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(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 28, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 28, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 29 petitions.

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[*Translation*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association respecting its bilateral mission to the Republic of Kenya and the Republic of Malawi, held from January 19 to 26, 2013.

The delegation travelled to Kenya to speak with our parliamentary colleagues about the importance of holding a transparent election that is free from violence. The election will take place next week.

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[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with a continuing desire to grow our economy and create more jobs for Canadians by way of international trade, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade, a report of an economic partnership agreement between Canada and Japan. Japan is the third-largest economy in the world and, as such, very important to Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party is very supportive of deepening and broadening Canadian economic relations with Japan. We share the view that closer economic relations between Canada and Japan can lead to greater prosperity for the people of both nations. We believe that pursuing an effective economic partnership agreement between our two countries is an important means to this end, and we support in principle and in many specifics the findings and recommendations contained in the report.

However, evidence received by the committee makes it clear that economic progress for Canada is dependent on more than simply signing an agreement. Economic benefits will accrue fully to Canada only if the necessary policy and structural supports are provided. Careful and skilful negotiations are essential to achieve an economic partnership agreement that preserves democratically determined policy making, recognizes the importance of both private and public interests, and deals successfully with the real issues at hand.

That is why the New Democrats have prepared a supplemental report containing some 17 additional recommendations to ensure that economic relations with Japan truly result in a better economy, environment and society.

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 19th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill C-273, an act to amend the Criminal Code (cyberbullying).

The committee has studied the bill and has recommended to the House not to proceed further with the bill.

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PETITIONS

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by a further 200 Afghani Canadians, including those in my riding of Pickering—Scarborough East, calling for the establishment of a consular and immigration office in Kabul, Afghanistan.

The petitioners note, among other things, the deteriorating conditions in the Islamabad office in Pakistan, which currently handles many of the consular and immigration requests originating in Afghanistan.

Government Orders

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from a number of people in Regina, Saskatchewan. The petition they sent to me is calling for a housing strategy for Canada.

I am very proud to present it on their behalf in support of this strategy, which the government should put in place to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, decent and quality housing.

[English]

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by many Manitobans who are asking the government to reverse its decision to close the ELA research station.

The ELA provides essential scientific knowledge for the development of our national and international policies that ensure the future health of fresh waters. A good example of that would be our very own Lake Winnipeg and the amount of concern that many residents have in regard to its future.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from a number of residents in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex calling on the House to condemn the discrimination against females occurring through sex-selective pregnancy termination. Sex selection is condemned by all national political parties, and millions of girls have been lost through sex selection. Parliament needs to condemn this worst form of discrimination against females.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ENHANCING ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE
ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed from February 12 consideration of the motion that Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak about Bill C-42. The issue of enhanced accountability for the Royal Canadian

Mounted Police is one of great interest to Canadians and one I am glad to have a chance to speak about today.

Canadians have high expectations of the RCMP. They expect the men and women of the RCMP to serve them with honour and integrity. We need them to serve us and protect us and protect public safety. We ask them to put their lives on the line to protect us.

The RCMP officer in the red uniform, the Mountie, is an iconic symbol of Canada. The force's service to Canadians is, on the whole, exemplary. It is an institution in which we take great pride. It is a symbol of Canada around the world, known to citizens of different countries all over the world.

However, recent high-profile incidents, including complaints of sexual harassment lodged by current and former female RCMP officers and, importantly, the failure to discipline officers who step outside the bounds of the law, show that there are deep underlying issues with respect to the culture of the RCMP. It is being called, in some circles, dysfunctional. It is unanimously recognized that it is a culture that needs to be changed dramatically.

Speaking to the CBC in November, RCMP Commissioner Paulson referred to the institution as "...the culture of harassment, it's the culture of misuse of authority". So much so is this the case that, regrettably, public confidence in the RCMP has been shaken. A change in the accountability framework for the RCMP is long overdue.

We witnessed on television, and in the news, the concerns and complaints of many former and current RCMP employees, mainly women, talking about their concerns with the culture and the lack of response to their concerns and complaints. These are clearly difficult issues that have had profound effects on the careers and lives of these RCMP officers and former officers.

Speaking of Bill C-42, the Minister of Public Safety has stated:

...Canadians' confidence in the RCMP has been tested over the past few years and this legislation will ensure that the RCMP is fully accountable for its actions and is open and transparent in its service to Canadians.

However, Bill C-42 does not lead to more independent and transparent oversight of the RCMP. It is simply the same body that reports non-binding recommendations to the minister, but with a new name.

Bill C-42 is the Conservative government's take on what accountability should look like, but on this side of the House, we have an entirely different perspective. We actually understand accountability, what it means and how valuable it is, and we believe in it. We find Bill C-42 wanting because of its lack of accountability.

● (1010)

Although we agree with the principle of the bill, what we find is that the bill is deeply flawed in its execution. We have a piece of legislation here that fails to recognize either the needs of RCMP officers who have experienced harassment in the workplace or the very reasonable and appropriate expectation of Canadians of civilian oversight of a police body. This is the key to improving accountability in this institution; that is, civilian oversight and transparency.

Government Orders

We voted in favour of the bill at second reading, hoping that the bill's flaws would be addressed in committee. Unfortunately, true to form, the Conservatives voted down every amendment the NDP proposed. The result is that we have missed an opportunity to fix the glaring holes in the bill that we identified at second reading, glaring holes that many witnesses at committee were able to identify and expound upon.

Some of the amendments we proposed at committee included these few things that I think members of the House should find critically important to a bill that purports to bring accountability and transparency to a policing institution. They included adding mandatory harassment training for RCMP members and specifically to lodge that requirement in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act; ensuring a full independent civilian review body to investigate complaints against the RCMP; adding a provision to create a national civilian investigative body, which would avoid police investigating police; and creating more balanced human resource policies by removing some of the more draconian and despotic powers proposed for the RCMP commissioner, and by strengthening the external review committee in cases involving possible dismissal from the force.

The Conservatives turned down all of those very reasonable proposals to amend Bill C-42. As a result, the bill fails to create a strong independent civilian oversight body for the RCMP such as—and this is important to note—the one proposed in the 2006 O'Connor inquiry or the 2007 recommendations of the Task Force on Governance and Cultural Change in the RCMP.

The proposed new civilian review and complaints commission would replace the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP and would have greater authority to conduct investigations, gather evidence and materials and compel testimony. Admittedly, that is a step in the right direction.

However, the new body would not report to Parliament, not to us, but to the commissioner and to the minister, so this is most emphatically not an independent organization. It most emphatically does not bring about the purported goals of the bill, which are to bring transparency and accountability to this institution.

As well, the commission's findings would be non-binding. Indeed, this represents a missed opportunity to have a fully independent complaints commission that would be accountable to all Canadians and not just the Minister of Public Safety.

The word “accountability” is one the government loves to use. It throws it about all the time. However, I do not think it has quite grasped the concept. In fact, it has cheapened and undermined it and simply does not value it.

● (1015)

The bill purports to bring accountability to a police institution. That is, I think, sufficient evidence that the government fundamentally does not believe in accountability and does not act in accordance with the principles of accountability. We simply do not see it in the bill.

This new body would have observer status only in investigations of serious incidents involving the RCMP. This is evidence of not grasping the concept of accountability.

The new investigative framework for these incidents proposed in Bill C-42 is really just a patchwork system. It would differ from province to province. A province would choose to appoint an investigative body or a police force or would leave the RCMP to either refer the investigation to another police force or to even conduct the investigation itself. These provisions simply allow a continuation of the current practice of police investigating police. It is clearly a problematic practice and clearly is a practice that got this institution into the issues it is in now. That, fundamentally, is one of the key things that needs to be changed under the bill, but it is not. Unfortunately, a fully independent national watchdog agency is not part of this legislation. Although independent civilian oversight is needed, the bill fails to deliver that independent civilian oversight.

Bill C-42 not only fails to deliver that oversight, it concentrates considerable power in the hands of the commissioner, who would be granted the authority to appoint and dismiss officers and to establish a system of investigation and resolution of harassment complaints. Rather than taking responsibility for addressing problems within the RCMP, the minister has decided to simply give this responsibility over to the commissioner.

The NDP feels that a more balanced approach would involve strengthening the external review committee rather than concentrating the power to dismiss officers in the hands of a single individual. However, again, all proposed amendments were rejected at committee.

RCMP officers carry out difficult and dangerous work at considerable risk to themselves to protect Canadians. Some have died in this service, and that is a profound tragedy for all Canadians and particularly for the families of those officers.

The question for us to contemplate in this House is what those RCMP police officers are owed, in return, from us, yet we have so far even failed to create an open and respectful workplace environment for all members, which all Canadian workers are entitled to. In the circumstances of the police, who put their lives on the line and from time to time tragically lose their lives in that service, it is an absolute minimum expectation in any kind of tacit contract with members of the RCMP.

However, what we have are officers who experience harassment in the workplace and are fearful about even speaking up. They are fearful of losing their jobs, in fact. Many have even left their jobs because of these circumstances in the workplace.

● (1020)

For a bill that was supposedly introduced as a response to sexual harassment complaints brought forward by female RCMP officers, Bill C-42 is strangely silent on that very specific but critically important issue. We have female officers who have been serving the Canadian public in the RCMP for almost 40 years. In that time we have failed to bring about protections from this type of abuse, which is barred under Canadian human rights codes and provincial human rights codes and which all workers across the country in all workplaces and jurisdictions are entitled to.

Government Orders

In 2013, we have a Conservative government that is missing an opportunity to use this legislation to create a workplace in which RCMP officers, like all workers, should feel safe in bringing forward harassment complaints. NDP members on the public safety committee brought forward an amendment to the bill that would make harassment training mandatory for RCMP officers. However, just like every other amendment, the Conservatives voted it down.

The RCMP needs a clear anti-harassment policy that will set the standard for behaviour in the force. This would allow for a fair disciplinary process in cases where harassment occurs. Despite the NDP's best efforts, the government has passed up this opportunity to address that issue in the bill.

Earlier this month, the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP released its report on issues of workplace harassment within the RCMP. The report had this to say:

The RCMP bears a responsibility to foster public trust to the extent possible, and when the public perceives that the organization is unwilling to adequately protect and discipline its own employees, it is difficult to see how their interactions with the police and trust in the organization would remain unaffected. It is for this reason that swift and effective action must be taken by the RCMP in terms of dealing with workplace conflict and harassment, and taken in a manner that engenders the confidence of both members and the public.

We are not seeing swift and effective action here. We are not seeing action at all.

We on this side of the House believe that trust in the RCMP, for the officers and the public, is a critically important issue. Important legislative steps can be taken to enhance trust and accountability for the RCMP and for Canadians. However, Bill C-42 falls short of this mark. It is unfortunate that in their rush to pass this bill, the Conservatives did not even take time to make sure that the new legislation ensured that the RCMP and the public were getting the transparent and independent oversight they expect and deserve.

The men and women of the RCMP provide a vital service to all Canadians. They carry out this service in difficult and often dangerous situations, putting themselves in harm's way to protect others. Bill C-42 is a missed opportunity to protect them in return. They deserve the protection of independent oversight, and they should not be afraid to speak out about harassment in the workplace. The members of the RCMP deserve to know that when one of their own breaks the rules, that person will be held accountable. Canadians need to see this accountability to enhance the trust between the police force and the members of the public, a trust that has been weakened by recent incidents.

The men and women of the RCMP deserve better than what Bill C-42 has to offer. The Canadian public deserves better. Most certainly the women who work for the RCMP have a right to a workplace free from sexual harassment, and indeed, harassment of all kinds. They need and deserve our protection. Bill C-42 fails to adequately provide that protection and should, for that reason alone, be rejected by this House.

• (1025)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his dedication to the justice committee.

As he is aware, I am a retired member of the RCMP. I spoke with two members of the RCMP yesterday who feel that this bill has been a long time coming. The RCMP has been unable to do anything with regard to discipline, because it has not been there. Since 1873, the RCMP, and specifically the commissioner, have not had the opportunity to deal with anything. Bill C-42 would provide the commissioner of the RCMP with the authority to dismiss someone if the person is found to have caused a breach under the RCMP Act and/or the Criminal Code.

Does the member think that the commissioner of the RCMP should have the authority to remove someone who breaches either the RCMP Act or the Criminal Code, or does he believe that sending it to an independent body, which will have no authority to remove the member, would be better?

• (1030)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of clarification, for the record. I am not on the justice committee. I now sit on the Standing Committee on Health.

There were a couple of issues in the question. First, the member raised a hypothetical issue of an independent review body not being able to discipline or dismiss a member. I am not prepared to address a hypothetical situation. What I am prepared to address is what the government has done to redress the circumstances that Canadians surely find offensive. Whether Canadians work for the police, in retail, or the industrial sector, it does not matter; they have an expectation that they can work in a workplace where they are protected, by law, from harassment so that they can go to work and feel safe, do their jobs and return home to their families at night. For the RCMP, these days, unfortunately, that is not the case.

We know that there have been many charges of sexual harassment raised by members and former members of the RCMP. There needs to be a transparent process for handling those charges and there needs to be accountability within that organization. It is not reasonable to lodge all of that authority with the commissioner.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Liberals agree in the sense that there needs to be and always can be more transparency and accountability. The issue of harassment and bullying in the workforce among all the different professions is, of course, of great concern.

In committee, and even at second reading, there are ideas and thoughts on how legislation could be improved. There was a lost opportunity by the government in not necessarily taking the action it should have taken to directly deal in more tangible, concrete ways with sexual harassment. I would add workplace bullying, because it takes place in significant ways. We also need to recognize that what we are really talking about is a very small percentage of RCMP personnel that actually carry out such activities. A vast majority, 95% plus, actually do fabulous jobs in terms of their dedication to the force.

I am curious to know if the member thinks there would be any benefit whatsoever in supporting the bill at this stage. Does he see any benefit from the bill?

Government Orders

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, the fundamental issue in what the legislation needs to do is change the culture of the institution. Clearly, there are issues within that culture. However, we have a government on that side that is effectively a one-trick pony. It knows only the stick. It knows only deterrence and punishment.

The provisions of the bill and the failure to bring about a process of an independent civilian oversight of the institution is a failure to get at the root of the problem, which is about changing the culture of the institution.

The notion that putting more power into the hands of the commissioner to fire individual officers in order to curb harassment would somehow change the culture of that organization shows a true lack of understanding of organizations and workplaces and shows a true lack of understanding for the pernicious effect of sexual harassment upon workers.

I am surprised that the member down the way would stand and begin his discussion with, effectively, a dismissal of the problem. The NDP and Canadians recognize that there is an issue. We know, of course, that there are a limited number of cases, but it is a critically important issue that needs to be addressed. Canadians understand that workplaces need to be safe and that workers, whether they are RCMP or others, need to feel that they can go to work and be free from sexual harassment. That means that the culture of the RCMP needs to be changed, and it needs to be changed through this legislation, which is why we welcomed the legislation being brought forward.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a mother and a member of the public, I believe we have a right to transparent police investigations. That is fundamental.

Could my colleague explain the points raised by the NDP about this bill, in particular the idea that investigations should be carried out independently so that the public can be sure that those at fault will receive due punishment and so that the atmosphere of trust and the atmosphere within the RCMP are tolerable for whistleblowers?

Could my colleague expand on that idea?

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, there is very little in the bill that would enhance that protection. The fundamental mechanism that would be used is threat. It is by lodging into the person of the commissioner, and ultimately the Minister of Public Safety, the ability to dismiss RCMP officers who have breached the workplace rules and, in some cases, have broken laws. That is all they would have. It would not go to the culture of the issue.

What we expected to see included in the bill to change the culture were such things as a mandatory harassment policy, mandatory harassment training for RCMP members and a clear, consistent, transparent, accountable investigation process.

Instead we have a patchwork of investigation processes. Province by province, they can figure out how to do this. The options would still include, very problematically, police investigating police; very problematically, it would include the RCMP investigating itself

without appropriate civilian oversight, and it would fail to bring comfort to those people in the RCMP who are concerned about having a workplace that is free from harassment in any form.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are times in debates in this House that speak to times and periods in our own lives. I was pleased to hear from the member for Kootenay—Columbia, who is an RCMP officer and who can bring to this debate a very clear perspective from inside the organization.

In my lifetime, as a young boy growing up in a town called Plaster Rock, New Brunswick, RCMP officers enforced the law in our province. My family had occasion to deal with them. When I was very young, my sister died at the hands of a person or persons unknown. It turned out to be a very ill family member.

For a long time afterwards my father talked about the investigators from the RCMP who handled that investigation. Initially he was taken in for questioning, and he talked about how professionally he, a man who was broken-hearted, who had just lost a daughter, was handled. In fact, that particular incident would affect the rest of his life. He became an alcoholic.

Again my family would interact with RCMP officers, who would pick him up from time to time, as they should and as they needed to do, but there was always a sense that they handled my father with a kind of dignity that perhaps they might not have under other circumstances. I do not know.

For a young boy growing up, my ideal was to become an RCMP officer. Well, if members look at me, I am wearing glasses and I am too doggone short to be an RCMP officer, so I had to forgo that, but I had this great interest in the RCMP, and a great respect for them, for an awful long time.

I still respect the RCMP, although they have fallen on difficult times. There is a cultural change that has happened, at least in my view, over the last number of years, relative to how they treat one another. We have heard those reports.

I recall, I believe it was in the 1970s, a group that was referred to as the "dirty tricks" squad. There was an investigation, and as I understand it, that particular group was disbanded.

The warning signs were there for some time about things that would later become almost institutionalized within the RCMP. Going back to Justice O'Connor in the Maher Arar case, Justice O'Connor made some very significant recommendations to the RCMP at that time, things that they needed to address, things that the government needed to address. That has gone wanting, as far as I am concerned.

Members will recall Bill C-38 in the last Parliament. It started to address this issue, and of course it was lost to the election cycle, as so many things are.

Going back to my friend from Kootenay—Columbia, who brings to this place a particular view of this institution and perhaps of the problems and of some solutions, I am looking forward to listening to his commentary as the day unfolds.

Government Orders

In my previous life as a union leader, one of the things that we had to deal with quite often was harassment in the workplace. We would get together with the company and work on strategies for education of the members who were involved with such things.

Within the union movement itself, I can recall that in the 1980s we worked hard dealing with our own conferences and doing our own internal work on the respect that needed to be paid to one another.

The key to it, in both of those cases, was education. I have a little saying: “With knowledge comes responsibility”. We have the knowledge today of the accusations and abuses that it is suggested have happened within the RCMP. We have enough knowledge to know that something of significance has to be done.

Our party was concerned about this bill because we felt it did not go far enough. During the committee stage, we made proposals for changes to the bill. For instance, a change that is needed is to add mandatory harassment training for RCMP officers.

● (1040)

Every single individual who works with the public and who works under the kind of pressure that these officers work under needs to have that training.

Again reflecting back on my own life, there was a time I worked for the Canadian National Railway as a signal maintainer. In Niagara Falls there was a place called Thorold Stone Road that some members here will know of. Four people were killed there, struck by trains while driving through.

My point is that day in and day out, our RCMP, our police officers and our fire departments deal with the aftermath of horrific events. Today I read in the newspaper that there was a six-car pileup in Hamilton because of the storm. Quite often the first on the scene is a police officer, who has to deal with the pressures that come from those situations. If we consider that pressure for a moment, it does not justify harassment, but in some cases it might help to explain it. It might help us to understand what officers' lives are like and the problems that they take home with them.

In any situation in the workplace, we have to give employees the tools they need to deal with those situations. In the case of the RCMP, I and our party have stressed the need for mandatory training. We also believe there should be a civilian body involved, someone at arm's length. Often we are too close to issues and problems ourselves and keep repeating the same mistakes and not addressing them in a fashion that is helpful to the situation, whereas a civilian board at arm's length would have the capacity to bring a different perspective to the situation. It is really important that the government should pause and look at this idea and give serious consideration to implementing civilian oversight.

In our view, some of the human resources policies we see are overly dramatic and perhaps even draconian in what they offer, but I am not going to dig too far into that because I do not want this to become a bashing of the RCMP. My party and I have great respect for this organization, but part of our responsibility in this place is to do the right thing to help that organization make the corrections deemed necessary by the government.

The government has made an attempt with this bill to start a process, but we do not think it has gone far enough. Witnesses at the committee made recommendations that the government did not see fit to follow through on, any more than it did for things proposed by our party at committee.

As I recall, the bill was put forward in June 2012. It referred to enhancing trust and restoring accountability to the RCMP. Accountability will need the oversight that was talked about. It will need someone at arm's length.

There are proposals in the bill to give more power to the superintendent in charge. The number one officer is going to be given authority where what I would call due diligence should come into play.

I am a great believer in people's right to be heard. People in the workplace, whether they are RCMP officers or regular workers in a plant, make mistakes and do things wrong, and there may be an arbitrary situation in which an employer says, “You're fired”. I worked for Bell Canada, which many times, in my opinion, fired people too quickly. Bell did not even listen to the story in those days. Hopefully that has changed—it has been almost 20 years since I was there—but the reality was that workers would be called on the carpet, the accusation would be made, and they were fired. Then, along with the union, they had to prepare a case to come back to correct the accusation. It is very concerning when that kind of power is vested in one manager or one superintendent in a workplace.

● (1045)

When there is a situation like with the allegations about the RCMP, which talk about a systemic problem that has had to have developed over many years, I remind members again of the pressures that these individuals live under. I want everybody to pause and think about it. It does not justify misbehaviour on the part of workers or officers, but we need to have a trail of due diligence that allows people to look at and understand the situation and help the officers retain their position and correct the behaviour with which people have problems.

● (1050)

As I look through some of the statements from our party and our view of things that could happen, we need the minister to prioritize the issue of sexual harassment. This is the part of the story that has received a lot of media attention. In my experience, the media sometimes make a flashpoint of an issue in which other underlying related or cultural issues in an organization are overlooked because the focus is drawn so heatedly on that point. Sexual harassment in any form in any place, workplace or otherwise, is certainly not acceptable and must be addressed.

However, we can look at the existence of police officers in general and the military-style training they have. Again, I refer back to 1963-1964 when I was a sapper apprentice in the Canadian army. At that time hazing took place. It was considered part of becoming a soldier. We had to be tough enough to put up with whatever happened, whatever was done. Fortunately, the environment I was in did not contain any sexual harassment, but there were other forms of it. Over time, the military dealt with that.

Government Orders

My understanding is that the world today in the military is entirely different. In the military-style training that police officers receive, the environment for that kind of culture is there, and it is just a very short distance between harassment or the buddy-buddy system where people are harassed in good-natured fun.

