposed to say. The New Democrats continue to vote against increases to the GIS. They continue to vote against everything we put forward to support low-income seniors. These measures have helped remove 380,000 seniors from the tax rolls entirely. I guess all they want to do is tax and spend more money.

Adjournment Proceedings

We need to act now to maintain the strength of the OAS system, which is why we put in place changes to ensure that future generations of Canadians will benefit from them, unlike the NDP that wants to vote against everything.

• (1850)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stood in the House on June 18, 2012, and posed a question in response to the announcement from the Conservatives that Canada would join the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which followed on an announcement of a new advisory panel on international trade issues. At that time, the Minister of International Trade announced the formation of a trade committee and he appointed panel members, all of whom represented a one-sided ideological approach to trade policy. This panel has no representative of organized labour, no representative of environmental organizations, no representatives of human rights organizations and not a single representative from our supply-managed industries, a sector that will be the subject of much discussion in trade talks, especially the TPP.

Now the Trans-Pacific Partnership is a multilateral trade and investment agreement being negotiated among nine countries: the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Chile, Peru, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei, with the U.S. leading the negotiations. The aim is to create a new template for future trade deals modelled on U.S. interests. Fourteen rounds of TPP negotiations have already taken place with the next round in New Zealand in December of this year. The negotiating text is under tight secrecy, though draft versions of the investment chapter and the U.S. position on intellectual property have been leaked.

Canada has been lobbying for years to join the negotiations but there has been stiff resistance from the U.S. and other trade partners, such as New Zealand, that are concerned about Canada's position in specific areas including protection of supply-managed agricultural sectors. On June 19 of this year, the Prime Minister announced that Canada had been invited into the negotiations but there is significant concern with the price of admission. It appears the Conservative government has acceded to U.S. demands that would dramatically curtail Canada's negotiating rights and powers.

These demands include that Canada would have no ability to change anything that the nine original TPP countries have already agreed to. In other words, Canada has agreed to the existing unbracketed text, sight unseen and without input. Second, Canada would not have any veto authority over any chapter. This would mean that should the other nine countries agree on terms, Canada would be required to accept them. This context has led commentators to characterize Canada's entry into the TPP as being with "one hand tied behind our back" or having second-class status.

Canada already has free trade deals with four of the current TPP members: the U.S., Chile, Peru and Mexico. The other six countries combined account for less than 1% of Canada's exports. With limited opportunity for significant new market access for Canadian exports, the deal raises alarm bells regarding other aspects of the deal in areas of sensitive policy regulations, such as investor-state provisions, supply management and intellectual property, chiefly in pharmaceu-

tics and copyright. Canadians want to see what the advantage would be and how much it would cost.

Half of us on the trade committee were in Japan two weeks ago where we were presented with information from Japanese economic modelling that suggested that without Japan in the TPP there would be no benefit economically to any country in the TPP. With Japan in it, there may be.

In terms of the investor-state provisions, there are serious concerns being raised. Just last week, Canada faced two new suits against Canadian governmental regulations and legislation passed concerning the regulation of fracking in Quebec and concerning the development of wind turbines in Ontario. Essentially, because of investor-state provisions, investors are suing the Canadian government and subjecting taxpayers to millions of dollars of liability, simply because the Canadian government has legislated in areas that these investors think may impact on their profits. Australia has adopted a position that investor-state provisions are not part of its trade template, and I urge the government to follow that lead.

Showing up late has put Canada at a serious disadvantage in negotiations. Will we have to give up on supply management and on copyright protection? Given the seemingly negligible benefits of the deal, we have to ask ourselves whether this deal would really be in Canada's best economic interests, or is it simply a vehicle to slip through right-wing policies that are not about trade and that Canadians would not otherwise support?

• (1855)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always listen intently to my colleague from Vancouver Kingsway. It is always interesting and informative. Like any good fiction novel, there is a storyline that can be followed and after a while, we can see a story starting to unfold.