When women are introduced into the force, their sensibilities relative to what men consider jokes are often greatly different, in most instances. What a man may think is very humorous may tragically hurt a woman. Women live in an environment where the males in the environment have the perceived power in many instances, and they perceive themselves as not having the power to push back. If we listen to the accounts that have been made public by women officers in the RCMP, we hear that is exactly what they have felt happened. They were marginalized, troubled by what happened to them. When they went to superiors for assistance, they felt they did not receive the respect they deserved.

However, I go back to the question of whether the people they went to really had the training, understanding and development of sensitivity for what the women faced. Did they really and truly understand? It is easy to say that they neglected and ignored, but maybe they did not have a true understanding of the damage being done.

We have to go back to education and to changing the system that has evolved in such a negative way. We have to give the tools to the RCMP as a whole to begin to address this problem. We cannot fix these things from the outside. We can start doctoring and putting band-aids on it, but the culture needs to evolve itself. Again, we need sensitivity training of relationships between men and women in the workplace, and as well visible minorities, because that is another new thing within the RCMP. All of these things are added to the day-to-day pressures that these good officers live under and the culture that has sadly reached the point it has, a point where we have lawsuits and individuals going very public with their stories.

From my own experiences as a representative in the trade union movement, the last thing harassed people want to do is to make that public. In their minds, they look at it just like bullying in a schoolyard and the people will do it again, or they will lose the respect of their co-workers. All of those things need to be addressed.

● (1055)

When the bill went before the committee, the NDP went to committee in good faith. We understood that the situation had to be addressed. We cannot support the bill in its present form because it does not go far enough.

The government has the idea that power can be vested in one person, that person being the head of the RCMP. The government believes that individual will create the environment. That individual is going to need exterior help, such as experts who deal with harassment situations and training experts to assist the people in charge of individual departments. A comprehensive training cycle has to be put in place or this will not work.

It has taken many years for this to evolve. We never heard stories like this before, and it is not because people were silent. We never heard about it because it was not happening. The pressure on modern-day police forces is beyond anything.

Being a child of the fifties, I am from the days when we did not lock our houses or our cars. Police officers in those days very rarely faced somebody with a firearm. The environment we lived in was different. Again, I want to stress that I am not justifying what has happened, but stress has to be part of the equation so we can understand what is happening to these officers and the spillover effect of that evolving negative culture. It totally is out of hand.

Many women RCMP officers have come forward, and I encourage all of them to come forward. They need to understand that there are people who sincerely want to see change. We want to correct the tarnished record of the RCMP. We also want those in charge of the RCMP to have the tools they need to create and sustain a healthy workplace, and I cannot stress that enough.

Members can probably tell that I speak with a great deal of sadness and that is because, as I said earlier, I wanted to become an RCMP officer, but that was a long time ago. I am talking the fifties.

The NDP went to committee in a sincere attempt to make the bill better. We can do better for our RCMP so that we can remain proud of the people who work so hard for us and put their lives at risk, but work in a difficult environment. There is a culture in the RCMP that has been tainted, and we have to do everything we can to fix that.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of things we should recognize. The RCMP has been our national police force since 1873, and on August 30 of this year it will have existed for 140 years. Another thing to recognize is that on September 23, 1974, the first female troop went through Depot, and since that time it has evolved from full 32 women troops down to integrated troops to a whole bunch of things. I do agree that the RCMP needs to recognize that transformation.

I hear what the opposition is saying, but the unfortunate part of the entire process is that the RCMP falls under its own federal statute, which is the RCMP Act. No one in the House can change that unless we want to remove the RCMP Act. As a result of that, the commissioner, and only the commissioner, has the authority to deal with things within the RCMP Act. Whether it be implementing programs or removing someone from the force or a number of things, they fall under the RCMP Act.

Recognizing that the commissioner is the totality of the RCMP Act, would my colleague agree that the commissioner is the one who needs to implement the programs that need to be brought forward to recognize the issues that the RCMP has, and whether we like it or not, the commissioner is the only person who can provide discipline to RCMP members?

● (1100)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Kootenay—Columbia for his service prior to coming here. Within the question he just put to me, I hear the sense of his loyalty, something I greatly respect.

Government Orders

In the context of vesting the power with the commissioner, he will have the responsibility of implementing whatever we do, but we can alter the RCMP Act. We can alter the regulations that are part of the act, which would give direction to the commissioner and other folks in the RCMP who would deal with this situation.

I recall that in 1974 women first took part in the RCMP. I was just beginning my career in the labour movement and I remember how proud my sisters at Bell Canada were of the fact that women were taking their places.

Women's service in the RCMP or in the military has evolved over the last 30 or 35 years in a way most people did not think was possible. The environment has changed. Equipment within the military and the RCMP has changed. However, it takes people with exceptional skills to deal with that life, not only during the day but when they go home.

As I said in my speech, education is the key to this situation: education of the folks who have created the problem, because obviously there is a place they have to go; education for the folks who are on the receiving end, with assistance, help, peer counselling; and the HR people who administer whatever the commissioner brings forward.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I posed a question earlier, the member asked where the Liberal Party might be on this. It is important for us to recognize that whether it is the RCMP or the workforce in general, sexual harassment or bullying in the workplace is not acceptable. We need to address that issue head-on.

We have to recognize that the Conservatives, having a majority government, are not very sympathetic to improving legislation. We see that at committee when an opposition member attempts to bring forward amendments.

There is no doubt that the government could have done more to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace with regard to RCMP. There is a lost opportunity there.

The commissioner's increased capacity to deal with disciplinary action we thought, in principle, was necessary. Does the hon. member believe there is any necessity to increase the capacity of the commissioner to take disciplinary action? Does he believe there is any need for that whatsoever?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, it is not often I am almost at a loss for words in this place, but this is one of them. The Liberal Party of Canada was the governing party for many years and lost the opportunity to address this problem.

At the committee our party made 18 proposals for amendments and his party made zero. The Liberals are in the House saying how things should be addressed when they were not even prepared to do their part in committee. I find that astounding.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for his excellent and very heartfelt speech to the House about the official opposition's position on Bill C-42. It was a fine

tribute to our national policy, but especially to the men and women who serve on our national police force. It was a good way to recognize the incredible and hard work this police force does every day.

My colleague spoke about the training and the tools the RCMP needs to combat various problems, including sexual harassment. I found that interesting because one of the amendments we proposed in committee, after having various discussions with witnesses who appeared before the committee, would have required mandatory harassment training for all RCMP members. Unfortunately, this amendment was not adopted in committee, which is very sad.

What are my colleague's thoughts on the fact that this amendment was not adopted and the official opposition tried to make harassment training mandatory?

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that question, because in my opinion, that is the most significant failure with respect to the bill going forward. We have to educate people. With knowledge comes responsibility.

Often people in the workplace, not just in the RCMP, but in general, do things with a sense of humour that they believe justifies what they do. They do not give a lot of consideration to the feelings and the fears of the people on the receiving end.

I recall a time, around 1966, when I worked for the railway, in a machine shop. There was a man there who was highly nervous. When people went by, they would give him a little tap, and he would jump. They had him so shell-shocked, he could not talk. If someone said boo, he would literally jump and take two steps away from him or her. The people in that workshop thought it was wonderfully humorous. That man was fragile and close to having a breakdown.

If we view that in the context of sexual harassment, we put it in a place where we have to talk about it. We have to understand that this so-called sense of humour is a testing vehicle for people. If they can do that to her, what else is available? It could be an exercise in power if it is done by a superior. In some instances in the RCMP, it was a superior who did these things. It humiliates the woman. It embarrasses and troubles her. It devalues her in front of her co-workers in a fashion that is totally unacceptable.

The only answer is to go back to those individuals who are doing it to determine whether they are truly bad people. They have established that they are people of trust by becoming RCMP officers and completing the training. In my opinion, the only answer to that is what you raised, which is to educate those people and provide corrective action that would bring them back where they belong.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would point out to the member that he should address all of his comments to the Chair, not to individual members of the House.

[*Translation*]

Before I give the floor to the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas, I would like to inform the House that we will now go to 10-minute speeches and five-minute periods for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

Government Orders

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to follow a speech like the one given by the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

He spoke about his own personal experiences, and I think that, in so doing, he attacked the very heart of this bill. We are talking about the impact that this can have on individuals and what can happen to people who have problems in the workplace, particularly those involving sexual harassment.

When a debate is held on this type of issue, it is very important to point out that criticizing those who put their heart and soul into serving their community, for example police or RCMP officers, will not advance the debate.

When we talk about matters pertaining to National Defence, Veterans Affairs or the RCMP, our opinions are often criticized and simplistic arguments are often made. Some would say that it is only natural for us to say such things since we do not support our police officers or our armed forces. It is very important to point out that nothing could be further from the truth.

Contrary to what the Conservatives believe, when we engage in a debate and have the courage to take a stand and say that the bill does not go far enough, it is because we have a great deal of respect for the work that is done and we think that it is important to implement measures that will allow RCMP officers to operate in a healthy work environment and that will improve the working relationship between the police and the people they have the duty to serve and protect.

Of course, we will oppose the bill at third reading. As always, we optimistically tried to make amendments to the bill based on the testimony given in committee, but as always, our attempts were in vain.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the work done by the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, our public safety critic, and the hon. member for Alfred-Pellan, the deputy critic. They certainly worked very hard to put forward these amendments.

I want to point out that these amendments were not based on some radical ideology, as the government claims. They were based on testimony from experts in committee. These experts have been involved with this issue for a very long time. It is not a new thing.

The first version of this bill, Bill C-38, was introduced during the 40th Parliament. It is not to be confused with the omnibus Bill C-38, which was introduced last spring.

The amendments came out of the testimony, but they were unfortunately all rejected, as usual. I think that is very disappointing. When we hear the points raised by witnesses and propose changes that do not necessarily change the spirit of the bill, but instead help make the measures in it more precise, effective and transparent, I think that the government should be more receptive to the proposed amendments. However, true to form, the government rejected all of the amendments outright.

The member who spoke before me talked about his experience with unions. With respect to the harassment within the RCMP, it is the only police force in Canada that does not have a collective agreement.

People will say that other measures will be put in place to ensure that workers' rights are respected. They are workers, because they work for us. However, when there are no appropriate measures in place, it becomes hard to defend their rights in cases of harassment. This is not the only workplace where harassment is a problem, but as my colleague pointed out, harassment is quite prevalent.

• (1110)

RCMP members have to deal with certain cases and, as one may well imagine, with a very heavy psychological burden in some situations. Sometimes that means that relations between the various individuals involved may be tense and negative behaviour may result. When you take all that into consideration, you realize how important it is to establish ways to manage those problems more effectively.

Continuing on the subject of harassment, when we say sexual harassment, we are talking about an issue that mainly affects women. That may seem to be a prejudicial view, but it is unfortunately true. From the standpoint of gender equality, it is even more important to address the problem of harassment when you want to encourage women to consider taking on any role in our society.

Government members will no doubt tell us that this bill would put in place a system that will solve that problem. We do not believe that is the case, particularly given the structure that would be introduced to do so. That is really our biggest concern in relation to this bill.

To put the matter simply, the government wants the police to investigate the police and the commission to be accountable to the minister, not to Parliament. The lack of political will that this minister has shown for some time now is becoming a problem. After all, when discretionary or decision-making authority lies solely in the hands of one minister, we have to rely on his political will, and he seems to have no such will at the present time.

On the contrary, if we asked the commission to report directly to Parliament, there would be more transparency, more answers and a structure more accountable to the public, which the RCMP is supposed to serve. That would also be good for people on the force, RCMP members, particularly those who are victims of harassment.

To put it simply once again, when we talk about the police investigating the police, this is really the problem that emerged from Justice O'Connor's report in the Maher Arar case. I am very interested in that case. At the risk of making myself seem very young, I was just a student when that report was issued in 2006, but I was very much involved and very interested in politics and current affairs, and I supported various causes.

I remember seeing the report at the time. One of the issues of great interest to me was the way in which our police forces and our armed forces acted, even though we were still in the post-September 11 phase five years after the fact. People in Canada, the United States and Europe were trying to adjust to this new reality as a society and give our police forces powers while protecting citizens' rights.

Government Orders

That report was an attempt to balance those two realities. However, this bill does not take its recommendations into account. Justice O'Connor recommended establishing an independent commission that would actually have been able to go further in changing the RCMP's culture and solving the harassment problem in particular.

We in the NDP want to see more concrete measures. That is why we oppose this bill, which is far too flawed. We want something much more concrete, and these are precisely the kinds of measures we will put in place in 2015 if we have the opportunity to form the government, in order to change this culture, protect RCMP members and ensure there is a better relationship between them and our communities.

I await your questions and comments.

•(1115)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the last number of years we have seen a huge increase in the need to deal with this issue. One of the reasons for that was several allegations of sexual harassment. However, it was in May of 2012 that the RCMP commissioner, in a public letter, talked about the need for legislation. The idea behind it is that the commissioner has to have some sort of capacity to take disciplinary action. Although this legislation falls short in being able to deal with a number of different issues, it at least addresses in part what the commissioner was calling for and has been calling for.

My question to the member is this: does he not believe we should be respecting, at least in part, RCMP Commissioner Paulson saying in his letter dated May 2012 that we need to have something? Does he not agree that this bill does at least something with regard to providing some form of disciplinary action, that something is better than nothing and, in that sense, that it is better for us to pass the bill in the hope that we will be able to bring in additional legislation in the future?

•(1120)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question.

The commissioner expressed his opinion, but despite the respect he deserves for the important work he does, he is just one piece of the puzzle. During my speech, I pointed out that, according to testimony heard in committee, this bill has significant flaws.

In response to the member's question I would say that we often support a bill if it is a step in the right direction. The NDP has often supported bills even though our amendments were rejected and the government could have gone much further or even taken an entirely different tack. The difference here is that there are very significant systemic problems. The bill has far too many flaws for us to be able to support it in its present form.

If there were fewer flaws, we would be more willing to support it. But the issues are far too serious. They were clearly identified in committee. When we are dealing with police forces and sensitive issues, as in the recommendations in the O'Connor report, it is very important that we implement far more tangible and fair measures.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on his wonderful speech. Once again, he is an inspiration when it comes to speaking from the heart and representing his constituents' opinions.

I could not help but think of some of my constituents who are part of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and who are very disappointed with this bill. They are wondering when we will evolve.

The women who were victims of harassment must be bitterly disappointed in the government's lack of intervention and its inaction with this bill. What does my colleague think?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, since it gives me an opportunity to talk about something I neglected to mention in my speech.

There are RCMP members living in my riding and the surrounding ridings, and that is exactly what they are feeling. I pointed that out because this is not an attack against individuals, who do an excellent job within the RCMP. This is about combatting the attitudes that are institutionalized within this police force.

I believe that they want a change. When structures like the complaints system are inadequate and dated people want to see changes. That is where our role as legislators becomes very important. That is why we are so disappointed that there are so many flaws in this bill. That is also why we are opposed to it.

Furthermore, we would be happy to propose something concrete and much better to bring about real results. We will certainly have the opportunity to do so soon.

•(1125)

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this place on behalf of the residents of Davenport, in the great city of Toronto, for whom this issue is of great concern and of great interest. The idea of, in particular, a civilian oversight of the RCMP and a more rigorous accounting of its operations is something that certainly the people in my riding and the people in Toronto are very much concerned about, particularly in light of events that occurred in Toronto in June 2010. I am referring to the G20 conference and the events that led to essentially the biggest mass arrest in Canadian history, for which the RCMP was the lead law enforcement agency.

We note that Bill C-42 does seek to reform the RCMP public complaints commission by establishing a new complaints commission for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and implementing a new framework to handle serious incidents involving the members.

The problem, though, is that while the name may change, the powers would not really change. It looks remarkably like the current RCMP public complaints commission, especially in that it would not be a fully independent commission reporting to the House of Commons. Instead, it would continue to report to the Minister of Public Safety.

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We on this side of the House have great concerns about that because we have concerns about the minister himself. We cannot forget that this is the same minister who extolled and hectored and lectured Canadians, saying that if Canadians did not stand with him and his flawed online piracy bill then they were standing with pedophiles—an outrageous and offensive comment that earned the scorn, the rightful scorn, of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

The changes in the bill would essentially mean that any major investigation would be overseen by the minister himself, who ultimately would be the final arbiter of these investigations.

As well, the new commission would have serious restrictions on its ability to undertake independent investigations, and its findings would be presented only in the form of non-binding recommendations to the commissioner and the Minister of Public Safety. These restrictions on the independence of the new commission would be a major issue for us.

As we have done on many bills that have passed through this House, we put forth many measured amendments to the bill, ones that would actually have beefed up the idea of civilian oversight and made it independent. Once again, the government ignored every single one of our recommendations and amendments.

This is particularly concerning in light of the 2006 report of Justice O'Connor of the O'Connor inquiry into the actions of Canadian officials in relation to Maher Arar, which called for the RCMP watchdog to be structured along the lines of the Security Intelligence Review Committee, which monitors CSIS. It would have the right to audit all RCMP files and activities and the power to subpoena related documents and compel testimony from any federal, provincial, municipal or private sector person or entity.

The present RCMP public complaints commission does not have review powers to ensure, systematically, that the RCMP's national security activities are conducted in accordance with the law and with respect for rights and freedoms.

This issue of civilian oversight and the independence of an agency that would oversee complaints is an important one. It is an important one for civil society. It is an important one for democracy.

● (1130)

I think it is important to note, as many of my NDP colleagues have during this debate, that we have enormous respect for officers in the RCMP. We understand that they are oftentimes working in extremely difficult conditions and situations, often chaotic, often situations where they have to make split-second decisions, quick decisions.

We understand that sometimes this is an incredibly difficult and pressure-filled job that we as Canadians ask them to do on our behalf, which is all the more reason why it is so important that we create and then maintain an independent oversight body for the RCMP. This is exactly what we had recommended.

We have seen some of the reactions from various stakeholders in Canada around this bill. We would also note that the former chair of the commission for public complaints, Paul Kennedy, commenting on the last iteration of this bill, Bill C-38—and not a lot in terms of this part of the bill has changed—said that the legislation is riddled with loopholes and does not meet Mr. O'Connor's standards.

The law would allow the Minister of Public Safety to make regulations concerning the watchdog's access to privileged information, such as classified intelligence or material about clandestine operations. It also permits the RCMP commissioner to deny the watchdog access to such information. The new law also lacks time limits for RCMP to respond to the commission's interim reports.

Many people may view this debate as a bit inside the bubble, as “inside baseball”. However, in fact, when we get down to the street level and go back to June 2010 and we think about what happened on the streets of my city, the biggest city in the country, the economic engine of this country, the cultural centre of Canada, we see what actually happened, especially right at the corner of Queen and Spadina.

Hundreds and hundreds of regular folks, most of whom lived in the neighbourhood, were kettled, or boxed in, in the rain, for several hours as the police pursued a tactic known as kettling. One of the many problems with what happened that night is that kettling is something the RCMP is not supposed to do. It is not part of their regulations. It is not part of their code, and they did participate.

A report into the RCMP's activities at the G20 was delivered in May 2012. It itemized, in rather minute detail, some of the issues that occurred that night. It also very clearly states that kettling was not part of the RCMP's mandate, and yet officers pursued it.

This is an example of why we need an independent civilian oversight body to build the public trust. I have to say that the events of the G20 severely damaged the public trust in our law enforcement agencies to both keep the peace and protect people who are peacefully coming together and expressing their democratic right of free speech.

● (1135)

I would like to end my comments there. I welcome any questions.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one thing that is really important, and we have stressed it, is for Canadians to know that we support the RCMP. The NDP tried to move some amendments so that we could actually support the bill. That is why, at second reading, we supported the bill going to committee. At committee, we proposed a lot of amendments and tried to work with the government to bring them forward.

Could my colleague comment on the reaction to the amendments we brought forward and how difficult it is, if we want to make a bill better, to work with the government? We know that none of the amendments were accepted. Could my colleague speak to that?

Government Orders

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, this is becoming a broken record in this place. It is a broken record that is dramatically out of tune. It is out of tune with Canadians. It is out of tune with the idea that Canadians elect parliamentarians to come and work together, to the best of their abilities, to craft the kind of legislation that is the best legislation we can come up with. Instead, what happens too often here is that partisan games and politics are played that supersede sound public policy. It has happened constantly. It is at play right now as we debate the bill. None of the amendments, not a single one the NDP presented on the bill, was accepted or considered by the government.

Occasionally the government will accept amendments from the Senate. Instead of listening to elected representatives and the wise counsel they can bring to a debate, it will go to the other place, get together with its various campaign buddies and hash out some amendments there. That is not the way Canadians expect this place to work, and that certainly is not the way the NDP, the official opposition, works.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I served in the RCMP for over 18 years. The opposition talked about kettling and public peace. What is it about public safety that is not in order, especially in Toronto? What police officers do is make sure that no one gets hurt. Individuals attending these protests or rallies or demonstrations then put other innocent people at risk. Having had to serve on the front lines with the RCMP and also having participated in issues like this and having actually been with the tactical troops, listening to an individual who has no clue, a downtown suburban person, does not make sense.

There are poor performers in the RCMP. Having been a sergeant in the RCMP and having had to administer the RCMP Act and do the investigations on those individuals, I know that the RCMP is looking for a tangible, meaningful way to get rid of the RCMP troublemakers who are tarnishing the image of the RCMP.

What I am asking my colleague, yes or no, is whether he is going to support the bill to get rid of the poor performers in the RCMP. This is what I had to investigate as a member of the RCMP.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, why do we not first start by getting rid of the poor performers in the Senate? Why do we not start there?

The member opposite starts talking about the fact that if someone lives in an urban or suburban part of Canada, one has no idea what one is talking about as it pertains to public safety. This is an outrageous comment from the member opposite. It really shows how this party—

• (1140)

The Deputy Speaker: Is the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River rising on a point of order?

Mr. Rob Clarke: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I asked a question, and I want that question answered.

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. We have about 20 seconds.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I think this is an important point to bring up about the G20. It spells it out in the report. I am happy to give this report to my friend across the way. It also shows that when

the RCMP participated in the kettling at Queen and Spadina, they actually arrested five people, two of whom were undercover police officers. I think urban people in Canada are very engaged with this issue. You have just insulted a wide swath of the Canadian population.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, could I direct all members of the House to direct their comments to the Chair and not to each other or other members of the House?

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on days like today it is discouraging to listen to what our adversaries opposite have to say. That just cannot be.

I am very disappointed, but not surprised by this government's approach, which is unproductive, indifferent and unfocused and whose failings have been laid bare. Today, the government is on the defensive because of its indifference. It is very evident this morning. Amendments put forward by the NDP included mandatory harassment training for RCMP members, a civilian body to investigate complaints against the RCMP, and an independent review body to avoid police investigating police. All these amendments were very reasonable and in keeping with what the many witnesses said. All these amendments were rejected.

Contrary to the recommendations in the O'Connor report on the Maher Arar case and the many witnesses who appeared before the committee, the government rejected the amendments and continues to favour an internal, perhaps even arbitrary, approach at the RCMP, as we would unfortunately expect, rather than an independent, external and transparent approach.

Unfortunately, Bill C-42 will not resolve the very serious problems that will continue to plague the RCMP. In the meantime, many people will suffer. We are obviously thinking of the women who experience sexual harassment.

Therefore, it is with great regret that we must oppose this bill for all the reasons mentioned and especially because of the lack of transparency and the government's blinkered approach to official opposition amendments.

The people in my riding of Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher sometimes ask me whether I am fed up with Conservatives' behaviour. Of course we are fed up. We cannot take any more of this closed-mindedness, this sense of divine authority and omniscience, the way the Conservatives do not want to listen to and consider other points of view, the bad faith. We are fed up with how the Conservatives always make their ideological agenda a priority, but especially with how, particularly lately, they are always using the buzzword "transparency" and talking about accountability when they are the champions of silence, the champions of working behind closed doors.

I cannot help but see something that is very suspicious in the Conservatives' attitude. What are they hiding by always calling for transparency and officially talking about accountability, when they have an agenda that they will never reveal?

Government Orders

This is very disappointing for us, particularly for those of my colleagues who have been asking for reforms for a long time, such as the member who is sitting right beside me. It seems that we are still working on the issue of harassment within the RCMP. The NDP has been asking the government for ages to take care of this situation, which affects many people, particularly women. It is a governance problem within the RCMP, a problem with the internal culture.

The bill that the government put forward is not a solution at all. We were hoping for a proactive approach and a strategy to prevent these regrettable situations from happening again, but unfortunately, the outcome we are seeing today is a dry, disciplinary, impersonal and ill-considered bill in which the word harassment appears only once. It is unbelievable. As I was saying earlier, although the amendments we proposed in committee were very positive, they were rejected, and the opinions of many witnesses and experts were ignored.

Once again, as is often the case, the Conservatives took a serious, systemic problem affecting the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and addressed it in a simplistic and—quite frankly—lazy manner. What is needed today to change the RCMP and reassure the public is a major change to the culture of this organization, something that this bill does not allow for. On the contrary, in a few years, we will once again be faced with the same problem because harassment will continue to be a serious problem within the organization. This bill does not reassure Canadians that their formal complaints will be examined with the attention they deserve.

Robert Paulson, Commissioner of the RCMP, has repeatedly said that a cultural change is needed. He said the following before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women:

It's the culture of the organization that has not kept pace... We haven't been able to change our practices and our policies...

[T]he problem is bigger than simply the sexual harassment.

David Brown, who led a working group on the issue in 2007 at the request of the federal government, also said the same thing. The name of that group was the Task Force on Governance and Cultural Change in the RCMP. It could not be clearer than that.

● (1145)

And yet rather than a real change of culture on the inside and outside, through unambiguous leadership and listening on the part of the minister's office, we have been treated instead to a sort of "light reform", which ultimately will do nothing to solve the fundamental problems we have been raising in the House for several months now, if not several years. It will do nothing to change the problems that have brought us to where we are and that this bill is supposedly intended to solve.

The system proposed in this bill for investigating the police completely fails to meet the test of logic and common sense. Bill C-38, which was cloned to produce the bill that is before us today, had provided that the RCMP would investigate itself in certain cases.

The strange structure we are presented with in this bill provides that in the case of serious incidents involving the RCMP—deaths and serious injuries—the provinces will step in and assign the investigation to an investigative body or police service. Otherwise, the RCMP may assign the investigation to another police service,

and if that option is not available, the RCMP will carry out the investigation itself.

This means that the job of overseeing the RCMP is assigned in the first instance to provincial bodies, in spite of the fact that such bodies exist in only four provinces: British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Ultimately, and unfortunately, oversight of the RCMP is too often shifted to the provinces. This amounts to the federal government abdicating its responsibility and once again downloading the federal government's costs onto the provinces.

I thought that the Conservatives wanted to reduce the size of government, since they told us they did, but that cannot mean that responsibility for the oversight of federal institutions has to be shifted to the provinces.

We are opposed to this Byzantine system because it can be simpler and more effective. We tried to do this through an amendment in committee, proposing that a national, independent civilian group be created that would systematically handle this and report to Parliament. Obviously, that amendment was rejected. We have to put an end to this system of the police investigating the police. Even the mayors of some municipalities are opposed to it.

We made proposals here and in committee to that effect. Our amendments and the recommendations from reports, task forces, commissions and witnesses have been waved off by a government that is running headlong toward disaster. Its stubborn insistence on doing nothing of any real effect is astounding, and we find it particularly tiresome.

The bill before us is also an abdication of the minister's responsibilities. The proposal to significantly increase the powers of the commissioner of the RCMP amounts to running toward the nearest exit; it is the easy solution.

This is another abdication: the government should have led the charge against harassment inside the RCMP with a vigorous reform. Instead it is choosing to set up and endorse a system that massively increases the commissioner's powers, in the hope that this will change something.

All the witnesses and experts who are familiar with this issue say that we do not need more powers concentrated in the hands of a single person and that what we really need is a new system of transparency and independent oversight.

The Task Force on Governance and Cultural Change in the RCMP, which the government created in 2007, had another idea in mind. It proposed reforms that would bring the RCMP into line with the internal governance methods and structures used in civilian bodies, with a board of management that would oversee and could challenge decisions of the commissioner, that would require accountability, that could hear complaints from employees and that would exist within a transparent structure.

Unfortunately, what the government is proposing is, once again, the complete opposite. Clearly, the solution in this bill, which is to put more powers than ever in the hands of a single person, when what is needed is to overcome an organizational problem, will solve nothing. In fact, it may well create more internal problems and discontent.

Government Orders

This is a clash between two different philosophies. When the Conservatives are faced with a complex problem, they propose more powers in the hands of a single person, more order, more hierarchy, more unchallengeable or arbitrary decisions and more discipline. When we look at the same problem, we call for a system that is structured, transparent, well thought-out and systematic and that will act in the public interest and respect the rights of RCMP members, certainly, but most importantly the rights of the public.

In this bill, what the Conservatives are proposing is unprecedented: an enormous reform that will replace the existing commission that examines complaints against the RCMP and reports its findings to the minister with a commission that will examine complaints against the RCMP and report its findings to the minister. That is very impressive.

In conclusion, the people in my riding are not taken in by this kind of obsession with the rhetoric of transparency and accountability, and they hope that we are going to oppose this sham as long as we can.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the member does not understand is that the system his party is proposing cannot be integrated into the RCMP Act. It just cannot be done. The power needs to be implemented within the RCMP Act first, in relation to the Commissioner of the RCMP.

To say that only the Commissioner of the RCMP would hand out all or any punishment or any other types of things is simply incorrect. The Commissioner of the RCMP would automatically provide options for deputy commissioners, assistant commissioners, chief superintendents, superintendents and anyone of commission rank. They could also provide guidance or discipline to members across this great country.

The RCMP has to fix itself from within, because since 1873 we as parliamentarians have done it that way. We created the RCMP Act. Therefore, I believe that Bill C-42 goes in the right direction.

My question to the hon. member is this: does he believe that not supporting Bill C-42 would solve anything?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I used to work in communications and media relations, so I can tell the Conservatives that this is what I see as their biggest problem. They march in authoritatively with their solutions, as though they had divine power and knew everything. They refuse to listen to suggestions from others and disregard what witnesses have to say. That is what is most pathetic.

We cannot support a government that asks for our trust, when history has shown that it has duped us on many occasions.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to share with the House and the member who was speaking a comment from Paul Kennedy, who, as the former commissioner for

the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP, has all the credentials in the world to make comment on this bill.

He recently wrote:

The Government, at the cost of many millions of dollars, established a major initiative in the form of the O'Connor Inquiry to specifically provide policy recommendations upon which a new legislative regime of civilian review would be based. Bill C-42 presumably is a response to those recommendations. Having appeared as a witness before that Inquiry I am familiar with its key recommendations and can attest to the fact that Bill C-42 falls well short of the standard of review set by Justice O'Connor. It will serve neither the needs of Canadians nor the RCMP.

I am profoundly disappointed that a bill that purports to improve things for the RCMP falls so far short in the view of this expert. I ask my friend from Longueuil for his comments.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands for her question.

It is very sad to see an experienced and eloquent person, like the witness she quoted, be completely ignored. That is exactly what the NDP is referring to when we say that the government does not listen, and the Green Party clearly agrees.

These people have their agenda and a one-track mind. We cannot support a bill like this because it is too little too late.

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, RCMP Commissioner Paulson indicated in an open letter in May 2012 that the government needs to enhance the powers of the commissioner in order to take disciplinary action and cited issues such as sexual harassment.

The Liberal Party believes that we need to deal with this.

My question to the member is this: does he believe that passing Bill C-42 would make the current law weaker?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I am not an expert on police forces, but like many of my colleagues, I have a lot of respect for the work they do.

These people live under huge amounts of stress. It exists everywhere, but if this bill does not properly address the unbelievable stress caused by sexual harassment, we might as well take it back to the drawing board and address real problems.

These people, who have complicated jobs and put their lives at risk on the front lines to protect us, need to feel that we understand their reality and should not feel that we are denigrating it.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to Bill C-42 at third reading. It is an important area of public policy that needs to be addressed by the House. Unfortunately it is our conclusion that it has not been addressed properly by the House, because the bill would not do what it is expected to do.

Government Orders

As previous speakers have said, the RCMP is a storied institution in Canada. As the member for Kootenay—Columbia said, it goes back to 1873. It has not always been a perfect institution, and we all know that. It has been open to criticism from time to time in its history for some of the uses to which it was put by various governments.

When I started practising law, the RCMP was regarded as the senior police force in the country. Police forces around the country looked up to the RCMP for standards and training and discipline and proper procedures.

Of late, unfortunately, people have become disconcerted with the way the RCMP has been able to handle matters, particularly those of an internal nature. We have heard complaints for a number of years about harassment, particularly the harassment of women. There are outstanding lawsuits by 200 women complaining about harassment within the force and the apparent inability of the force to deal with that issue. As a result of some constant prodding by the NDP in the House, legislative action was deemed necessary and taken. Unfortunately, the bill does not address the kinds of issues that caused the need for this legislation to take place.

We have talked about the need for a more respectful force in terms of having a proper method to deal with sexual harassment and a proper response to the concern about that harassment, the need for a broader and more balanced human resource policy and the removal of some of the more draconian powers that are proposed for the RCMP commissioner. None of these were accepted in committee.

The government's response to these problems is to create a more powerful hierarchy within the RCMP and to give the commissioner more draconian powers than ever. As the member for Kootenay—Columbia said, the commissioner is going to delegate all of these powers to various deputy commissioners and others. Instead of having a more balanced approach whereby people would have a right to have their grievances dealt with and issues responded to, we are going to have a top-down hierarchy, which will not inspire confidence but create more of a paramilitary organization. That is an anachronism when it comes to modern policing in Canada.

Obviously there needs to be discipline within a police force, and all of that should take place, but when it comes to matters such as complaints about sexual harassment, there has to be a safe place for people to go. People have to know that these matters will be dealt with. They should have a clear expectation that the professional police officers throughout the force, from the bottom to the top, are well aware of and sensitive to what sexual harassment is and what it can do. Previous speakers have outlined some of the particular ways in which that should happen.

Through some 18 amendments at committee stage, we talked about what could be done to meet some of these needs. All of these amendments were rejected by the government. These amendments included adding mandatory harassment training for RCMP members, and specifically adding those measures to the RCMP Act itself, so that it would be clear that this was a response to the problem. We wanted to ensure that there would be a fully independent civilian body that would be able to review and investigate complaints against the RCMP.

● (1200)

This is important. The model that was proposed was a model like SIRC, which oversees CSIS. It is independent, with decision-making power, not just the recommendation power in the bill. That was provided for as well. It was turned down by the government.

Third, we wanted to add a provision creating a national civilian investigative body. We still have the situation of the RCMP being able to investigate itself when complaints are made of improper behaviour by police officers. That is not right. There is an elaborate procedure in place that maybe the provinces would undertake something first and if not, then the RCMP would do it and potentially there would be some civilian role in that, but that is not good enough. Some of the provinces do not have the capability of an independent review. Also, there are three territories that do not have an independent police force, and the RCMP does the work there. It is going to be a situation of RCMP officers investigating cases involving their own activities.

The fourth one, which I just talked about, was to have a more balanced human resources policy, removing some of the powers that were proposed for the RCMP commissioner and strengthening the external review committee so cases involving possible dismissal from the force could have an outside review. Now the situation is that the final authority is being given to the RCMP commissioner, with no possibility of appeal or independent review. That is not right.

One of the complaints about that was made by the president of the Canadian Police Association, Mr. Tom Stamatakis, who stated, "Without any additional, and most importantly, independent avenue for appeal, I would suggest there is a possibility that RCMP members could lose faith in the impartiality of a process against them, particularly in situations in which the commissioner has delegated his authority for discipline". The contrast to that would be the example in Ontario, where a police officer subject to a disciplinary process has the right to appeal that decision against an independent civilian police commission.

These two go hand in hand. Having a proper policy and proper disciplinary process, but also an expectation by police officers themselves that the process is fair and impartial would allow for the cultural change that is required to take place. As the commissioner said, cultural change is required, but legislation cannot bring about all of the cultural change. In fact, he said that the culture of the organization had not kept pace. Commissioner Paulson stated:

—the problem is bigger than simply the sexual harassment. It is the idea of harassment. The idea that we have a hierarchical organization overseeing men and women who have extraordinary powers in relation to their fellow citizens, which requires a fair degree of discipline.

It is the hierarchical system that he says has been part of the problem. Instead of making mandatory sexual harassment training part of the solution, instead of having a more balanced approach in terms of management and perhaps a board of managers to oversee this, what we have done is strengthened the hierarchical system. We have not found a solution to the problem that caused and brought about the need for legislation. Instead of solving the problem, this legislation has actually made it worse.

Government Orders

The member for Kootenay—Columbia asked why members would not vote in favour of it since, in part, it went in the right direction. In fact, we think voting in favour of this bill would not provide a solution at all.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to congratulate the member for St. John's East on his speech. I must say that it is always a pleasure to listen to his fine analysis and his vast legal expertise as he picks apart bills that are brought before us.

I cannot help but draw a parallel between Bill C-15, which we are currently studying in the Standing Committee on National Defence, and the fact that the Conservatives refuse to hand more power over to people outside the system. That is what is happening with National Defence and military justice, and it is also what is happening here with regard to giving people outside the RCMP more opportunity to see what is going on within the system.

I would like to hear his thoughts on that parallel. Does he see a pattern in the Conservative government's actions?

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his work on the defence committee.

Yes, we are going through a similar process as we went through on Bill C-42, for which the NDP brought forward a significant number of amendments. We are not through all of them yet, but so far the government has accepted none of the amendments we proposed, and that is the case here.

If there is a problem that requires a solution, legislation is brought forward. If it is inadequate and we provided means to address the problem for which the legislation was created in the first place, we would expect the co-operation that reasonable members of Parliament would address to an issue.

However, it appears the Conservatives say that it is their bill and they will not make any changes. They do not care what arguments are made and what support there is for them logically and from people who are experts in the field. They will continue to do what they want. This seems to be what happened here as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is the official opposition's national defence critic. I know that he is aware of the issue of sexual harassment in the armed forces, which is another government institution. I served in the armed forces. During my recruit course, I had sexual harassment training sessions, and they were given every year.

Does my colleague believe that they could have discussed this issue with other federal departments that have taken measures to prevent sexual harassment? Does he find it acceptable that the issue is not addressed in this bill, even though we know that in many cases it is very important to have women who are able to intervene and who are capable of doing the work of intervening in certain situations?

I would like to hear him speak some more and perhaps compare what he knows about sexual harassment at National Defence with the RCMP.

• (1210)

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, there have been complaints in respect to both organizations, but what is comparable between the military and the RCMP is that we have hierarchical organizations in which the people who are senior in rank have an enormous amount of power over individuals below that rank. Therefore, in order to counter that, the culture has to have a very strong and robust anti-harassment policy and clear ways of dealing with it.

Neither in the bill nor anywhere else has the Minister of Public Safety mandated the adoption of clear anti-harassment policies within the RCMP containing specific standards for behaviour and specific criteria for evaluating the performance of employees. We need that kind of commitment from the government if the RCMP is to have the tools to deal with that, and the support and ability for discipline to take place and a fair process to deal with it. What is lacking is leadership by the government.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is important to note certain statistics, because sometimes, in order to understand why a bill has been introduced in the House, we have to understand what led up to it.

A number of people in the House have already spoken, but it is very important to remember that more than 200 women who are now employed or who were employed by the RCMP have joined Constable Janet Merlo to bring a class action suit against the RCMP for sexual harassment.

This has caused quite a stir in Canadian society, and justifiably so. It is difficult to come up with a more contemptible crime in the workplace than sexual harassment, or even harassment in any form. I spent 30 years of my life as a labour lawyer for businesses, where staff relations are very important. Everyone wanted to develop harassment prevention policies. The more people talk to each other, the more familiar they become with the issue and the more likely they are to do what they have to do to get rid of harassment. It is the employer's duty to ensure that the workplace is free from any form of harassment.

The cases that I dealt with in my area of practice were often the most tragic ones. I thought that when I arrived here as a member of Parliament, I would see fewer of these cases. Treasury Board has a great policy, and I really do not see much wrong with it. However, as I often say, the devil is in the details, in the implementation.

I am sure that some of my colleagues are hearing the same kinds of stories from their constituents as I am. Constituents who are public servants, members of the RCMP or some other agency contact us and tell us their horror stories.

I am not going to get involved in legal matters between the government and its employees, but I can barely repress a shudder when I hear some of their stories. I see people who, five years ago, followed the proper procedure: they filed a complaint, talked to their harasser, criticized the behaviour, and ended up being harassed more than before. Then they went to see their supervisor, who looked into the issue and realized that it was true.

Within the Canadian public service, apparently when there is a harasser, an offender, he receives a promotion after going on a training course to become a little more aware of the issue. Although the government claims to be on the victims' side, victims still have to jump through all the legal hoops. If we spent as much time trying to resolve the issue and change behaviours, which are sometimes attributable just to a lack of education and political will to solve the problem, we could avoid these types of situations.

People who are broken come to tell us their side of the story. Many do not understand that it is a case of harassment. Harassment is about control; it is a way of trying to demean someone. If the harassment is psychological, the harasser is messing with his victim's head. If the harassment is sexual, there will be repeated actions. However, sometimes a single unwelcome act may be serious enough to be called harassment. As there is often a power relationship between the harasser and the victim, the victim often feels caught between a rock and a hard place, caught between losing her job and coping with the despicable behaviour.

We must remember what led to the introduction of Bill C-42. Let us remember the grand pronouncements by the Minister of Public Safety.

● (1215)

He said he would fix the problem and introduce a bill to ensure that the RCMP takes care of the problem. As I said, 200 people have brought a sexual harassment class action suit against the RCMP, which did not protect the victims. That is why we need a meaningful bill.

When Commissioner Paulson was appointed, he said that this was a priority.

When I am called to speak to a bill, I like to read it first, which may surprise the Conservatives, who think we do not read the bills. On the contrary, we in the NDP read the bills. Based on some of the questions I hear in this House, it is clear that some people did not read the bill or they would not be asking the questions they are asking.

The preamble says it all. In fact, it lays out what we would expect to see throughout the bill, but we do not see those things anywhere in the provisions. The preamble says:

Whereas

Canadians should have confidence in their national police force;

That goes without saying.

Whereas civilian review is vital to promoting transparency and public accountability of law enforcement;

That goes without saying as well, but these are concepts that the current government is not grasping. I think the government does not have the right definitions for these concepts.

Government Orders

Whereas civilian review should enhance the accountability of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to provincial governments that have entered into arrangements for the use or employment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police;

Whereas all members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police are responsible for the promotion and maintenance of good conduct and are guided by a Code of Conduct that reflects the expectations and values of Canadians;

And whereas the Government of Canada is committed to the provision of a framework that will serve to enhance the accountability of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and support its continued modernization;

A preamble like that augurs very well. Anyone reading it would say, "This is wonderful." Again, the devil is in the details. A number of provisions in Bill C-42 give a tremendous amount of discretionary power to the commissioner.

My colleague from St. John's East did a good job of illustrating how we are in the process of creating a more powerful hierarchy within the RCMP. We know that the police like to investigate themselves. They would opt to investigate themselves every time, if we let them. However, this is at odds with values of transparency and accountability. It is best to have independent agencies.

With respect to labour relations, certain parts of the bill, namely clauses 2 to 34, indicate how the commissioner can make certain decisions. He would not necessarily make bad decisions, but there is a real danger in having the commissioner make all the decisions. Such provisions do not bode well for transparency. The commissioner would make reports and recommendations at certain committees, but implementation of these recommendations would not necessarily be mandatory.

We noticed serious problems during the debate at second reading. We were confident that the bill would be carefully studied at the Standing Committee on Public Safety. And that does seem to have happened. However, as is always the case for a number of committees, the problem arises when it is time to listen to the advice of anyone other than the government. The Conservatives can never listen carefully or actively, and they always have blinders on.

They are so afraid of leaving just one sentence that they have not penned in a bill, not being able to take full credit, not being able to say that they are the best, and so on, that they prefer to be closed-minded and wilfully blind and pass weak laws that may be challenged and may not achieve the desired results. This attitude is unfortunate and does not solve the problem.

To those who think that women will breathe a sigh of relief today because of Bill C-42 and that women will finally be able to put to rest the issue of harassment, feel respected and believe that there will be transparency and accountability, I say this bill deserves a big fat zero.

● (1220)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that it was actually RCMP Commissioner Paulson who ultimately got the government to take action.

Prior to the commissioner's going public in the form of a public letter, the government did absolutely nothing in terms of recognizing how important it was to, for example, allow the commissioner increased capacity to invoke some sort of disciplinary action against members of the force.

Government Orders

That said, there is no doubt that the bill falls short. I think all of us on the opposition benches, whether Liberal or New Democrat, would say that the bill falls short.

The question I have for the member is this: given the shortcomings of the bill, if this bill were to pass as it is today, does she believe the system would actually be worse than it is today, or does she think that at least in some small part the bill does deal with what Commissioner Paulson was hoping to achieve?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, if it does that in some small part, it is really small. I would need quite the magnifying glass to find it.

[*Translation*]

I agree with the hon. member for Winnipeg North that Commissioner Paulson—and I am not here to criticize Commissioner Paulson—was appointed at the height of the storm and he made promises. He said he would do things. I will give him all of that. However, the fact that he could delegate some of his powers himself poses a problem.