Let me start with the bogeyman theory because that is really what he is talking about. The NDP are not going to support trade so they need a bogeyman, something that will take Canadians' rights away—that we will lose our border, our culture, our water, our self-esteem, our children, and our dog is going to run away. It just makes me shake my head.

Adjournment Proceedings

Let us set the record straight. What did Canada give up to join the trans-Pacific partnership? Nothing. Zero. We gave up nothing to join the trans-Pacific partnership. We are a trading nation; our future and our children's future is based on trade. We are a country with 33 million people and a vast amount of resources, with a great wealth of individuals and people who make up this nation, who are entrepreneurs, who go out to work every day and make a living selling things to other parts of the world. This is not a complicated issue. We do not need to find a problem with something that is not a problem. We are in the beginning stages of the trans-Pacific partnership. There is a lot of negotiating to go yet.

We will continue to negotiate the trans-Pacific partnership. We will continue to negotiate other trade agreements. We formed government in 2006 and we have signed free trade agreements with nine countries. We are negotiating another 50 agreements around the world.

I would ask the hon. member to get on board. What do NDP members want to talk about? They want to talk about a free trade agreement with India. We are already there and working on that. Is it going to happen tomorrow? No, there is a long series of negotiations ahead of us. The NDP did not support the foreign investment promotion protection agreement with China. They voted against a free trade agreement with Panama. They cannot have it both ways: we cannot say that we need to be a trading nation and then shut other countries out.

As far as the investor-state provisions are concerned, they ensure that an investor from a foreign country will be treated the same as Canadian companies. There is nothing wrong with that. It is pretty basic stuff. There have been hundreds of filings over the years about the rules being broken, and only eight of them have been successful. If someone breaks those rules, they have recourse to the courts. That is not unusual. There is nothing wrong with that. That is a good way to do business. Where there is rules-based trading, everyone knows what we are talking about and everyone plays by the same set of rules and things are fair straight across the table.

I would ask my hon. colleague to stop fearmongering about the trans-Pacific partnership. We are in the early days of negotiations. I am not expecting to see it anytime soon, but if he wants to take a pro-trade stance, there is lots he can do to help with this.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague talked about fiction. Given the numbers about trade under the government's watch since 2006, I think we are talking about a horror story. We have gone from a \$26 billion trade surplus when the Conservatives took office in 2006 to a \$50 billion trade deficit today. Our manufacturing trade deficit in the time the Conservatives came into office has exploded

six times to over \$90 billion today. Exports of raw materials are up \$30 billion, but value-added exports are down \$35 billion.

The government is fond of throwing out numbers, most of them mythical and made up with a discredited economic modelling, but those numbers are real and I do not hear the government responding to them.

Supply management is responsible for supporting 17,000 farms in this country, \$10 billion in farm cash receipts, 106,000 direct jobs and 300,000 jobs in total. I ask my hon. colleague to assure the House that supply management, our system in this country, will not be jeopardized by the trans-Pacific partnership negotiations and make that pledge here in the House to the supply managed sector of this country. It wants to know.

● (1900)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, members do not have to take my word on supply management but can take the word of the supply managed sector. We meet with them on a regular basis. The supply managed sector both in dairy and poultry has been a very consistent supporter of our government's position on supply management, because it understand that we support supply management in this country both in dairy and poultry. Again, I just do not know where the hon. member is coming from.

Here is the deal on trade. We used to do 85% of our trade north and south after we signed NAFTA with the United States and Mexico, that is, 85% of our trade went to the United States. Today, 72% of our trade goes to the United States.

We have more product to market. We have to market with other countries. There are a number of countries around the globe, but we get criticized by NDP members who say that these are small marketplaces. The \$200 million worth of trade with Panama is important to those manufacturers who are exporting their products to Panama.

It is as simple as this: We are a trading nation and we are going to remain a trading nation. Again, I call on the NDP to get away from their anti-trade stance and take a pro-trade stance.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:02 p.m.)

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