Just read some of the clauses in Bill C-42 to understand what its limitations are. What will happen when there is no whistle-blower, like the RCMP officer who made this story public and instigated the class action suit? That is often what it takes in these situations. There needs to be a heroine. When you work for a police force, it is not easy to go public and say that you are a victim of sexual harassment. We know that it is such a macho environment and that it has been hard for women to find their place in that environment.

I find that this entire debate on Bill C-42 does not address the underlying issue, which is the pain and suffering of the victims. In short, not enough improvements are being made for us to say that we are taking a step in the right direction with this piece of legislation.

• (1225)

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Bergen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me get this right.

We have heard evidence, overwhelming testimony, even on Tuesday morning—and clearly this member has not read a word of it—from not only the independent chair of the complaints commission but the commissioner himself, who has just laid out a very good and very thorough plan called “Gender and Respect”. The goal is to not only stop harassment and bullying within the RCMP but also to make sure there are more women within the RCMP.

Both of these individuals, as well as countless numbers of law enforcement agencies, have said that in order to do this, we need Bill C-42 passed so that we have a framework and can go ahead with the road map.

Let me ask this member a question. She is willing to stop this bill, stop the ability of the RCMP to end harassment and bullying and to have more women recruited into the RCMP. Is she willing to sacrifice all of that because she has a political agenda? Is that what the member is saying?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate how measured my colleague's speeches are. It seems to

me that she did not listen to a word I said or maybe what I said was lost in translation.

On the contrary, measures need to be taken to increase the number of women in the RCMP. However, women wanting to enter these somewhat difficult work settings need reassurance. We need to let them know that we are sending them to work in an environment that is free from every form of harassment. Stories such as what happened over the past few years are not very reassuring at all. And often we only see the tip of the iceberg.

There are some agencies that will come on behalf of the government to say that we must pass Bill C-42. What we are saying is that there were some serious flaws that could have been fixed with a bit of political will. The government shies away from fixing anything if it is the official opposition's idea. That is the problem.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would like to remind all hon. members that they ought not refer to whether their colleagues are in or outside the chamber.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by pointing out that I made a speech on this bill at second reading. In it, I clearly stated my concerns and explained what I felt was missing from the bill.

Now that the bill has been studied in committee, we can see the outcome. We had decided to give the Conservatives a chance, believing that they were perhaps prepared to create a useful bill for the RCMP.

At issue here are the RCMP, accountability, transparency and sexual harassment. We are not discussing a bill about changing the colour of the placemats, but about the RCMP. I was accordingly expecting a degree of openness and a desire to do much more.

The 23 amendments put forward by the Conservatives were mainly grammatical corrections to the French. Is it not rather amateurish for a minister of the Crown to introduce a bill and then have to make so many amendments to correct the grammar? It strikes me that something was really messed up here. It is unacceptable.

It would be understandable if it was a private member's bill that had to be introduced quickly because the member's name happened to come up by chance early on. But this bill was introduced by a minister of the Crown who had received assistance from the department and many people, and even so he was unable to submit a grammatically satisfactory product. From the outset, this shows us just how botched it is because it was not worked on enough. It is really not that great.

Government Orders

The focus of the amendments proposed by the NDP was sexual harassment. In the bill as a whole, sexual harassment is mentioned only once, even though this issue was raised many times because of the legal action taken by the women who publicly condemned the fact that they were subjected to sexual harassment. It is a major problem.

If we want our institutions to work properly, then real action is required to deal with sexual harassment. Simply expecting the problem to disappear magically will not do; practical measures are needed.

When I was a member of the military, we received training on sexual harassment from the very beginning of my recruit course. We received such training virtually every year. I cannot remember exactly how many times, but it was fairly often. Soldiers took the issue seriously precisely because some women had spoken out about it at the time. Sexual harassment training and the measures that were introduced can never solve all the problems, of course. Nevertheless, having talked with a number of women who served in the Canadian Forces—veterans who served in the 1970s and 1980s, for example—and having taken training myself, I can tell you that things have changed and that the problem was taken seriously. There is still work to be done, but the situation has vastly improved. It too is a federal institution.

It is therefore important to stop burying our heads in the sand. People say they want more women, but they also have to want them to remain. It makes no sense to launch programs and go to great lengths to encourage women to join the RCMP and our federal institutions unless we are prepared to take steps to ensure that they will stay. It makes no sense at all.

The Conservatives rejected all of the NDP's amendments, the precise target of which was sexual harassment. This is unacceptable. I believe they did not even look at the amendments as such. They merely looked beside the amendment and decided to oppose it when they saw the letters "NDP". That is not a responsible attitude. If we really want to improve our legislation and our institutions, especially the RCMP, partisan considerations must be set aside. If some members of this House find it difficult to do that, we should conceal the name of the party submitting the amendment and consider it with a view to providing a logical response, instead of operating in an arbitrary way. This is important in order to improve bills.

●(1230)

We want to avoid having to return three, four, five, six or seven times to a bill on the same subject, namely the RCMP, to make corrections that could have been made at the outset. The government could have put together a very good bill, a complete bill, by showing some openness of mind. However, it decided not to do so. In my view, this is a major problem.

So who pays the price? Women in the RCMP, who will not have access to a legislative system to help and support them. This is not acceptable. For partisan reasons, the government persists in refusing to accept amendments. I am frankly disappointed that the NDP's amendments were not accepted. It is a pity. What bothers me is the knowledge that it is women in the RCMP who will pay the price.

From my youth, I have always fought for the opportunity to do what I want in life, and never to be limited because I am a woman. I made a career in the military for a few years, and I am proud of it. I would not want other women to decide not to make a career in the RCMP, telling themselves that the situation is intolerable and the government is unable to give them the necessary support. That is not acceptable. In my view, we really should be doing more to protect women and provide them with a safe work environment.

I would like to return to another subject. There has been talk of unionization in the RCMP for over 35 years, but there is no reference to it in the bill. I think that would have been something useful to explore, and it would have enhanced the bill.

Contrary to what the Conservatives believe, unionization comes with many benefits. Usually, unions are dedicated to the welfare of their members. Many social measures have been introduced to workplaces as a result of union lobbying. This bill, however, makes no mention of that. It sweeps it under the rug. Basically, the government is interested in what it is interested in, and that is all, which is a pity. The government could have introduced a solid, comprehensive piece of legislation if it had conducted an in-depth study and been prepared to discuss and accept amendments. The government could have done that for RCMP members. Yet, the government chose not to, which is a terrible pity.

I would also like to briefly turn back to one of the problems with the RCMP: in some cases, it investigates itself. In my opinion, this was a golden opportunity to address the problem. The allegations that women were not taken seriously by the RCMP have recently been the subject of discussion. This is an important issue. The RCMP needs to properly address this issue. Unfortunately, if the RCMP investigates itself, or if an individual investigates himself, the findings may not be worth the paper they are written on.

It is important to understand that the purpose here is not to scold people unnecessarily. When an investigation is launched to determine what has occurred and what went wrong, the goal is not to castigate people and tell them that they are bad or have not done things properly. When a procedure is not followed and there seems to be a problem, the purpose of an investigation is to determine what the problem is, to address it and to find solutions. However, if this process is not followed, the problem will not be solved.

In closing, I believe that more could have been done for women and for RCMP members. It is really a pity that the government has this attitude. When we consider a bill, we must bear in mind that the ultimate objective of important legislation is to make genuine improvements and not to score partisan points.

●(1235)

I believe that something very positive could have been achieved. Unfortunately, the government did not even try to achieve anything with this bill, and that is a great pity.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member intently. I am on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. We did hear from the Commissioner of the RCMP as well as the chair of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP, the person vested with investigating the whole issue of harassment in the RCMP.

I encourage all Canadians to look at the evidence presented at the committee, which will show, beyond a shadow of any doubt, that what this side of the House is saying is basically correct. He said that there's no systemic evidence of harassment in the RCMP. The Commissioner of the RCMP said there will be mandatory training for all RCMP officers, and that is his intent. To put it in his words, he has aggressive recruitment targets for additional women on the RCMP. I can say, after 30 years of working with both men and women in the police force, that it is possible for men and women to work together. It is possible for those targets to be met.

The member is saying that she is ideologically opposed to what this side of the House is saying, that no good ideas can come from this side, only that side. We are saying that we are listening to the commissioner and the person who—

• (1240)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member did not hear the first speech I gave when this bill was at second reading. In it, I explained that this bill was a step in the right direction and that it constituted progress but that it did not go far enough and that other measures were needed. I never said that this bill was just a bad idea and that there was nothing good about it. Rather, I said that it did not go far enough and that we needed to build on it.

Unfortunately, after this bill was examined in committee, the Conservatives refused to go further. That is the problem. The problem is not the initial idea but the fact that this idea is not being transformed into practical measures to address sexual harassment.

The witnesses were not unanimous. In the testimony she gave on October 24, 2012, Yvonne Séguin, the executive director of Groupe d'aide et d'information sur le harcèlement sexuel au travail de la province de Québec, said:

With the 32 years of experience we have, we have found out that when companies do have a clear policy, when employees do know what is acceptable and not acceptable, it makes it much easier for management to deal with the problems.

So, in response to my colleague, I would like to repeat that I never said that the members opposite never have any good ideas. I think that the initial idea was good. However, the government did not take it far enough. The government could have made this bill really great but, unfortunately, did not do so.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that it was RCMP Commissioner Paulson who ultimately led to the government taking action and introducing legislation. I would not give credit to the government for taking action without being prodded by the RCMP, in particular the commissioner, in an open letter to all Canadians. In essence, to quote

the CBC in May 2012: “The RCMP's disciplinary process is so bureaucratic and out of date that 'bad apples' end up staying on the force long after they should be thrown out, RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson said in a remarkably frank open letter to Canadians on Monday”.

Given that the very nature of the legislation allows for some additional authority for the commissioner, is it better that we pass the legislation that at least enables the commissioner to have some of that power, which is something the commissioner himself has been asking for, and look at making changes in the future as opposed to trying to kill the legislation outright? We all recognize that there are many shortcomings in this legislation. It could have done more on sexual harassment and so forth, but would the member agree that this is better than absolutely nothing? According to the commissioner, one might draw that conclusion.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I cannot presume to know what the government's intentions are. It is possible that what happened pushed the government to act but that it would have done so anyway. But I do not have any proof of that. I will assume that it was acting out of goodwill and that it truly wanted to improve the RCMP. That is why I do not understand why it did not want to push this further.

I do not accept that something is better than absolutely nothing when it comes to a bill. I do not think that is logical. We cannot pass a bill just because it is better than nothing. It makes no sense. We must create something excellent, that will improve the situation and that we will not have to revise at some point. Voting for something because it is better than nothing makes no sense to me. That is not why I became an MP.

I want us to have excellent bills that go far enough, that are relevant and that we will not have to revise three, four, five, six, seven or eight times. So no, I do not think this is satisfactory.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts.

I would like to begin by saying how important the RCMP and the police in general are to me. My colleague also mentioned this in his speech. When we were young, several of us, including myself, wanted to be police officers. We thought that it was a noble occupation, that genuine conviction was needed to engage in it and that it was a way of dedicating oneself to society. This is part of the process, of the importance that I personally attach to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I therefore have enormous respect for all those people who have served, and I know that my colleague opposite has previously served. I tip my hat to them. As a member of various committees, I have had the opportunity to question and speak with RCMP members. Quite frankly, I must say that I owe them an enormous amount of respect.

Government Orders

The purpose of this bill is to solve certain problems that exist at present time. Although we assert that we admire those individuals and that we believe they are doing a good job, as in any organization, there are always minor problems and matters that must be resolved. In this case, we really want to solve those problems. The initial purpose of this bill was to do precisely that. The NDP supported it at second reading so that we could study it in greater detail. However, we knew from the outset that it was somewhat flawed.

I would like to provide more details on the bill's deficiencies and the positions that have been taken. The bill in fact addresses the process for dealing with sexual harassment complaints within the RCMP. It was introduced in response to the headline-making scandals. It constitutes a government reaction to this problem. Unfortunately, it appears to have been an improvised reaction, since the government's bill contains numerous flaws. I will elaborate on that later.

With Bill C-42, the government wanted and we wanted to solve existing problems and address instances of misconduct. There were abuses of power, intimidation and harassment. So we wanted to give the commissioner the power to decide what disciplinary measures should be taken in those cases. However, one of the issues with Bill C-42 is that it does not solve the problem and, according to some witnesses, even creates more problems. To answer my Liberal colleague's question, that is why it creates more problems. I will come back to this a little later.

The purpose of Bill C-42 was also to add clauses respecting labour relations and to give the RCMP commissioner the power to appoint and dismiss members at his discretion. We see a problem with that. Also, the bill does not go far enough. Commissioner Paulson stated that current legislation was not enough to retain the public's trust and that serious reforms were needed. That is what led to the introduction of Bill C-42. We knew there were flaws and a problem regarding the public's trust in the system.

Once again I repeat how important it is for me to protect RCMP members, the men and women who are doing an outstanding and necessary job to maintain order in the society we live in. It is important for us as legislators to protect the RCMP. We have the opportunity to do it. We see what the public is calling for and what Commissioner Paulson, in particular, has demanded. The public has spoken, and that is why the government ultimately decided to move forward.

When we look at what has happened and where we are headed, we see that this is not enough. We would like the bill to result in a working environment that is more open, more co-operative and, especially, more respectful of all concerned. It would also benefit the RCMP if we brought in legislation that would achieve greater transparency and a better workplace. That would be good for the public and for the RCMP.

●(1245)

However, the minister has not really done his homework and has not gone far enough in this area, particularly with respect to disciplinary investigation procedures.

Here is what is happening. We are creating a new commission, except that, when we look at and analyze the bill, we see that, in

actual fact, the RCMP public complaints commission already exists. However, there is no separation here; by that I mean that we do not have an entirely independent commission. We know that the commission already exists, but once again we are ensuring that police officers will manage police officers, or that RCMP people will manage RCMP people.

This commission has to be independent if we are talking about transparency and something more public. Its members must report to people other than the same people who must manage all this. In my opinion, this is one of the more important factors that has not been addressed in the bill for which we made recommendations.

We also have other restrictions in this area, particularly regarding the new commission's ability to conduct independent investigations. Its findings would serve only as a basis for non-binding recommendations. Consequently, recommendations would be made to the commissioner or to the Minister of Public Safety, but they would not be binding. Once again, we see that the "new commission"—as my colleagues opposite call it—would not be independent and would only issue non-binding recommendations. So ultimately nothing much is changing in this area. This is one of the major problems we had.

The second major point that really troubles me about this bill is that it does not address the problem of sexual harassment within the RCMP. On the other hand, I have sometimes heard it said that, if there is not really any sexual harassment, then it is not a big problem. We have to be honest, open our eyes and take off our rose-coloured glasses. This is a problem, but one not exclusive to the RCMP. We must not necessarily point a finger at it alone. Once again, I restate my enormous respect for the men and women who work at the RCMP.

However, we must protect the women who work for the RCMP. We know that our society is evolving. More and more women are entering the labour market. In some places, people's attitudes have not changed. I am not necessarily saying that this is the case in the RCMP specifically, but there are problems that we wanted to address. We really wanted to tackle this issue, to stop burying our heads in the sand and look at what we can really do to get rid of sexual harassment. Unfortunately, once again, this bill is not the answer.

Justice O'Connor made many recommendations. Fifteen of his 23 recommendations concerned the RCMP. As I mentioned, and I would like to mention again for the benefit of my colleagues, in the beginning we supported this bill. We found that it was indeed a step in the right direction. We wanted to move reasonable proposals to resolve the problems I mentioned a little earlier. We put forward 18 amendments that I find very thoughtful and reasonable.

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For example, we wanted to include mandatory harassment training for RCMP members in the RCMP Act. How can anyone be opposed to that? Here again, it is obvious that if we bury our heads in the sand and put on our rose-coloured glasses we can say that harassment does not exist. The government is saying that maybe it does exist, that it probably does, that yes, it does. Now we have to take measures. We in the NDP understand that prevention and education are important. The members on the other side are primarily talking about repression. If we want to eradicate certain societal ills, harassment prevention and education are crucial. Among other things, this is what we are proposing here.

•(1250)

We also asked that a completely independent civilian body be established to review complaints against the RCMP. I think it is obvious that a certain degree of independence is essential. Here again, it is not only for the benefit of the RCMP, but also for the public's benefit. Both the public and the RCMP would come out ahead.

Our goal in establishing this independent body is to reassure Canadians. Obtaining the public's trust will help the RCMP directly. We must not forget that the RCMP works closely with the general public. It is important to show some transparency and some sincerity, and let Canadians know that not everything is being done behind closed doors. We know that is how the Conservatives prefer to do things, and unfortunately, it comes through clearly in their bills.

We are aiming for openness and consultation. Let Canadians be part of the process.

Moreover, we want to avoid cases where the police investigate themselves.

•(1255)

[English]

This bill does not really address the root of the problem, and one of the things that was really disappointing was that none of the amendments we brought forward, and I mentioned all of them, were accepted. We have a government whose members are not listening and not consulting. Unfortunately, that is why we have a bill that is flawed.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague, and I want him to speak a bit more on something that I find very concerning.

We see a pattern with the Conservatives where they shut down debate; they invoke closure continually. Whenever there is an attempt to be bipartisan in this House, to actually bring forward amendments to correct bills, because there is no such thing as a perfect bill, the Conservatives vote down every amendment every time. They refuse to address them and allow the ability to change and fix bills. What we see here is this attitude of infallibility. At that moment, Canadians have no reason to trust a government that is not willing to listen to the Canadian people.

Could my hon. colleague comment on why the government is so arrogant and so out of touch and why its members believe themselves to be infallible?

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay.

Let us not forget that this government is the first in Canadian history to be guilty of contempt of Parliament. That is the essence of this government. Clearly, it does not respect Parliament. It is the first time in Canadian history that a government has been guilty of contempt of Parliament.

Moreover, this government has a majority. It is perhaps trying to make up for the times when it had a minority. It is taking that majority to extremes and ignoring what people have to say.

The recommendations did not necessarily come from the NDP alone. Public servants were consulted. Having served on the Standing Committee on Finance, and now as a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, I know that the recommendations were set aside. I wonder if the government reads them. It scarcely reads them, and when it does so, it is only looking for points to argue.

There is often no reason to reject the amendments proposed, especially when they are reasonable and improve the legislation.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too listened with great interest to my colleague's speech and also to many of the other comments that have been made here today in the House. It is clear, based on some of the comments we heard earlier, that members opposite do not seem to have an appreciation that these are important issues in urban Canada as well. We have produced several amendments that the government dismissed out of hand.

In fact, since I was elected in 2011, I believe the government has not entertained a single amendment from the opposition side. However, it has entertained amendments from the unelected Senate. Would my colleague comment about this inclination toward a lack of democracy on the other side of the House?

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Davenport for his question.

That is a very good point. I had not yet been elected, but I remember that when the House passed Jack Layton's bill on the environment, it went to the Senate, and the Senate completely killed it despite the fact that elected members had voted in favour of the legislation. I know that Jack and my colleagues did a tremendous amount of work on it. I had not yet been elected, but I found that extraordinary. I watched the vote on CPAC. That was something I did not often do at the time. To me, it showed real open-mindedness and a vision for the future. I was so happy about it. Nevertheless, without even looking at it, without even referring it to committee or studying it, the Senate killed it.

It is not for nothing that people wish to abolish the Senate. It has become such a partisan place. This is to be expected, because senators are appointed by the Prime Minister. We have seen the results this produces. Senators with a somewhat dubious past or dubious positions are not people who will always have good judgment. Some senators are now demonstrating this.

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It is too bad that they listen to what senators have to say about bills, but not to the opposition or to witnesses.

● (1300)

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this House to speak to this very important bill dealing with the RCMP.

It is important to me and to people in Surrey, British Columbia, because as members may know, Surrey has the largest RCMP detachment in the country. The men and women who work in the RCMP in Surrey do tremendous work to make our communities safe. In fact, I was very proud to have an opportunity to present Diamond Jubilee awards to a current member and a retiree in the last month. I am proud to work with the RCMP on a regular basis and to look at issues that deal with the RCMP on a regular basis.

As the House of Commons, we have a duty to restore public confidence in the RCMP, and we have an opportunity with this bill to do that.

The preamble of the bill states that the goals for this bill are transparency, improving conduct, strengthening the review and complaints body, and dealing with the climate of sexual harassment that exists in the RCMP. Those are all good goals, and we supported these goals at second reading, hoping that we would be able to scrutinize the bill more fully at the committee stage.

However, when we got to the committee, we heard witness after witness pointing out that the bill actually does not address a number of the issues that have been plaguing the RCMP over the last number of years. In fact, for the last six or seven years, the Conservatives have mismanaged this file so badly that the reputation of the RCMP has taken a beating.

Bill C-42 fails to act on any of the recommendations set out by Justice O'Connor in the Maher Arar inquiry that aim to improve the standards of review for the RCMP to meet the needs of Canadians. The bill is supposed to fix years of mismanagement of the RCMP by the Conservatives. The Conservatives presented Bill C-42 as a solution to a dysfunctional RCMP, but it fails to improve any of that.

The bill not only falls short of addressing sexual harassment within the force but also falls short on a number of other areas that the NDP tried to amend in the committee. The NDP put forward a number of amendments meant to ensure that Bill C-42 effectively meets the challenges the RCMP is facing.

Since I was elected in 2011, the NDP has made hundreds, if not thousands, of proposed amendments at the committee stage. I am quite surprised that not one of them has been accepted by the government. One would think that maybe one, two, three or ten would make sense to the government; no. It has consistently rejected all amendments.

Those amendments are based on consultations that happen in the committee. Experts come to the committee and provide expert testimony, but we know the Conservatives do not like to consult. On the aboriginal file, we have seen them fail to consult aboriginal people time after time. This is a similar case.

We had experts at the committee who provided testimony that gave good solutions as to how we could restore confidence in the RCMP. Again the Conservatives failed to take any of the amendments from the NDP. Some of those amendments included adding mandatory harassment training for RCMP members and ensuring a fully independent civilian review body to investigate complaints against the RCMP.

● (1305)

The credibility of the RCMP has taken shots in a number of high-level cases in British Columbia over the last number of years. I have talked to a number of people in my constituency and throughout British Columbia, and I have heard people on the radio as well talking about having a civilian body to investigate the RCMP. Throughout this country, Canadians have been calling for an investigative body that is independent of the RCMP.

Again, the Conservatives had an opportunity with this bill to put the RCMP on the right path and restore the confidence of the people of this country in the RCMP. However, they failed to do that. The bill before us does not address any of that.

Another of the amendments we proposed was to add a provision to create a national civilian investigation body that would avoid having police investigating police. Again, the Conservatives chose not to accept it.

We also offered to create a more balanced human resource policy by removing some of the draconian powers proposed for the RCMP commissioner and by strengthening the external review committee in cases involving possible dismissal from the force.

I would point out again that we saw the deterioration start under the Liberal government, and it has continued under the Conservative government.

The Liberals did not even offer any amendments at the committee stage. We offered 18 amendments, but not one of them was accepted by the Conservative government. The Conservatives voted down every single one of the amendments, ignoring many recommendations made by witnesses at the committee. Witness after witness explained that legislation alone will not foster a more open and respectful workplace for all.

We need to see an ongoing effort from the RCMP and the government to modernize the RCMP. However, Bill C-42 lacks the transparency and accountability necessary for that change. The bill does not go far enough in directly addressing the concerns of women serving in the RCMP, who are calling for urgent action to foster a more inclusive and safe environment for women in the RCMP. As well, the bill has been introduced without the benefit of the findings of the internal gender audit of the RCMP ordered by the commissioner, which is currently under way but not yet completed.

Government Orders

The Conservative approach does not make women in the RCMP a priority, which is necessary if we want to deal with the problem of harassment in the RCMP. My concern is that over and over we see the government attempt to gloss over the real issues within the RCMP and implement quick fixes instead of actually looking at the root causes of the problems and addressing them. Again, the Conservatives had an opportunity to do that; we in this House owe it to Canadians to address these issues, but the Conservatives have fallen flat on that.

The scope of sexual harassment in the RCMP is massive. We have seen a number of women come forward to talk publicly about harassment in the RCMP, and there are currently lawsuits in front of the courts. We had an opportunity to address this problem, but again the Conservatives have failed.

To conclude, I stress that in my community of Surrey and in communities across this country, crime and violence are a reality. Many shootings have occurred in the greater Vancouver region in broad daylight. However, instead of investing in crime prevention programs, the Conservative government is actually making it harder for the RCMP to do its job. Our job is to help the RCMP, give its members tools and resources, and invest in our forces.

The Conservatives had an opportunity to improve the reputation of the RCMP. We must get to the root cause of the internal cultural problem of sexual harassment in the RCMP, and we need to finally have binding independent civilian oversight so that we can deal with the real issues of accountability and transparency and ultimately restore public confidence in our force.

• (1310)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to stand to speak to Bill C-42, an act to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act., an issue that is not only of importance to all members in the House, but is of great interest to the public at large, from coast to coast.

To put this in context, I want to pick up on some of the themes that were mentioned by my hon. colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, who gave one of the most thoughtful speeches on this subject, or any subject that I have heard in the House in years. What he touched upon, and what is important, was the special relationship that Canadians have with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I do not think there is a more memorable symbol of our country around the world than the iconic Royal Canadian Mounted Police figure. It has played a pivotal role in the history and development of Canada and is responsible for delivering police and community safety services in communities across our country.

This long storied history is not unchecked. Like any organization, it has not been perfect. It has had its challenges in the past and it has its challenges today.

The job that we call upon of our RCMP women and men across the country to do is one that is of utmost importance to Canadians. It is one of the most challenging and difficult ones that exists. We expect these men and women to answer calls in the middle of the night, often alone, and to be first responders at times of crisis, tragedy and emergency. We expect them to be the first people on the scene of an accident to deal with death and injury. We expect them to put their lives on the line in defending our communities and keeping

people safe. For that, all members of the House join together in expressing our deep gratitude and respect for the men and women of the RCMP.

At the same time, the RCMP is an organization that is facing some serious challenges. Is it possible in 2013 to create a national police force that has a proper civilian oversight structure? Is it possible to construct a labour relations framework that not only gives management the tools it needs to ensure there is an appropriate standard of conduct for the staff that work under it, as well as a fair structure for the men and women to ensure they have access to justice and are treated fairly and equitably? Is it possible to expect that we can have a national organization that can deal promptly, swiftly, fairly and adequately with important issues like sexual harassment? Is it possible to have a modern-day police force that meets the expectations of Canadians? I think all members of the New Democratic Party say, absolutely, we can do that and in fact we should do that.

Bill C-42 is the Conservative government's response to long-standing claims of sexual harassment in the RCMP and to some difficult scandals that have made headlines as a result of problems with the disciplinary process and, if we are honest, lenient disciplinary measures handed out to officers accused of serious misconduct.

Bill C-42 proposes to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act in three main areas. First, it adds new provisions to the labour relations clauses and gives the RCMP commissioner the power to appoint and dismiss members as he or she sees fit. Second, it seeks to reform discipline, grievance and human resource management processes for members. Last, it seeks to reform the former Royal Canadian Mounted Police Public Complaints Commission by establishing a "new" civilian complaints commission and implement a new framework to handle investigations of serious incidents involving members.

Because of the immense respect we have for the RCMP, we can talk about some of these challenges. We have had cases of deaths occurring in custody. In my home province of British Columbia, some very serious questions were raised about the conduct of RCMP officers when civilians died while in the hands of the police. Over 200 women have joined a class action lawsuit alleging sexual harassment against members of the RCMP and making the more disturbing allegation of a widespread, well-entrenched system of gender harassment within that structure.

• (1315)

Bill C-42 reiterates many of the provisions of Bill C-38 from the 40th Parliament. At that time, the NDP criticized that bill for not going far enough in dealing with these very important issues. A very significant difference from the former Bill C-38 and the present Bill C-42 before the House today is silence on the issue of unionization of the RCMP. I would like to start there for a moment.

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There has already been a court decision that has struck down the labour relations structure in the RCMP as being unconstitutional. As I said when I was public safety critic, the RCMP is the only police force in the country that does not have the right to have its men and women freely choose their bargain representative and engage in free collective bargaining. It is a national embarrassment. It is also unjust to the men and women who all members of the House claim to support and respect. If we truly respect the men and women we send into dangerous situations, should we not also respect their ability to decide who will bargain the terms and conditions of their work and raise concerns as any other group in the country is free to do? I think we do.

It is not acceptable that to this day the government has not replaced the bargaining structure in the RCMP with a free collective bargaining structure that respects norms, a bargaining structure that not only every worker in the country expects but that is contained in international treaties to which Canada is signatory. The main reason we oppose the bill is that it refuses to deal with this very important issue.

When we talk about sexual harassment, as my friend from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek so eloquently pointed out, one of the many workplace issues that organized labour has worked toward in the county and has helped improve is the situation of harassment in the workplace, including sexual harassment. It is only by changing workplace culture and the attitudes not only of management but of the men and women who are in a bargaining unit or performing labour that we can make meaningful progress.

The fact that the government has failed to act as the court has directed it to—that being to replace the unconstitutional labour relations structure with one that actually conforms to our law and the legitimate desires of the men and women in the RCMP—is a contributing factor to the poisoned context and situation that occurs in many RCMP detachments across the country.

The NDP supported the intention of Bill C-42 to modernize the RCMP and address issues such as sexual harassment in the force and voted for the bill to move to committee because we believed that it was important to work with the government to bring in effective legislation. We made that good-faith attempt.

The New Democrats members on the committee proposed 18 amendments to help strengthen the bill and make it conform to not only the necessities of good legislation but also the dictates of previous commissions and the requests of very informed respected people who were knowledgeable about the RCMP, such as former RCMP complaints commissioner Paul Kennedy, groups such as the Supreme Court of Canada and people like Justice O'Connor, who made recommendations in the aftermath of the Arar inquiry as to how the RCMP could improve its standards. These are eminent non-partisan people who have made a number of deeply thoughtful suggestions as to how we can modernize and improve the RCMP. The NDP wanted to help build that legislation.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives rejected every one of those 18 amendments. For Canadians watching, this is a common daily occurrence in the chamber.

I have been in the chamber long enough to know that no party has a monopoly on good ideas. Sometimes they come from the right, sometimes from the left and sometimes from the centre. However, the Conservatives have an unprecedented fashion, governed by rejecting virtually every idea that comes from any other part of this chamber, because they are hyperpartisan and extreme.

We hear the hon. members clapping when they are called extreme. I will leave it for Canadians to judge the thinking that goes behind that.

● (1320)

I want to point out, as well, that the bill fails to directly address the issue of sexual harassment in the force. It fails to bring a civilian oversight body that is truly independent. It fails to deal with the unionization requirements of the workforce. It also fails to put in an adequate system that would deal with sexual harassment.

The New Democrats remain ready and willing to work with the government to fix those problems and we urge it to do so. The men and women of the RCMP and the public deserve to have a modern RCMP that upholds the finest traditions of this force and makes it prepared for the century ahead.

Ms. Candice Bergen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is my hon. colleague aware of some of the amendments that his colleagues put forward during committee? One of them was to change the short title of the bill, which really had absolutely no purpose. Therefore, we defeated that one as it was not a good amendment.

Another proposed amendment shows that the NDP is not ready to govern because it does not know legislation and how it works. The NDP wanted to use word “harassment” within the legislation. We argued, and the Liberals agreed with us, that we did not put specific words in legislation like that. We give the RCMP the ability to deal with all kinds of inappropriate behaviour.

Ian McPhail just came forward with the report that stated harassment was not the number one problem in the RCMP, that it was actually bullying. The members on that side are strangely silent on that issue right now, which is smart. The bill would give the RCMP the ability to modernize the discipline process to deal with not only harassment but bullying and other inappropriate behaviour. It would give it the ability to have an absolutely independent civilian oversight body, as well as a number of other things for which the commissioner and the chair of the complaints commission asked.

The NDP members are down to process arguments. That is all they have left. They did not get their poorly written amendments passed, so they will not support the bill.

Is that what the member really thinks is going—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, some of the amendments that the NDP proposed dealt with adding mandatory harassment training for RCMP members, specifically in the RCMP Act.

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When we have a national scandal going where 200 women have launched a class action lawsuit alleging sexual harassment in the workplace, does one not think that putting mandatory harassment training in a bill dealing with the RCMP would be logical response? The New Democrats did. That is not procedure; that is substance.

The NDP proposed to ensure a fully independent civilian review body to investigate complaints against the RCMP. The number one problem with oversight of police forces in our country is that it allows, and the bill would still allow, police to investigate police. If we ask Canadians if they think it is a truly independent process to have police investigate police, even a different police force, they will tell us no.

Finally, the NDP asked for an amendment to create a national civilian investigative body that would be fully independent and could actually initiate investigations on its own and that would not have to report to the minister to avoid partisan political interference.

There are the kinds of substantive amendments the NDP put forward.

I might add that we will take no lessons from the Liberals, who put in zero amendments and who were in government for much of the last 30 years and did absolutely nothing to modernize these problems within the RCMP.

• (1325)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it distressing that the Conservatives are attempting to diminish the effect of sexual harassment on the 200 and some women by saying that it is merely a case of bullying. The RCMP commissioner, Robert Paulson, said, “I’ve said it publicly, and I’ll say it again. I think the problem is bigger than simply the sexual harassment. It is the idea of harassment”. The commissioner of the RCMP understands that it is an issue of harassment.

What does hon. colleague think about the Conservatives attempting to say that this is just some minor schoolyard bullying and not harassment? It is very different terms.

Mr. Don Davies: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. If we just stop and think for a moment, in 2013 I think Canadians expect that when men and women walk through the workplace door, they do not check their rights. When they walk through the workplace door, they expect to be treated professionally. They expect to have their civil rights respected. They expect to not have other co-workers be allowed to intimidate them, to demand sexual services, to suggest sexual services, to make fun of them, to have any kind of treatment or words or conduct that demeans their dignity as workers. We expect the people in the RCMP to uphold the law.

Here is the difference between the NDP and the Conservatives. The NDP believes RCMP officers should also have the benefit of the law. In this country, sexual harassment and bullying, and I do not make any real distinction between those two things, are both offensive and unacceptable. For the Conservative member to suggest, and she sits on the public safety committee, that somehow or other bullying is somehow a less serious form of workplace treatment than harassment shows the depth of misunderstanding that the government has and why the bill is so flawed.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a great honour to stand in the House and represent the people of Timmins—James Bay and to speak on the issue of reforming the RCMP, which is a very serious issue.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Oh, oh!

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I see the member for Kenora is attempting to shut down my ability to speak, but he should realize this is not grade 6; I am actually here to speak.

In my region in terms of police issues, we see the Nishnawbe-Aski Police underfunding and the post-traumatic stress that is being faced by front-line officers. Our officers and our citizens expect that the people we put on the front lines will have the benefit of a secure work environment. That is a fundamental for them to have a secure work environment so that they can go out and create safety in our communities. Whether or not it is the Nishnawbe-Aski Police who in northern Ontario are dramatically underfunded and are servicing communities without backup, without proper radios in their detachments and with jail cells that are often in third world conditions, they put themselves above and beyond time and time again.

We look at the RCMP, which is perhaps one of the most famous symbols of Canada. As Canadians, we do not often brag about our history. We think our history is boring, but there is something to be said about the fact that we have a tradition in this country where we had a system of law and order. The Dakota Sioux talked about crossing the famous medicine line that was the 49th parallel; it was to go from lawlessness to the idea of the rule of law. That was because of our North West Mounted Police at the time.

Canadians, whatever their political stripes, whatever region of the country they are from, are invested in the RCMP. We all agree it has been very distressing that we have a very troubled force—the undermining of the force, the issues of harassment and the issues of leadership.

The bill purports to address the issues of harassment at the RCMP, where we have an unprecedented case of 200 women police officers who came forward in a class action lawsuit over the issue of harassment, which is intimidation, threats, the demand for sexual services that is completely unacceptable. It is a culture that has gone on far too long. I would like to quote Robert Paulson, the RCMP commissioner, who agrees on the need for this reform. “It’s the culture of the organization that has not kept pace”, he said.

We haven’t been able to change our practices and our policies, or provide systems that would permit women to thrive in the organization and contribute to policing, which they must do....

I’ve said it publicly, and I’ll say it again. I think the problem is much bigger than simply sexual harassment. It is the idea of harassment. The idea that we have a hierarchical organization overseeing men and women who have extraordinary powers in relation to their fellow citizens, which requires a fair degree of discipline.

Government Orders

How do we address this poison that has affected and undermined our national police force? We were hoping we would be able to work with the Conservatives on bringing forward legislation that would get to the core of the problem and snuff this problem out once and for all. Unfortunately, once again we have a government that believes it is above democracy, that does not accept amendments, that does not accept debate. We have a government that is unprecedented in its use of shutting down debate in the House of Commons, of shutting down organizations like the round table on sustainable environment and the economy.

Conservatives are very threatened by anything that challenges them. It is a level of anger and paranoia. I have never seen such sore winners in my whole life. It is disturbing because the idea of democracy is that Canadians send us to the House of Commons to work together, and the muttering and the anger I see on the other side is reflective of very defensive and insecure people who are afraid to actually get to the bottom of the issue.

The New Democrats brought forward a number of good-faith recommendations, and some of those recommendations are key to addressing this, one of which is to address the issue of harassment. That is what the bill is about, but the government does not want to say it. The other is the need to establish a civilian oversight board. If we ask any Canadians how they ensure police services are accountable, they would say we should have an independent civilian board.

● (1330)

Unfortunately, what we see with the government is the idea that it will just give the RCMP commissioner the power to fire someone he feels has broken the rules.

It is important to move the process along for dealing with people who perpetrate harassment, but we also recognize the need, again through civilian independent review, to be able to look at the whole instance. It is not just about holding people accountable, but it is about ensuring that officers are actually able to have the right to due process.

This is a government that refuses to recognize the desire of the RCMP to put in place a members' union so that they could be protected and so that there is a balancing act.

Let us look at what the Canadian Police Association has said about this bill. Mr. Tom Stamatakis said:

Bill C-42 provides the commissioner with extraordinary powers in this regard, powers that go beyond what one might find in other police services across Canada.

Again, it is unbalanced. The government is not looking at what other police services do. One would think that the government would actually listen and look at other areas that work, but the government is very paranoid and actually seems to believe it is infallible. It does not look to other services; it just ignores them. It is ignoring the president of the Canadian Police Association.

The Canadian Association of Police Boards president, Dr. Alok Mukherjee, said:

We...share the concerns that have been expressed...about...the...provisions of the bill. We fear that they could undermine true, effective oversight.

The Canadian Association of Police Boards opposes the government's plans.

Mr. Ian McPhail, who is the interim chair of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the Royal Canadian Mounted Police says:

The credibility of any civilian review process will be lost if the agency subject to review is in a position to control when investigation may or may not occur.

These are serious objections. They are not frivolous. If we had a sense of working for the common good in this House of Commons, we could have fixed the problems in this bill. We could have ensured that this bill had the power to deal with the issue of harassment, that we had a civilian oversight board, and that we had started to put in place the mandatory harassment training. It is needed in that organization. When there are 200 officers coming forward in a class action law suit, it is needed.

In terms of restoring the trust of Canadians, in terms of addressing the legitimization crisis, especially now with the allegations of potential sexual crimes on the trail of tears, Canadians need to know that if they bring forward allegations they will be investigated, they will be investigated fairly and independently. That is not what this bill does.

This bill actually creates another cone of protection around the leadership in the RCMP and, by extension, the government in that they would be able to limit the reviews, fire the troublemakers and not address the fundamental problems.

As parliamentarians we need to realize that this is not just about the attack notes that come out of the PMO on any given day. This is about saying there is a long-term systemic problem; it has been identified; it is undermining the officers and the communities they represent; and it is incumbent upon this House to begin to address this.

Let us look at some of the amendments that were turned down: adding mandatory harassment training for RCMP members, specifically to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act; ensuring a fully independent civilian review board to investigate complaints against the RCMP; adding a provision to create a national civilian investigative body that would avoid police investigating police; and the issue of creating more balanced human resource policies by removing some of the draconian powers that actually exist with the RCMP commissioner now.

This is not about a witch hunt. This is about ensuring that the RCMP officers, male and female, who go into their workplace and put their lives on the line in community after community across this country, can do so in an environment where they can be safe, free from intimidation, free from sexual threat, and at the end of the day that they can be promoted based on their merit, not on their sex.

Unfortunately, the government ignored every single amendment, just as it has done with every attempt in this House to move forward legislation. It refuses to work with anyone else. It believes itself infallible. Once again, it is showing the error of its way, and we have a bill that will not address the fundamental problem, which is the harassment in the RCMP.

Government Orders

●(1335)

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to point out, before I ask the member opposite a question, that Ian McPhail of the independent RCMP complaints commission did appear before the status of women committee last week. He specifically said that the commission found, through surveys and investigation, that the problem of harassment and sexual harassment is not in fact systemic.

However, that is not to say that there are not very important issues that need to be addressed, and I want the member opposite to know that they are being addressed. In fact, today at committee, E division deputy commissioner Callens appeared to talk about the work it is doing.

I would like to ask the member opposite specifically if he agrees that establishing a civilian complaints body under Bill C-42 would help the problem. Why does he think that harassment and sexual harassment need to be detailed specifically, when Bill C-42 addresses the entire problem of all of these issues?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I refer my hon. colleague back to the words of the RCMP commissioner himself, who said that the problem was harassment and that this was the culture in the RCMP. He said that.

Now we hear, “Oh, it's not systemic”. Earlier we heard the Conservatives say, “Well, it's not harassment; it's just bullying”, as though we can somehow diminish the issue of sexual intimidation, threats and violence against workers with “it's bullying” or “it's not systemic”.

Well, if it was not systemic, then there would not be 200 police officers coming forward in a class action law suit.

Again, this is the kind of bubble the Conservatives live in. They believe that if they ignore the issues, if they shout down the opposition, that it will all just go away. This is what has created the rot and undermined one of the greatest police services in the world.

We need to get to the bottom of this and we need to deal with the issue of harassment, just as the RCMP commissioner has called on us to do.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a while ago there was a justice bill going through this House, and our hon. learned colleague for Mount Royal proposed about eight to ten amendments. Every single one of those amendments was refused at committee, absolutely refused. However, when the bill came to third reading here in the House of Commons, the government realized it should have taken those amendments. The bill then went to the Senate, where a senator introduced almost the exact same amendments to the bill.

The NDP proposed some very proper and straightforward amendments to Bill C-42 that would fix the bill and address some of the concerns that my hon. colleague has outlined. Again, in typical Conservative Party fashion, the Conservatives refused any of the amendments, which is a huge mistake.

I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that, please.

●(1340)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I think that example is excellent, because it shows how ridiculous government looks when it believes it is infallible, when good amendments are brought forward.

Every member in this House has a right to bring forward amendments, because we are here to work for the common good. However, the government shuts down everything and sees it as a personal threat. I see this in debate after debate on bill after bill.

However, when the Conservatives realize that they have created a really bad bill because they have been blocking their ears and not listening to reality, often they will just pass it and not care. Sometimes they have to rely on the Senate—the unelected, unaccountable Senate that is under massive investigation right now. The Conservatives do not mind going to the perps in the Senate, but they will not listen to the democratically elected members of this House.

That shows us that this government is fundamentally afraid of accountability and democracy.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to discuss concerns about Bill C-42.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with government members or anybody introducing legislation for better transparency, better accountability or better working arrangements within any department. The unfortunate part is that Bill C-42 would leave out many issues.

I have been following the RCMP and have been a fan for many years. I have been following careers and have tried, through my Veterans Affairs advocacy, to ensure that veterans of the RCMP receive the benefits they so rightly deserve.

Let us go back to how some of these things have happened. It was the current government that appointed, for the first time in my memory, a civilian to be the commissioner of the RCMP. If the Conservatives had tried to do that to the military and make a civilian the CDS, there would have been a riot and an uproar. For whatever reason, they thought it was okay that a civilian, Mr. Elliott, could look after the RCMP. Right away we could see that the rank and file RCMP members across the country were really upset. Many of them in my own riding were upset. They said that was not the way to go.

Government Orders

Young people join Depot and do the training and put on the yellow stripe. Probably the proudest day in many of these young men and women's lives is to wear the red serge. Maybe someone has ambitions and wishes to grow within the RCMP and maybe one day be the commissioner of the RCMP. Basically, the Conservatives said, "Don't worry about it. We're going to hire one of our friends and make him or her the commissioner of the RCMP". That was such a wrong thing to do. It is nothing against Mr. Elliott personally. It is just that he never wore the uniform. I honestly believe that the only person who should be the commissioner of the RCMP or the CDS of the military should be someone who has actually worn the uniform at one time. That is my personal belief.

Only the Conservatives can do this. The RCMP has an organization called the Pay Council, which negotiates with government its pay and benefits for future years. In 2009, after many months of negotiation, they negotiated a 3.5% increase, which was fair in 2009. That was negotiated between the Government of Canada and the Pay Council of the RCMP. It was an agreement. On December 23, in the afternoon, an email went out from the minister's office saying that the 3.5% they had negotiated was completely off the board now and that they were getting 1.5%, end of story. It was just before Christmas. It was the Conservatives who did that, not the NDP, not the Liberals, not the Bloc, not the Greens, and not the independents. The Conservatives did that. Just before Christmas, they rolled back the pay increases of RCMP members without consultation. Just like that, it was done. Mr. Elliott said that there was nothing we could do at that time.

Also, on the desk of the former public safety minister, Mr. Stockwell Day, there was a long-standing request for members of the RCMP and their families to have access to the VIP, the veterans independence program, which is a great program for those in the military who receive it, although many of them do not. It allows members of the military and their families to stay in their homes longer as they age and require help with groundskeeping and housekeeping services. RCMP veterans have been asking for the same program for many years. What did they get from the Conservatives? They said no, even though it has been a request on the desk for many years.

The third factor in the abuse of RCMP veterans is that recently the government had to be taken to court to settle the SISIP clawback. These are pain and suffering payments. They came back. That ended up costing taxpayers \$880 million, \$150 million of which was interest and legal fees, which never would have had to be paid if the government had only listened in 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007. Especially in 2007, before the legal proceedings started, the government could have saved an awful lot of money and a lot of aggravation on the SISIP clawback. The veterans won their case, and now those cheques will eventually be going out. We are glad that it has happened.

• (1345)

Did the Conservatives learn from that mistake? No. What have they done now? About 1,000 disabled RCMP veterans in the country have a lawsuit against the government on literally the exact same thing, a clawback of pain and suffering payments from their superannuation. Did the Conservatives learn from the expensive

SISIP clawback legalities they went through after five years of litigation? No. Their answer is, "Take us to court".

Given these three examples of the Conservatives' attitude toward the men and women of the RCMP, RCMP veterans and their families, it is no wonder that we on this side of the House distrust them when they bring forward legislation that is faulty at best.

We agree with the fact that there are certain elements of the RCMP that need changing, internally and structurally. We understand that, and we are willing to work with the government to see that it happens.

When my colleagues introduced amendments at the committee stage to improve the legislation, with very little discussion, the response from Conservatives was, "No, we are not accepting any opposition amendments. It is our way or the highway".

As I said before, the justice committee was doing a justice bill. My hon. colleague from Mount Royal introduced some very relevant and important amendments that would have strengthened the bill and made it constitutionally legal in many ways. He is one of the finest human rights people in the entire world. He is one of the most respected people I know. He does not do things on the fly or willy-nilly. He is a thoughtful and intelligent person. He introduced amendments, and the Conservatives said, "No, we're not going to do it".

It got to third reading, when amendments cannot be introduced, and all of a sudden, the government realized that maybe it should have listened to him. The bill went to the Senate, where a senator introduced amendments that were almost word for word the amendments the hon. member for Mount Royal introduced at the committee. It is incredible. What level of arrogance does the government have when it thinks that nobody in the opposition has an idea that may improve something it is bringing forward? It is incredible.

I have said for many years that it took the Liberals a long time to develop that arrogance. The Conservatives developed it very quickly, and I do not know why. Individual members of the Conservative Party are very good people. I do not know why they think they are the only ones who have all the answers. Many people came before committee and brought forward amendments that we in the opposition took from them to give the government. The answer was no.

The three examples I have given show exactly how the government treats RCMP members and their families. It is no wonder there is distrust. It is no wonder the morale among some members of the RCMP is really low.

I have been helping a veteran RCMP member for many years with his case with DVA. He lives in my riding. He said the proudest day of his life was when he put the red serge on at Depot. It was the proudest day of his life. He said the happiest day of his life was when he took it off. What did the RCMP or the government at the time do to make him so upset with the organization he had been willing to live and die for?

Government Orders

We in the NDP want to tell the government that we understand what it is trying to do. We are willing to work with it in this regard. It is going to have to bend to make this bill an awful lot better. If it is not willing to do that, then obviously, we are going to have to oppose this legislation.

I say, in closing, that the men and women who serve the RCMP have unlimited liability. We in government or in the opposition have the ultimate responsibility to see that their needs and their families' needs are met.

• (1350)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member is aware, I am retired from the RCMP. I am very proud of the RCMP and am happy to wear the red serge today. I would strongly suggest to the hon. member that the retired RCMP member he was speaking of probably has a pension and was happy to receive that.

Beyond that and the other things the member said, I think the RCMP has served our country very well for 140 years and continues to serve its members as best it can. Bill C-42 just extends an opportunity for what the commissioners of the RCMP want, whether it be the first one, MacLeod, or Paulson, and that is the power to do something within the organization that since 1873 it has not been able to do. I would like to hear one thing from the other side that shows that the commissioner has had the power, because he has not.

Bill C-42 is at least a start down the road. Commissioner Paulson has been very clear that he wants to eliminate the problems within the RCMP. Does the member believe that Bill C-42 is at least a good start for the Commissioner of the RCMP?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his service. The reality is that the gentleman I spoke to was very proud of his RCMP service. What he is not proud of is the way the government is handling his pension benefits affairs when he is fighting with DVA. That is what he is angry about.

We just want to ensure that the office of the commissioner does not have over-extenuating powers and that when the men and women of the RCMP have grievances or concerns that they are able to have them addressed properly. We agree that Bill C-42 was a discussion point to open up concerns within the RCMP.

I throw the question back to my hon. colleague. Why would his government not accept any amendments that came from experts, which were passed on to us and that we passed on to the government? Why is it that he, on behalf of his government, thinks that only they have the answers when it comes to the RCMP, when the fact is that we were trying to assist and help improve Bill C-42?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue of sexual harassment in the RCMP is an issue the Liberals have been talking about for the last number of years. In May 2012, Commissioner Paulson came forward with a public letter about how important it was that there be more authority for the commissioner to have the capacity to deal with disciplinary action. The sexual harassment issue is one of the things that really stirred that pot.

Bill C-42 has many shortcomings. We probably both would agree on the fact that it could have done a lot more in terms of making the bill better legislation. I agree with that. I agree with his comments,

especially when he talked about trying to get amendments through with this government.

Does he see any merit whatsoever in Bill C-42? Does the bill improve the system at all?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, as with most bills, there are always certain elements that move the discussion forward, possibly in a proactive way. The unfortunate part is that we have to take the bill in its entirety. The reality is that we cannot just pick a bill and say that one part is good and the rest is not. It is sort of like a budget. There are thousands of things in it. One thing is good and the rest is bad.

The unfortunate part is that Bill C-42 has many flaws. I am not sure if they are going to be supporting the legislation, but I encourage my hon. colleague to rethink the bill, because it could be greatly improved, and we have some suggestions for how to do that.

• (1355)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore for the tone and content of his remarks. I think he has summarized our objections to the bill in a very comprehensive way, from the heart and out of principle.

Given the nature and subject matter of the bill, I also want to recognize and pay tribute to my colleagues from London—Fanshawe, Churchill, Halifax, and the many others who are volunteering to be recognized today, with the notable exception of the member for Kings—Hants, for the contributions they have made to this important subject matter, which includes not only the serious issue of sexual harassment in the workplace but also the issue of restoring confidence and pride in our national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

For whatever reason, we know that the image of the RCMP has suffered in recent years as a result of unresolved allegations, investigations and complaints regarding the operations and functions of that workplace in the context of harassment and in the broader context of bullying, a word that has come up a number of times in comments by learned members in the House. Bullying has almost become a motif or theme throughout a great deal of the objections we have heard, and I think we cannot separate the two.

I am also proud of the opposition day motion that my colleague put forward, the motion regarding an anti-bullying policy or strategy for this country. It is a shame that the anti-bullying initiative was turned down, because the issue we are dealing with today could be quite appropriately dealt with in the context of that anti-bullying legislation.

The reason I wanted to compliment my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore is that he got to the root of the problem, which is that it is actually too late to be debating the merits of the bill now that it is at third reading.

Statements by Members

We tried to amend the bill at committee stage. We supported the bill at second reading in the hopeful belief that there was an intention of co-operation by the government side members to accommodate some of the legitimate concerns we brought forward. The theme of the speech by my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore was with respect to an arrogance in this place, the likes of which we have never seen in the government, as it has refused to allow a single amendment to a single piece of legislation in the entire 41st Parliament.

I was a member of Parliament during the majority Liberal government. We were a small party, about the size the Liberals are now, and almost as irrelevant as the Liberals are now. However, we did have one member on each committee, just as the Liberals have now. I can say without any fear of contradiction that during the Liberal majority years, my colleagues and I used to get amendments through on pieces of legislation at committee. That is only reasonable, because in a Westminster parliamentary democracy there is an obligation on the ruling party to accommodate some of the legitimate issues brought forward by the majority of Canadians who did not vote for the majority party.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I must interrupt the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre at this point. He will have six minutes remaining when the matter returns before the House.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Human Resources had an opportunity to show some openness and to note the devastating impact of the employment insurance reform that she is shoving down the throats of Quebecers.

The minister first met with representatives of the Coalition de l'Est, who provided concrete examples of the major and immediate impact of the new measures. Then, she had a meeting with the Quebec Minister of Labour on the tragic consequences of the reform for Quebec workers, their families and for our communities.

On both occasions, the minister responsible for the reform rudely and flippantly cut short the testimonies and arguments. Her arrogance towards Quebecers is further incentive to do whatever it takes and take as long as we need to fight and win this battle.

Rest assured that the Bloc Québécois, along with workers and employers from all regions of Quebec, and the Government of Quebec, will fight to the end.

[*English*]

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after facing persecution in 2005 for converting to Christianity, Pastor Saeed Abedini fled Iran for America.

One year ago Abedini returned to Iran to visit his family and build an orphanage. He was arrested.

Last month Abedini was sentenced to eight years in prison for starting Christian House churches in Iran. He was accused by the judge of being a national security threat. Abedini is in the Evin prison in Tehran. It has been compared to a gulag for political prisoners.

While it may be easy to take our freedoms for granted here in Canada, we must never forget that so many other nations do not protect these rights. Human rights are most often violated by persecuting people for their religious beliefs.

Canada has always served as a safe haven for religious minorities escaping persecution. I am proud to say that this government has taken the principled stand of defending religious freedom at home and abroad. Nothing has proven this commitment more than the establishment of Canada's Office of Religious Freedom. This is a signal to the world that this government stands for freedom, democracy and human rights.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS TRAINING AND RECOVERY CENTRES

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to talk about the mandate of the Centres de formation en entreprise et récupération, commonly known as CFERs. Last week, I had the opportunity to visit the CFER at Jacques-Ouellette school in Longueuil. The company-school shreds confidential documents. I met dynamic, dedicated teachers and I spoke with youth who, despite being visually impaired, find it motivating to be developing their skills.

I cannot talk about CFERs without mentioning De Mortagne high school in Boucherville. The youth there, who will visit Ottawa this spring, collect second-hand clothing from Hydro-Québec and SEPAQ.

I must admit, I am a loyal customer of theirs, and I do not hesitate to make purchases at these stores, where you can find gloves, work clothes and overshoes for winter. To the youth involved in CFERs across Quebec: you are models of perseverance.

* * *

[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend thanks for the hospitality and to thank all parliamentarians who attended the memorial event to commemorate the second anniversary of the shocking assassination of the Hon. Shahbaz Bhatti, federal minister for minorities of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Statements by Members

Shahbaz Bhatti was the sole Christian minister in the government of Pakistan, and his brutal murder two years ago sent a chill to the soul of the nation. It was truly a dark day in human history.

The late Minister Bhatti's life work was to promote peace, tolerance and understanding among peoples of all faiths in Pakistan and throughout the world.

It was also my privilege to attend the announcement last week at which our Prime Minister appointed Dr. Andrew Bennett as head of Canada's Office of Religious Freedom. He did so in the spirit of Shahbaz Bhatti's mission of peace, tolerance and understanding among all peoples.

As a country that cherishes human rights, democracy, freedom and the rule of law, let us never forget what Shahbaz Bhatti stood for.

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PARLIAMENTARY INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night I had the honour of attending the annual parliamentary internship programme gala dinner with my intern Morgan Ring, who is a terrific intern with whom I am honoured to work.

The parliamentary internship programme brings Parliament to life for 10 exceptional young Canadians every year.

Last night at the dinner we were joined by *Globe and Mail* writer Jeffrey Simpson, who actually was one of the distinguished interns some time ago. We were also joined by Derek Burney, a great Canadian public servant, who gave an inspiring and insightful speech on free trade and Canada's role in shaping the future of global trade.

We also heard from Ed Lumley, a former member of Parliament and one of Canada's great trade ministers. I would like to thank Mr. Lumley and BMO Capital Markets, where he is the vice-chairman, for their continued support of the parliamentary internship programme. Last night Mr. Lumley launched an additional \$250,000 in support for this exceptional program.

* * *

• (1405)

CARING NURSE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, an anonymous author once said, "Save one life, you're a hero. Save 100 lives, you're a nurse".

I stand today to recognize the hard work and dedication of nurses in Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, and indeed of all nurses across Canada.

A number of nurses in Bruce County and Grey County were recently awarded the Caring Nurse Award from Bayshore's Healthy Tomorrow's Association. Recipients are nurses who are nominated by their fellow community members and who merit being recognized for outstanding work in their community.

I extend my sincere congratulations and thanks to Ann Thompson, Leanne Edwards, Jennifer Cowan, Garry O'Toole, Bobbi Jackson, Robyn Hewson, Kari Johnson, Pauline Linton, Shelly Dolson, Kim

Calverley, Mamie De Groot, Kory Whitlow, Shirley McCarthy, Margaret Thompson, Pauline Wyville and Joan Stephenson on receiving this award.

Nurses are a vital link between patients and families, and it is great to see that a spotlight is being put on nurses.

Congratulations to all for this well-deserved recognition, and I thank all nurses for their outstanding work.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a delegation from the Coalition de l'Est sur l'assurance-emploi, which includes representatives from all sectors in the five regions of eastern Quebec, came to Ottawa yesterday to meet with the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. This delegation was representing hundreds of thousands of Quebecers.

That same day, demonstrations were held in Pointe-à-la-Croix, Chandler, Rivière-au-Renard, the Magdalen Islands, Sainte-Anne-des-Monts and elsewhere in show of support for the delegation. All these people are saying no to the minister's reform.

The delegation met with the minister to explain the very devastating effects of her reform, and the fact that she is not considering the situation in their area. Unfortunately, the delegation left empty-handed, and the minister insinuated that they were spreading lies. The delegation now feels that this government is incapable of listening.

I am proud of the work done so far by the Coalition de l'Est, and I know that it will continue to mobilize against the reform. Employment insurance belongs to workers and employers. The minister must put her reform on hold.

* * *

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a former statesman once said, "A wise and frugal government, which shall restrain citizens from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to pursue individual enterprise and shall not take from the mouth of labour the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government."

The three principles of this statement are exactly what our Conservative government has provided to Canadians since 2006.

Our Conservative government has enacted laws to protect our citizens and is making Canada's streets safer.

Our Conservative government has cut unnecessary red tape, opened new trade markets for business and invested in Canadian research and technology, which supports individual enterprise.

Statements by Members

Finally, our Conservative government has lowered taxes over 140 times, thereby putting more money in the pockets of Canadians and Canadian businesses.

I stand on this side of the House because Conservatives believe in these principles, and we are delivering good government to Canadians.

* * *

HOCKEY HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, hockey is Canada's game from coast to coast to coast.

Today I heartily congratulate Marc Crawford for being named a 2013 inductee to the British Columbia Hockey Hall of Fame.

Members may question why I, as an Ontario MP, would honour Marc as one of the six new inductees to the shinny shrine in B.C. this year.

Marc is a Belleville, Ontario, native who comes from a family of dedicated and talented hockey players in the Quinte area. His father, Floyd, led the Belleville McFarlands to the world title. Marc, his brothers and his family achieved great success throughout the hockey world.

After six seasons playing in the NHL, Marc was named NHL Coach of the Year with the Quebec Nordiques in 1994-1995, and of course left a great hockey legacy with the Vancouver Canucks.

From minor hockey to the NHL, hockey is legendary in Prince Edward—Hastings. We are all very proud when one of our own accomplishes so much in this great Canadian game. We send our congratulations to Marc.

* * *

●(1410)

[*Translation*]

CASCADES-NOREMPAC

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Cascades-Norempac boxboard mill in Lachute will be closing down next month. These were good, well-paying jobs that were essential to our region's economy.

We now have 155 laid-off workers, and these workers recently learned that their pensions would not be fully honoured, even for those who might apply to another division at Cascades. This is especially distressing for the employees who are nearing retirement. Some were a few months from retirement.

I am committed to working with all the people and organizations involved and with all levels of government to ensure that these workers are treated with dignity and justice. Simply complying with the law is not enough. This is about solidarity. We must create new measures to protect the pensions of Canadian workers.

To quote local union president Daniel Brisebois: "I accept that this is legal...but it's a crappy situation nonetheless."

[*English*]

TOURISM

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism is leading a Canadian delegation in India. India is a very important emerging market for our tourism sector. Being born, raised and educated in India, I have a good story to tell.

Last year a record-breaking number of Indian travellers visited Canada. Indian travellers are now among our top 10 international travellers to visit Canada.

Our Conservative government is working with industry to capitalize on this growth. Because of the significant improvements made to the visa application process, thanks to the Minister of Immigration, we are now in a position to welcome even more Indian travellers this year.

This is not only strengthening our relationship with our Indian friends; it is also creating jobs and growth in Canada.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is February 28, the end of Black History Month. I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the House to never stop remembering the contributions of our black society to this great country we call Canada.

I have the proud distinction of representing the fantastic community of Preston, Nova Scotia, Canada's largest indigenous black population. Some of these individuals can trace their roots all the way back to Mathieu Da Costa.

There are people like the great Ovid Jackson, the Rt. Hon. Lincoln Alexander and Jean Augustine, Canada's first black individuals ever elected to the House of Commons. There are people like Custio Clayton of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, who was not completely successful at the London games but showed the class and dignity of a true Canadian, a true Dartmouthian and a true Nova Scotian in what it is like to be a man of class.

These are just two examples of the wonderful contributions that African Canadians have made to our country. I encourage every person to continue to learn the history of our proud black people of Canada.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for more than 25 years, aboriginal women on reserves across Canada have been without the legal protections that are available to all other Canadians. When a relationship breaks down, their spouse can ban them from the home, sell the house and even keep all the money without the consent of the woman.

Statements by Members

This is why we have introduced matrimonial property rights legislation to protect aboriginal women and children. This bill will allow judges to enforce emergency protection orders and remove a violent partner for the safety of the woman and child.

Women on reserves, international organizations and even the Manitoba NDP have asked for this legislation. Shockingly, the Leader of the Opposition and his federal NDP oppose this legislation. This is absolutely shameful.

On this side of the House, we will continue to stand up for aboriginal women so they can have the same protections as all Canadians.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, our Subcommittee on International Human Rights received Tibetan prime minister-in-exile, Dr. Lobsang Sangay, who provided compelling testimony on the ongoing repression and persecution of Tibetans by the Chinese government.

Dr. Sangay spoke with great sadness of the 107 Tibetans since 2009 who have expressed the ultimate cry of protest through self-immolation, some just days ago, which we ignore both at their peril and our own, to protect against the occupation and environmental degradation of their lands; against arbitrary detention and forced disappearance; and against marginalization, cultural suppression and the denial of religious freedom.

Tibetans value democracy, freedom and respect for the rule of law, while subscribing to the principle of non-violence in their pursuit of genuine autonomy pursuant to the Chinese constitution.

Let us all join our voices with Dr. Sangay in calling on Canada to press China to dialogue with the Tibetan administration, to permit Canadian representatives to visit Tibet and to work closely with the U.S., EU and international partners to end the persecution and pain of Tibetans.

* * *

• (1415)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government categorically rejects the remarks on Zionism made by Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan yesterday on the margins of the fifth United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. Inflammatory statements do nothing to advance the cause of peace or effective cross-cultural dialogue.

The UN Alliance of Civilizations must promote “respect and understanding for religious and cultural diversity...and...dialogue and cooperation among different cultures, civilizations and peoples”, rather than use language that would divide us. The fact that this type of statement was made at such a forum is truly unacceptable.

Zionism cannot be considered a crime against humanity. Such misguided sentiments only give expression to a dangerous, insidious form of new anti-Semitism. On this point, there is no space for ambivalence.

Canada fundamentally upholds Israel's right to exist as the Jewish state in peace and security. We are compelled as a country of free citizens to speak directly and to speak honestly. We have the obligation to speak out and to act. That Israel is still the subject of hatred is deeply disturbing and is one of the forces that drives our unwavering support for the Jewish state.

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[*Translation*]

THE SENATE

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to show that they are grossly incompetent when it comes to financial management.

While unemployed workers are treated like fraudsters with surprise visits, and the marine safety of francophones has been deemed unimportant, the Senate's budget continues to increase. Of all the Conservatives' bad choices, this is no doubt the worst.

It is not enough for the Conservatives to use taxpayers' money to sign bigger and bigger cheques for their fundraising friends. Their eyes are bigger than their bellies.

The Conservatives are also allowing the gross abuse of public funds. They are allowing senators to lie about their place of residence, use public funds to pay for plane tickets for travel during election campaigns and even submit expense claims for partisan activities.

The members opposite will defend senators' questionable schemes so that they can keep their privileges. In fact, the Prime Minister's Office has already decided that the senators who have abused public funds will be absolved of any wrongdoing regardless of the results of the investigation.

The Senate is undemocratic, unaccountable and filled with Conservatives who are rolling in the money—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River.

* * *

[*English*]

NATURAL GAS

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, natural gas is an affordable fuel that Canadians across our country use every day. British Columbians are fortunate to have natural gas deposits in our province and are benefiting from the jobs that the industry supports and low cost fuel for home heating, electricity and other important uses. Our government puts the jobs and economy first by supporting this important industry.

The Minister of Natural Resources was in British Columbia this week to announce our plan to support the export of natural gas to the fastest-growing economies abroad.

While we act in the interest of Canadians, the NDP would impose a \$21 billion carbon tax that would raise the price of everything, including natural gas. That means more expensive electricity bills, higher home heating costs and less money for British Columbians. We will not support this job-killing carbon tax.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are 16 Conservative senators who have refused to come clean with Canadians about their residency and housing expenses. However, now the Conservative senators charged with investigating corruption in the Senate have said that only three will face a forensic audit.

How can Conservatives be trusted to investigate Conservatives? Will the Conservative government finally agree to a full independent investigation of all residence and travel expenses in the unelected, unaccountable and unapologetic Senate?

• (1420)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have committed to ensuring that all expenses are appropriate, that the rules governing the expenses are appropriate and that the Senate will report back to taxpayers. It has done so. We take these issues tremendously seriously and that is why the Senate has retained outside support to ensure that the integrity of the system is respected.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a new analysis of Senate files reveals that in the last three years alone, no fewer than 46 senators were required to pay back expenditures that were billed to taxpayers.

Canadians have no way of knowing if these were simply administrative errors or out-and-out fraud. Senate representatives are refusing to provide more information. It is unacceptable for Conservative senators to investigate themselves.

Will the Conservative government agree to hold a full, independent investigation into the Senate? Yes or no?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister asked the leader of the NDP to help the Conservatives pass legislation that would do two things: one, allow for elected senators; and two, allow for term limits for the Senate.

What did the leader of the NDP do? He blocked it. He stopped this legislation from moving forward, and that is a disgrace to taxpayers.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is a disgrace to taxpayers is to have Conservatives stonewalling Conservative senators to hide the truth from Canadian

Oral Questions

taxpayers, to let unelected people overturn the laws of Parliament. That is undemocratic. That is what is unacceptable.

[Translation]

Today, we learned that on top of their mismanagement, the Conservatives are spending an additional \$1.5 billion on joint support ships. This government cannot count. Its mismanagement and incompetence when it comes to military support are astounding. This Conservative government does not know what it is doing.

Who is responsible for the Canadian ship spending fiasco?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader wants to talk about unelected people making decisions. I could not make this up. The leader of the NDP claimed that he wanted to abolish the Senate, but just yesterday in the House he proposed a private member's bill giving the Senate new and unprecedented power. Look at what he has done. In his private member's bill, he is now going to make the Parliamentary Budget Officer not just appointed by the elected House of Commons, but it is going to need to have the support of the unelected Senate.

The NDP leader should make his choice. Does he want the unelected Senate to have more power, or does he want to join this government in bringing real reforms?

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I believe the question had been about joint support ships, the latest mismanagement in the military procurement file. The NDP supports building these ships, but nobody trusts the Conservatives with procurement.

To date, it has been about fighter jets that do not fight or jet, maritime helicopters that do not fly over water and fixed-wing search and rescue craft that somehow got lost.

Therefore, who is going to take the blame for this one? Is it the Minister of National Defence who is finally ready to stand? Is the new associate minister going to lie down on the tracks for this one, or is the Minister of Public Works and Government Services still carrying the bag on this one?

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Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our national shipbuilding procurement strategy has employed rigorous independent oversight and shipbuilding expertise from the start. This oversight has included: a fairness monitor for our competition; internationally respected experts in the shipbuilding industry, First Marine International, which is overseeing the whole strategy; an independent validation and oversight firm which is KPMG; and we will have an independent third party to advise the shipbuilding secretariat on project management and cost validation for each step of every project moving forward.

Let us remember that this is in the design phase, but we have all these measures in place to protect the taxpayer.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, are the Conservatives claiming that the PBO has the numbers wrong? If so, what is the real cost of these ships? They are already scaling back on their promises about these ships and what they will be able to do. With their stated budget, are we going to be left with nothing but two tugboats painted grey?

If the procurement were on track, the Conservatives would not have already cancelled the program once and the delivery schedule would not have been pushed back six years. What capabilities are going to be lost because of this Conservative mismanagement?

• (1425)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have ensured not only that we have rigorous, independent oversight when it comes to costing but also that we are bringing in important shipbuilding expertise. We have not only First Marine International, which is an internationally recognized expert in the shipbuilding industry, overseeing the strategy but also an independent third party with shipbuilding expertise that will be reviewing not only the project management but also the cost validation for every step of every ship project moving forward.

If adjustments need to be made, they will be done in partnership with the shipyards, the navy and the coast guard.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that if there were tugboats they would not be painted grey, but they would be painted red, white and blue, the colours of the Conservative Party of Canada.

I wonder if the minister who just answered the question could please answer a very simple question. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that the estimate of \$2.60 billion is in fact incorrect and he estimates that replacing the *Protecteur* will cost about \$3.28 billion, but following the American GAO practice, the best estimate would come up with a number of \$4.3 billion.

What will it be, fewer ships or a bigger budget?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that the Parliamentary Budget Officer himself stated in his report that his “high-level cost estimates and observations are neither to be viewed as conclusions...nor as a view to future costs”.

We feel that, importantly, we put in place the independent oversight that we believe necessary and the shipbuilding expertise to ensure that we have those measures in place. Let us remember that these ships are in the design phase, but as we move forward we have the independent oversight and expertise in place to protect taxpayers. If any adjustments need to be made, they will be made with the navy and the Coast Guard.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister spoke of adjustments. But the question remains the same. Do these adjustments mean fewer ships or an even bigger budget than the Conservative Party originally planned on?

Fewer ships or a bigger budget—which will the department choose?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we do have the necessary expertise in place to ensure that as we move forward there is not only project management expertise but cost validation at every step of every ship project moving forward. Involving these kinds of independent, third-party experts will continue to be an integral part of our process, to provide the shipbuilding secretariat with sound advice not only on affordability but on capability and also on risk.

Again, we are in the design phase, and if any adjustments need to be made, they will be made with the shipbuilding secretariat in partnership with the shipyards and the navy and the coast guard.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the situation regarding Mr. Porter, I know that the Minister of Public Safety and others have said that of course his name was shared with the opposition parties. The opposition parties do not have the capacity to do a security clearance. They do not have a capacity to investigate. They do not have a capacity to cross-examine. They do not have a capacity to do the kind of work that is supposed to be the work of the government. I can vouch for the fact that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Toronto Centre still has the floor.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I can vouch for the fact that the security clearances for SIRC are traditionally very rigorous indeed. Yet, in the comments made by Dr. Porter, he made it clear that there was scarcely any security clearance for him. How does it happen for him? How does it happen for Bruce Carson? Where are the security clearances on the current government?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Arthur Porter submitted his resignation. It was accepted almost two years ago.

Oral Questions

The leaders of the NDP and the Liberal Party were consulted and they consented to this appointment. Now the member stands up and says he did not have any information and so he simply consented. That is an abdication of his responsibility. If there were any concerns that he had, he could have brought them to the attention of the appropriate authorities and simply asked the question. He failed in his responsibility.

* * *

● (1430)

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us get back to ships.

If all goes well, the vessels will be delivered 16 years after the proposal was submitted.

In other parts of the world, this process takes just a few years. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's figures are in line with those of National Defence, as Radio-Canada reported last week.

The extent of the problems in this file again shows the Conservatives' mismanagement.

What will the minister do to correct the situation?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, the national shipbuilding procurement strategy, right from the beginning and ongoing over the next 20 years in fact, will employ rigorous independent oversight and shipbuilding expertise. We have brought in the expertise and the capacity we need to oversee this strategy to ensure it remains successful. It is a very important industrial strategy for the economy of Canada, and we have made sure we are putting in place the right measures, the right expertise and the right oversight so that it does succeed.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this project has been announced, delayed, announced, cancelled and then announced again. Conservative incompetence in managing military projects is mind-boggling. This PBO report shows that the initial cancellation by the government could cost taxpayers over \$1 billion, and it has been delayed by years.

It is the Minister of National Defence who is responsible for this, and yet he is not even allowed to stand up and explain himself. When will the minister and the government finally take responsibility for their failure to manage this project?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, the national shipbuilding procurement strategy has employed very rigorous independent oversight and shipbuilding expertise right from the beginning to ensure that this strategy is successful over the next 20 years.

Not only have we ensured that we used a fairness monitor throughout the competition, but we have employed the internationally respected experts in the shipbuilding industry, First Marine International, to oversee the entire strategy. We also have an

independent third party that has expertise in shipbuilding and will be giving advice on the project management and cost validation for every step of every ship project moving forward.

We are putting in place the right measures to make sure this is successful.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, his colleagues seem to have trouble counting and the Minister of Public Safety seems to have trouble listening. The tripartite agreements for 18 first nation police services will expire on March 31, but he has refused to respond to their concerns, except today in committee. In what looked like an accidental moment of honesty, the minister said he thought the funding would continue, but then he retracted and said it was up to the Prime Minister.

Will the minister or maybe the Prime Minister tell these first nation communities today that they will still have police at the end of March?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister made the position of the government very clear.

I find it interesting that the member is talking about improving safety for aboriginals. That member opposed matrimonial real property rights for aboriginal women, he opposed tougher sentences for sexual assault, he opposed ending house arrest for serious crimes, he opposed tougher penalties for those who sell drugs to our children and he opposed funding to keep our young people out of gangs.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is unacceptable for the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador to be told that a meeting with other chiefs is all that is needed to respond to its concerns.

Studies show that the work of first nations police services results in savings for other social services. If these forces do not receive the funding they need, it will cost even more to replace them.

My question is simple. When will the minister advise the Quebec chiefs that they will receive the funding they need for their police services?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while policing is primarily a provincial responsibility, the federal government has long invested in first nation policing to help keep communities safe. As has been indicated by the Prime Minister, a funding decision will be made in the near future. However, I can say that spending on first nations policing has increased substantially under this government.

* * *

• (1435)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' determination to destroy the employment insurance program and to pretend it is for the good of workers is becoming increasingly pathetic. Protests are taking place every day—and I mean every day—to denounce the minister's ideological reform. Again today, workers are demonstrating in Rivière-du-Loup to tell the Prime Minister where he can put his reform: in the garbage of course. It is very simple: the Conservatives could not care less about what these workers think.

How many protests will have to take place before the minister realizes she is completely off base?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our fundamental responsibility is to ensure that there is integrity to all the programs the Government of Canada administers.

We are working to ensure that Canadians who have worked hard and paid the premiums get the benefits they need when they need them. That is why we are taking some reasonable measures to ensure that inappropriate payments are not paid out. This can save workers literally hundreds of millions of dollars.

Our fundamental responsibility is to create an economy that will create jobs so that everyone can provide for themselves and their families.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Of course, Mr. Speaker, while they are targeting the unemployed, their senators continue to abuse the system and benefit from it.

The Conservatives are making changes to employment insurance without impact studies. That is unacceptable, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses, except for an amateur government like the Conservative government. Apple growers in the Compton region and the tourist industry in the famed Coaticook Valley, which includes the Coaticook Gorge Park, will all suffer because of this bad reform.

How can we ensure the sustainability of these businesses and the quality of their workforce, year after year, if they have to start from scratch and hire new employees every time? That is not feasible, and it is not manageable.

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our vision for Canada is a strong economy, one that is creating jobs so that people can provide for themselves and their families.

Under the economic leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance we have seen the creation of some 900,000 net new jobs. More work remains to be done. That is why the government is providing a significant level of employment supports to help people find the dignity of a job and the pride of independence. That is why we are taking reasonable measures to ensure the system is sustainable for those hard-working workers who pay the freight.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the minister does not know the impact of her reform, here is a real-life example. A young mother in Manicouagan waited two months to get her EI benefits because of the cuts at Service Canada. However, she was just denied any benefits because she did not answer the questions concerning wage cuts and the distance she was prepared to travel to get a new job.

Why did the minister deny benefits for a mother who has a child requiring specialized care outside her region?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians who have worked hard and paid into premiums should be entitled to the benefits they require. We have a substantial number of well-qualified public servants who are prepared to provide support and help Canadians achieve and obtain the benefits they have paid for. However, we would encourage the member opposite's constituents to work with the hard-working public servants, to ensure they get the benefits they so justly work for and so justly paid into.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians from coast to coast to coast continue to raise concerns with the reckless cuts to EI, and still the minister refuses to take responsibility.

This week, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, a well-respected organization representing Canadian producers, has also joined the chorus. The Conservative cuts to EI are seriously potentially impacting their ability to farm, to harvest and to plant.

Did the minister even consider, did she even consult the agricultural sector, before she plowed ahead with these reckless cuts to seasonal workers?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last time this government and this party consulted rural Canada with a widespread consultation, it was a record bumper crop. It is because of the leadership of this Minister of Agriculture.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we just cannot get a straight answer out of the minister.

After denying it for weeks, the HRSDC minister finally admitted that bureaucrats are given targets for cutting people off EI. This is the same as a quota. Staff reviewing claims are given quotas and are paid bonuses for rejecting EI claims. How can out-of-work Canadians expect their claims to be judged in a fair and impartial way when the Conservatives have already decided that they are guilty until proven innocent?

• (1440)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Service Canada employees do not have quotas which would carry negative consequences for staff who fail to meet them. What we are trying to do is ensure that Canadians who work hard and play by the rules, who pay the premiums, get the benefits that they are entitled to, and nothing more.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here we go again, another Conservative procurement gone wrong. For the money allocated, the Conservatives cannot possibly get the number of supply ships promised. Something has to give—either more money or fewer ships. Had the Conservatives not abandoned the 2004 program, the military today would have three ships, not two, and Canadian taxpayers would have an extra half billion dollars in their pockets.

How can the Conservatives be so incompetent as to mess up a three-boat procurement?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our 20-year national shipbuilding procurement strategy, very importantly, has the proper independent oversight and shipbuilding expertise that we believe is necessary to make it successful over the coming decades. We have made sure that we have included a fairness monitor throughout the competition, of course, but also, and most importantly, internationally respected experts in the shipbuilding industry are now overseeing the strategy. We also have independent third parties that are going to help with project management and advice on costing validation for every step of every ship project moving forward. This is an important part of the strategy, moving forward, to not only protect taxpayers but to ensure that the strategy is successful.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservative government, the PBO has done in six weeks what the Conservative government has failed to do in six years. Unlike the Conservative government, the PBO does serious costing analysis. Unlike the Conservative government, the PBO tests the numbers against internationally recognized verifiers. Unlike the Conservative government, the PBO spends his money on peer-review panels rather than on spin and re-announcements.

Would the minister consider formally engaging the PBO instead of wasting the budget on spin?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my office does engage with the PBO, but again, the important thing is that we have included, right from the beginning, and let us remember that this process was launched just a year ago,

Oral Questions

the independent oversight necessary and the expertise in shipbuilding necessary to make this strategy over the coming decades successful. We have employed the internationally respected experts in the shipbuilding industry, First Marine International, which benchmarked our shipyards against shipyards all over the world. We also have KPMG, which is an independent validation and oversight firm, and a shipbuilding expert company, which will be—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bourassa.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer tells us that we got taken with regard to the F-35 program, but we also learn that the Conservatives are now taking us for a ride on a boat that will not float. The fact is that they do not know how to count. Even as they are going through their great crisis management exercise, they are saying that not only might they be forced to redesign the ships, they are not even sure they can afford them.

There are two options here: either the budget gets bigger or the government buys fewer ships. Is that clear? Is it going to be a bigger budget or fewer ships?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have independent third parties in place. These experts are an integral part of the process. They are providing sound advice, from beginning to end, on every step of every ship project moving forward, not only on affordability but on capability and risk assessment. Let us remember that these ships are in the design phase at this point, but as we move forward, we have all the measures in place to protect the taxpayer. Of course, if adjustments need to be made, they will be made in partnership with our shipyards, the navy and the Coast Guard.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has assured Canadians that he can personally vouch for the residency requirements of all senators under investigation, just as he vouched for Patrick Brazeau and Arthur Porter.

• (1445)

Mr. David Anderson: It is gerrymander.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has the floor.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives get worried when they get questioned on accountability. It is like they are circling the wagons.

Oral Questions

They are claiming that Senator Patterson of Vancouver actually lives in Nunavut, although he does not pay taxes there. Two weeks ago, Senator Lowell Murray said that if a senator pays taxes in another province, “he’s finished”. Why the whitewash? Why will they not stand up for the taxpayers and defend them against these cronies?

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, those questions have already been answered. What has not been answered from the gerrymanderer-in-chief over there is why he and only his NDP colleague have been singled out by an independent electoral commission for inappropriate behaviour as it relates to the boundaries. It appears that he was trying to apply inappropriate pressure in order to conform the boundaries to his political desires, because he does not want to run on a fair game after having voted against his constituents on the long gun registry.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday it was Farrah Fawcett reruns, and now the member is back to the duck hunter, so he will have to get his Rolodex of excuses out, because we are now learning that Senator Mac Harb is registered to vote in Ottawa and uses an Ottawa home address for his business, yet he signed a document claiming that he lives hundreds of kilometres away in order to ding the taxpayer for over \$40,000 in questionable living expenses.

Enough of these whitewashes. Will the government agree that any of these senators who defraud the taxpayers will be charged and booted out of the Senate? Will they stop defending their cronies?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Once again, the member failed to address the question before the House of Commons, which is why it is that he was singled out, in a very unusual step by an independent electoral commission, for inappropriate behaviour. He is the one who did it. He is the one who stands in the House and grandstands so regularly, putting himself on the highest moral level. He is the one who has been singled out for breaking the rules. He is the one who should stand and explain that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is standing up for the interests of the people—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We are wasting time. The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is standing up for the interests of the people of Ontario, while the Conservatives are defending the abuses of their friends in the Senate. That is what is happening.

Let us think about it. Right now, senators can do whatever they want. They can lie about their place of residence and submit expense claims for a bogus residence or for plane tickets. And the worst thing that will happen to them—the very worst thing—is that they will have to secretly pay back the money and then be defended by a bunch of docile and obedient MPs. Senators are not facing any

consequences. None. And then, the Conservatives are surprised when this type of abuse occurs.

Will the Conservatives finally crack down on their friends in the Senate who are abusing taxpayers' money?

[*English*]

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, the member asked about residency. On this side of the House, at least, we know what country we live in.

The NDP interim leader was a member of the Bloc Québécois. That member gave donations 29 times to the separatist Québec solidaire. The member for Laurentides—Labelle has supported the Bloc Québécois. The member for Sherbrooke said the NDP would respect sovereignty, and now one of the separatist members in the NDP has gone to join the Bloc. Is it the NDP over there or the NDPQ?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a member of a party that works for people and stands up for families—the only party that will get rid of the Conservatives.

Workers are not fraudsters. The fraudsters are the Conservatives' friends, like Arthur Porter.

The Conservatives took advantage of his money. They did photo ops with him, even after he was charged with tens of millions of dollars in fraud. They refuse to even admit that they screwed up royally by appointing him to monitor the activities of CSIS.

Will the Conservatives finally admit that the Prime Minister made a monumental mistake in appointing Arthur Porter to this key position?

• (1450)

[*English*]

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, that member has been asked almost as many times if he is a federalist as he has donated to the separatist Québec Solidaire. One more time he had an occasion to stand and be clear and answer the question. Today would have been a good day, when one of his compatriots joined the Bloc Québécois, for him to stand in the House of Commons, clarify his position and state that he is a federalist who believes in a united Canada.

Let us give him one more chance, a 30th chance, to stand in the House of Commons and do just that.

*Oral Questions***HUMAN RESOURCES**

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud of our proven track record of helping create over 900,000 net new jobs. However, we also know that skills and labour shortages do present a significant challenge to Canada's continued competitiveness and long-term prosperity. Would the Minister of Labour please update the House on how our government is addressing skills and training for all Canadians?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it would be my great honour and pleasure to answer the question from the hard-working member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Today the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development outlined that there is a skills mismatch in Canada. She stated that it is actually becoming Canada's most significant socio-economic challenge that in too many cases, Canadian workers do not have the skills that employers seek. Our government is committed to better helping Canadians, particularly young Canadians, to get the skills and the training they need for that labour market. We are going to work with our partners, and we are going to encourage employers to step up to the plate for training.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have one example of where the Conservatives are way off on the employment file.

The Conservatives are acting innocent and letting our airlines subcontract foreign planes and pilots for their flights. Sunwing and CanJet are among the Canadian companies that often use foreign planes and pilots. I have two simple questions.

Why did the Conservatives authorize so many foreign pilots and why are they exporting Canadian jobs abroad?

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, our airline system is one of the safest in the world, and we are making improvements.

We have reduced the number of accidents by 25% since 2000. Foreign pilots, like Canadian pilots, must go through a rigorous selection process to ensure that they have the necessary qualifications.

Transport Canada is reviewing its policies to see whether change is necessary.

* * *

[*English*]

AIRLINE SAFETY

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not actually true. There are risks associated with hiring foreign pilots, particularly when it comes to understanding Canadian safety regulations.

CTV reported that a CF-18 had to be scrambled when a Sunwing plane from Paris to Toronto went missing for an hour. It is a good thing we were not relying on an F-35; they are grounded. The reason was that Sunwing's foreign pilot had made a mistake.

Why is Transport Canada rubber-stamping wet leases, letting potentially unqualified foreign pilots fly Canadian flights? Does the minister consider this an acceptable practice?

• (1455)

The Speaker: The audio does not seem to be working. We will come back.

The hon. member for Trois-Rivières

* * *

[*Translation*]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we talked about planes, now I want to talk about trains.

There are more cuts coming for VIA Rail. Last year, the Conservatives slashed \$20 million from the operating budget, and we have seen what that has done to service.

But the die has been cast, and nothing more can be done. The Conservatives have chosen to slash another \$290 million, which is more than half of VIA's budget.

With these cuts, it will be impossible for VIA Rail to maintain the same services, which, it bears repeating, have already been cut.

Can the Minister of Transport tell us how many new routes will be cut?

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 need to strike a balance between VIA Rail services and the fact that it is a crown corporation, paid for by taxpayers. Obviously, VIA Rail has made decisions in order to save money and protect taxpayers while still providing excellent service to Canadians.

We will work with VIA so that we can have better service in the future.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a 60% reduction.

This situation with the Conservatives and VIA Rail is a bit of a catch-22. The Conservatives are discouraging people from using VIA by making cuts, but they are justifying further cuts by saying that there are fewer passengers. And the downward spiral will continue until the train is completely defunct, starting in the regions.

In my riding, the train is key to economic development. The government cuts to VIA are an attack on the regions that depend on the train.

Will the Conservatives stop these attacks on our regions and cancel these cuts that are hurting our communities?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the member is saying is incorrect. Our government has invested over \$1 billion in VIA Rail to renovate trains, improve accessibility and upgrade tracks and stations. These are important investments that the NDP voted against.

The issue with the estimates refers to a single investment in infrastructure that has been completed. Things are going well at VIA Rail.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Anishnaabe police service serves at 16 individual first nations throughout Ontario. Without new funding, it will lose 15% of its force, putting the communities it serves at risk.

The government is actually cutting \$15 million from first nations policing while increasing its own self-serving advertising budgets by almost the same amount.

How can the Minister of Public Safety defend laying off police officers so his government can continue its Conservative propaganda?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in respect of the funding decision, the Prime Minister has made it very clear that a decision is forthcoming.

However, I find it interesting to hear that member talking about the safety of aboriginals. She is simply not telling Canadians where she stands on matters such as her opposition to matrimonial real property rights for aboriginal women. It is shameful. She opposes tougher sentences for sexual assault. She opposes ending house arrest for serious crime. She opposes tougher penalties for those who sell drugs to our children.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the XL beef recall and the listeriosis crisis before that, the Minister of Agriculture has now presided over two of the largest food safety failures in Canadian history, yet he came before committee just this morning and lamely defended \$30 million in further cuts to food safety and biosecurity risk management.

Since he could not tell committee, will he tell the House why his government's ad budget received a sizeable increase while food safety gets a lump of coal? Who will want to trade with us when the next group of Canadians gets sick?

• (1500)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely unfortunate that the member opposite did not take advantage of the two hours that I and officials spent at committee this morning. We explained that signatures are required from our partners in the provinces and territories. These negotiations are ongoing, and that will make up that shortfall more than ever before.

As a government we will never apologize for doing our due diligence when it comes to the food safety of Canadian consumers. We recognize the need that is out there. We continue to add expertise and capacity to the CFIA, and those members continually vote against it. That is shameful.

* * *

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, VIA is not working for Niagarans. On February 20 last week I hosted a community round table on the cancellation of the only VIA train from Niagara Falls to Toronto. Many angry Niagarans from across the entire region came and raised their concerns about the reckless Conservative cuts to VIA, a train cancellation that VIA said "wasn't because of ridership". In fact, most of the time it is full.

What is the alternative that VIA says we should adopt in Niagara? It says we should take the GO bus and get stuck in traffic or wait until night and take the Amtrak train from the U.S.

When will the government restore VIA's funding and give Niagarans their train back?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, VIA is an arm's-length crown corporation, which means the government does not have day-to-day control over VIA's operations. VIA makes decisions based on the number of people, the proximity of other transportation and so on.

The idea of meeting demand and supply is foreign to the NDP, but VIA is doing the best it can and is matching demand with supply. That is what we expect and that is what taxpayers expect, so why is the member against it?

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems the government only wants to invest in one type of travel: cross-country fundraising trips for senators.

Canadians do not want to foot the bill for jet-setting Conservative senators. Canadians want and need affordable, accessible rail transportation.

We have seen VIA's budget cut \$300 million since 2011. Instead of wasting money on their senators, when will the Conservatives restore the budget for VIA and invest as well in high-speed rail service for Canadians?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have given the opposition ample opportunity to help us reform and develop a more democratic, accountable Senate.

We had a bill to make senators elected. Opposition members keep opposing it. They had an opportunity yesterday to pass it; they blocked it.

We debated it 17 times. On September 30, 2011, they blocked it. On October 3, they blocked it. On November 22, they blocked it. On December 8, they blocked it. They are bloc in all but name.

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[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is focusing on job creation, economic growth and long-term prosperity for all regions of the country.

Today, in Rivière-du-Loup, the Prime Minister announced funding for Premier Tech. This assistance will help to support the innovation and commercialization of the company's new products.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec tell the House about this announcement?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague on his excellent French.

While the NDP wants to impose a \$20 billion carbon tax on Canadians, our Conservative government is working hard to create jobs across the country. The funding announced by the Prime Minister will allow Premier Tech to develop and commercialize about 60 new products that will have a positive impact on the environment.

Our Conservative government remains focused on job creation and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I urged the Conservative government to listen to job creators who are sounding the alarm about its job-killing reform. Yesterday, I began reading the long list of these job creators, and I am going to continue today.

Will the Conservatives listen to the Association touristique régionale des Îles de la Madeleine—whose president is a former Conservative candidate—the Haute-Gaspésie, Matane and Rivière-du-Loup Chambers of Commerce; Entreprises agricoles et forestières de Percé inc.; Tourisme Bas-Saint-Laurent; the Chamber of Commerce—

• (1505)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if only the hon. member had listened to all those chambers of commerce when they spoke out so loudly and clearly against his plan to impose a huge carbon tax on Canadians. If only the leader of the NDP listened to Canadians, we would not have his plan for a \$21.5 billion carbon tax.

Oral Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Toronto workers are having a very tough time right now. A new United Way report finds that almost half of GTA workers cannot access full-time, stable employment.

People are cobbling a living together, working multiple part-time jobs—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, people are cobbling a living together in Toronto by working multiple part-time jobs. They are working contract to contract. They are freelancing. They are temping. However, these jobs come with no pensions, no benefits, no job security.

When will the Conservatives actually take this issue seriously and stand up for workers, particularly young workers in the GTA?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously the plight of young workers, young Canadians and all Canadians who are looking for work so they can provide for themselves and their families.

I know the member opposite has a lot of experience in having a part-time job. I read in the paper recently that in addition to taxpayers paying him more than \$150,000 a year, he is moonlighting at the CBC at the same time as he is sitting on the Canadian heritage committee. Maybe he should explain that to Canadians.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the new Associate Minister of National Defence and congratulate her on her new role.

Since 2006, our government has made significant investments in the Canadian armed forces to get our men and women the equipment they need after the Liberals' decade of darkness.

Can the associate minister tell the House how she plans to continue to build on the government's great record of delivering the equipment our men and women in uniform need to do the job we ask of them?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are providing our military with the equipment they need while ensuring taxpayers receive good value for money.

We are working with all stakeholders, including industry, to leverage these procurements to drive economic growth and provide our troops with the right equipment at the right price.

Business of the House

The government is rebuilding the forces by acquiring critical aircraft to transport supplies, modernizing army vehicles to protect our personnel, and making unprecedented investments in our navy.

We will continue to provide the Canadian armed forces with the tools they need by ensuring we invest taxpayers' money responsibly and maximizing—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Revenue Canada now only mails income tax packages to Canadians upon request. Most seniors file a paper return, not an electronic one. However, the Canada Revenue Agency has not clearly indicated that paper copies will only be sent upon request. This measure discriminates against seniors and people who do not have access to the Internet in my riding.

Will the minister fix this?

[*English*]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the way that Canadians file their taxes is changing, and we are changing to meet those needs.

We do, however, understand and recognize that everyone does not have access to a computer or can use a computer, so that is why we have ensured that taxpayers can still file on paper. They can pick up their tax forms at any Service Canada or local post office. They can also call the 1-800 number and have the tax form mailed to them.

Last year 1.3 million packages that were mailed out were never used. That is not a good, efficient use of resources.

The Speaker: Due to the technical difficulties before, I am going to give the floor back to the hon. member for York South—Weston for a very brief question.

* * *

• (1510)

AIRLINE SAFETY

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are risks associated with hiring foreign pilots, particularly when it comes to understanding Canadian safety regulations.

Why is Transport Canada rubber-stamping wet leases and letting potentially unqualified foreign pilots fly Canadian flights? Does the minister consider this an acceptable practice?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the same question was asked in French and an answer was given in French. I will provide the English answer, which is exactly the same.

Canada has one of the safest transportation systems in the world. It gets stronger every year. The number of aviation accidents has fallen by 25% since 2000 while air travel has increased significantly.

Foreign pilots, just like Canadian pilots, go through a rigorous selection process in order to ensure that they are fully qualified. Officials are currently reviewing this policy to see if reform is needed.

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RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the United States, China, Japan and Europe are all investing heavily in passenger rail, but Canada is going backwards.

The Conservatives seem determined to kill VIA Rail, chopping more than 60% of VIA's budget over two years. These reckless cuts will cause a train wreck for service across Canada.

Which services will be slashed as a result of these drastic cuts, and will the last remaining trans-Canada service be further cut?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the member has his facts completely wrong.

Since this government has taken office, we have invested almost \$1 billion in VIA Rail for new cars so that they could be made accessible. We have invested in rail track and the corridor between Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. The frequency of rail service has increased, and that is due to the investments we have made. The rail service is better than it has ever been and that is thanks to this government.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINT OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since I did not have enough time during my two questions to read the entire list of employers from eastern Quebec who are opposed to the EI reform, I want to table the list in the House for my colleagues.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise on behalf of Canada's official opposition.

My questions for my friend across the way deal with the calendar for the rest of this week and going into the next. I notice the lack of action on repairing the cuts and damages done to services Canadians rely upon, such as employment insurance, rail safety and food security. I wonder if the government has any response to the hue and cry coming from Canadians.

Government Orders

My friend also seemed to confuse and misunderstand the role of Parliament in his references earlier today in question period. I wonder if, now that we are at a year and a day since the last time the Conservatives brought in their so-called Senate accountability act, there are any plans for him to reintroduce the bill, which he claims the official opposition has delayed. In fact, all we have done is what MPs do, and that is to debate legislation. He may have confused the role that members of Parliament play on behalf of their constituents.

He could spend a little less time defending the unelected, unaccountable and under-investigation senator colleagues in his caucus if he could find a way to deal with the fragile nature of the Canadian economy in any of the legislation the government sees forthcoming in the next number of days.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue debating third reading of Bill C-42, the enhancing Royal Canadian Mounted Police accountability act, a bill that would give the RCMP the tools it needs to strengthen accountability and enhance public trust. I am puzzled why the NDP is putting up member after member to delay and block bringing accountability to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The New Democrats should let the bill come to a final vote so that these much-needed reforms can be put in place. In fact, the RCMP commissioner, Robert Paulson, was in front of the committee yesterday, and he called for swift passage of the bill.

If the New Democrats heed the commissioner's advice and allow the debate to conclude, we will be able to start third reading of Bill S-7, the combatting terrorism act, and help keep Canadians safe that way.

• (1515)

[Translation]

Tomorrow, we will start the second reading debate on Bill C-54, the Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act. This bill proposes to put public safety as the first and paramount consideration in the process of dealing with accused persons found to be not criminally responsible. It accomplishes this change without affecting the treatment these individuals receive.

The debate on Bill C-54 will continue next Thursday and—if necessary—on Friday. Monday, we will consider Bill C-47, the Northern Jobs and Growth Act, at report stage and third reading. We will continue that debate on Wednesday.

Tuesday, March 5, shall be the sixth allotted day, which will go to the New Democrats.

[English]

Finally, I hope that the opposition will support our hard-working approach to business so that we could also consider second reading of Bill C-48, the technical tax amendments act, 2012; the second reading of Bill S-12, the incorporation by reference in regulations act; and report stage and third reading of Bill S-9, the nuclear terrorism act.

In addition, in response to what I will take to be an invitation from the opposition House leader, I would like unanimous consent to propose the following motion. I hope the opposition will not block it.

I move that, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-7, an act respecting the selection of senators and amending the Constitution Act, 1867 in respect of Senate term limits, be deemed to have been read the second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read the third time and passed.

Unanimous consent for this would show that they really do care about Senate reform.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, yesterday the opposition members asked the government to table in the House documents relating to costing that was conducted by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in response to Bill C-400. This is the NDP private member's bill for a national social housing program. I have the document here today, which I am proud to table in the House, and it shows the clear reason our government could not support it. It would indeed put us \$5.45 billion further into debt. I am pleased that we were able to do this work for the New Democrats since apparently they had not costed the document. I would like to table the document at this time.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. government House leader for that.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

ENHANCING ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to speak to Bill C-42 at second reading. At the time, I began my speech by talking about the scandals that the RCMP has been involved in. Sad revelations about police officers in northern British Columbia add to the many cases of misconduct and show the urgent need to take action and ensure that these police officers are quickly identified and removed from the force.

Government Orders

However, this is impossible to do given the existing culture within the RCMP. That is the origin of the principles of Bill C-42, which, I would like to remind hon. members, are designed to punish or fire more quickly members who are accused of violating the standards and laws that they are supposed to uphold and who cause significant harm to the organization's image. These are the words that I used in my speech at second reading.

When he was appointed, Commissioner Paulson said that he was aware that harassment exists within the RCMP and that this was unfortunately not a new thing. He added that mindsets must change and that these behaviours must not be tolerated. That is why I am talking about culture.

When Mr. Paulson was appointed, he said: "First on my plate will be addressing the issue of harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace."

On this side of the House, we think it is too bad that the recommendations from the 2007 Brown report, which we did not really talk about, were not more fully incorporated into the spirit of the bill.

Mr. Brown clearly identified the importance of focusing on changing the organization's culture. These recommendations were diluted quite a bit and most of them were simply ignored in committee.

In his task force's report, David Brown indicated that the RCMP is not just another department. He said:

In many ways, the RCMP's approach to governance has been based on a model and style of policing developed from—and for—another era...

[N]one of these changes will be sustainable without the fundamental changes to structure that we are proposing.

These are David Brown's own words. They bear repeating here.

To some extent, that is why the NDP wanted to study this bill in committee. We supported the bill at second reading. We reached out to the Conservative government by mentioning that we were going to propose several amendments that would improve the bill. The Conservative government was apparently not receptive to our overture because every one of the amendments we suggested to improve the bill, which we felt was inadequate, was rejected.

The committee made an effort to hear from those who would be affected—the experts and the women alike. It did hear from a number of these experts, and a number of the people affected, including those at the RCMP.

Bills are important, but they must be well crafted and do what we want them to. The government did not create all the tools it needs to properly and effectively achieve its goal. It rejected most of the Brown report recommendations; it refused to hold a public hearing; and it introduced this bill without waiting for a number of important reports, such as the review ordered by the new commissioner on relations between men and women and the role of women in the RCMP, or the conclusions of the independent inquiry on workplace harassment being conducted by the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP.

When the bill was tabled, the two reports had not yet been completed. They have been completed since then, but their recommendations were not included in the bill.

I therefore wonder whether this can really be a serious exercise by a government that claims to listen to what people have to say about a bill in committee, a government that in the end refuses to seriously consider any of the amendments and recommendations that have been proposed.

In committee, most of the testimony from those affected indicated that the bill did not go far enough, in terms of the nature and scope of changes to the structure and organization of the RCMP, to really effect a significant change in the culture. One such witness was Darryl Plecas, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Research Chair and Director of the Centre for Criminal Justice Research, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University College of the Fraser Valley, who was rather hard on the organization:

● (1520)

Again, if there is one thing that's glaring about cases historically it's that there has been a never-ending effort in the past to minimize the seriousness of offences through the way in which they're dealt with, and to minimize them again through the kinds of penalties that are handed out. I don't think any reasonable outsider could look at the penalties that are awarded and think for a second that they in any way reflect what should be given as a disposition to anyone, let alone a police officer.

I will quote Mr. Plecas once more, because his remarks were instrumental in the NDP's decision to oppose this bill at third reading. He said:

What would be the process to ensure there is a proper and independent vetting of that so that cases can't be scaled down when they more properly ought to be dealt with in a formal manner?

When one considers—or at least we found—it's the entire spectrum of code of conduct cases, hopefully those regulations would be such that they would provide some assurances to any outside observer that every case is being given full consideration.

Maybe I'm missing something in the proposed changes, but I'm not sure that's happening or could happen with what's in there right now.

As I said, the NDP tried to move amendments to the bill in order to improve it and tried to work with the government to ensure that the bill addresses the concerns of Quebeckers and Canadians.

However, the Conservatives rejected all the NDP's amendments without any discussion. They seem to think that the Commissioner of the RCMP should have absolute control of the RCMP, and that is why they oppose a more balanced approach to the issues of dismissal, independent oversight and harassment training.

One of the amendments rejected by the Conservatives in committee was adding mandatory harassment training for RCMP members to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act. Another amendment would have ensured the independence of the body that will investigate RCMP complaints. Yet another asked for a provision to create a civilian investigative body in order to avoid police investigating police. It was deemed inadmissible. Finally, we asked for a police service with a better balance of human resources by eliminating some of the more sweeping powers of the RCMP commissioner and strengthening those of the external review committee in cases of potential dismissal from the RCMP. This amendment was deemed inadmissible.

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If this government were really serious about reforming the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the way it operates and its culture, it would have studied the amendments from the official opposition and the opposition in committee more seriously, in addition to the amendments that were suggested by external stakeholders, including the proposal to establish an independent RCMP oversight body that would report directly to Parliament. But that would be asking too much of the government; too much progress at any given time is a big no-no.

The new commissioner has, on several occasions, reiterated his intention and willingness to take action. It remains to be seen whether this government's proposals will help or hinder him. It must never be forgotten that beyond its responsibility to enforce the law, the government must do everything within its power to avoid any appearance that it considers itself above the law. That is where the buck stops.

In closing, I would say that the bill before us at second reading seemed like a step in the right direction. We understood the intention behind it, and the problems with the RCMP, and we wanted to help the government do something about it. That is why we highlighted the major shortcomings of the bill, which include too much power in the hands of too few.

We believe that, as a result of this bill, the RCMP Commissioner will have too much power to unilaterally decide the outcome of problems that may exist within the RCMP. Another fundamental problem that explains why we cannot support this bill at third reading is that the bill will not lead to any radical change in culture. There was broad consensus regarding the testimony heard in committee, testimony given by people who have had to deal with these problems, and who have observed from the outside or experienced from the inside what goes on.

This bill will do nothing to change the culture at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and that is a great pity. This was our chance to do something, but the government rejected our overtures and refused to make the changes that are sorely needed. I cannot—in good conscience vote in favour of this bill at third reading.

• (1525)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out the obvious. In 2012 RCMP Commissioner Paulson published a public letter that in essence said, in good part, that the commissioner's capacity to deal with disciplinary issues that related to the issue of sexual harassment in the workforce required additional authority.

I believe the legislation could have been a whole lot better. There could have been amendments made and ultimately passed. I applaud those individuals who put forward some amendments. The government has never demonstrated sympathy in passing opposition amendments.

My question to the member is this. If C-42 were passed, could he clearly define why it would make it worse than it currently is, which is the reason he will be voting against it as opposed to allowing it to

pass, recognizing that it has shortcomings that could be improved going forward?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asked a straight question, and I will give a straight answer. The problem is that the bill creates a false sense of security. It gives the illusion of answering the question it was supposed to answer.

Harassment and sexual harassment are very serious issues and should be taken seriously. We believe that this bill provides only the illusion of an answer. If we pass this bill, Canadians, including people who have been victims of harassment and those who monitor the RCMP and its internal challenges, may have the impression that the problem has been solved, when in fact it has not.

We need an approach that really deals with the current RCMP culture. The bill does not do that. If we pass this bill, we create the illusion that the problem has been solved and that we can now move on to something else.

• (1530)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The NDP argued that we need to do more to address harassment issues. Not only is harassment a serious problem within the RCMP, but the men and women involved absolutely need help and support to deal with these situations.

Would our colleague comment on that?

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the member for Saint-Lambert, is entirely right.

The issues that have been brought to light at the RCMP, such as harassment and sexual harassment, are systemic. They are symptomatic of a culture that needs changing at the RCMP. They reflect not on the quality of the men and women who serve on the force, but on the culture in which they must work.

This culture may not be tangible but it exists all the same. Any sociologist or expert in the field would say that an organization's culture or atmosphere is certain to impact on its members' behaviour. In this case, the impact is negative. Given the systemic nature of the problem, we need the proper legislative provisions to change the prevailing culture.

These provisions are not found in Bill C-42.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague for his excellent speech.

He clearly laid out the effects of this bill, a bill whose initial promise quickly turned to disappointment. We brought forward many amendments in committee; unfortunately, all were rejected.

I would like my colleague's take on the Conservatives' unwillingness to consider the amendments brought forward to improve the bill.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, my thoughts are easily summed up: same old, same old.

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We try to work on bills that would benefit Canadians as a whole, and more specifically members of the RCMP and those who deal with the organization. The Conservative government categorically refuses to even consider the amendments that we bring forward to fill the gaps in its legislation. One can only decry this government's lack of openness with regards to these very important questions.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-42. In my last speech on this bill, at second reading, I mentioned that we welcomed the introduction of this bill, despite certain problems we had noted regarding harassment, an urgent public concern for Canadians. We also pressed the Department of Public Safety to make sexual harassment within the RCMP one of its priorities.

However, the initial version of Bill C-42 did not directly address the systemic problems rooted in RCMP culture. The bill, as introduced at first reading, would not have changed the climate currently prevailing within the RCMP. When the bill was drafted, the Minister of Public Safety does not appear to have considered the various recommendations made by the Task Force on Governance and Cultural Change in the RCMP.

We nevertheless supported the bill at second reading so that we could study it adequately in committee and improve it so that it could solve the problems that seem firmly rooted within the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Unfortunately, that is not how matters unfolded, and we were not satisfied with the committee's study of the bill. I am genuinely disappointed by the government's lack of co-operation on this matter, and, unfortunately, on others as well.

The Conservatives did not want to co-operate with us to ensure balanced representation of the various options and positions available. In committee, they were able to invite 12 witnesses, whereas the opposition could only invite seven. We also observed that the Conservatives' witnesses were unfortunately not entirely independent. All but one were representatives of the government or the RCMP. Consequently, they came and asserted the government's position without qualifying it in any real way. The witnesses selected by the Conservatives were thus not there to offer an independent opinion. That is what we observed.

The Conservatives were also not that eager to hear from our witnesses. Our first witness was unable to appear before the committee until the fourth meeting, and most of our witnesses were not invited until the last day of hearings. The Conservatives also forced us to submit all our amendments on the day of the last meeting in which we heard from witnesses. They asked us to provide our amendments three and half hours later that same day. That did not leave us much time to evaluate or consider the recommendations made by the witnesses before the committee.

We wanted to introduce amendments that would have made the legislation more effective so that it could achieve its objective, based on the recommendations of those same witnesses. This kind of behaviour on the government's part is unacceptable and impedes the proper conduct of parliamentary proceedings. This lack of co-operation by the government is what we have observed since the start of this Parliament. As far as I know, virtually none of the amendments introduced has unfortunately been accepted.

We proposed a number of amendments that were rejected by the Conservatives without any discussion. We proposed to include mandatory training on harassment for RCMP members in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act, but they said no. The Conservatives simply do not want to hear a dissenting opinion, or even recognize its validity.

The director of the Groupe d'aide et d'information sur le harcèlement sexuel au travail de la province de Québec appeared before the committee and said:

With the 32 years of experience we have, we have found out that when companies do have a clear policy, when employees do know what is acceptable and not acceptable, it makes it much easier for management to deal with the problems.

But the Conservatives preferred to ignore that testimony and the others heard in committee. It is also disappointing that the minister did not ask for a clear policy on sexual harassment in the RCMP, with specific standards of conduct and criteria for assessing the performance of all employees.

● (1535)

Such a policy is necessary to provide a basis for a fair and effective disciplinary process. The director of the Groupe d'aide et d'information sur le harcèlement sexuel au travail de la province de Québec spoke eloquently on the importance of such a policy. The Conservatives chose to ignore her testimony and stubbornly insisted on a magic solution that will not resolve all the RCMP's problems.

We also put forward an amendment that would guarantee the independence of the body set up to investigate complaints in the RCMP. Once again, the government said no. We also proposed adding a provision to establish a civilian investigative body, to stop the police from investigating themselves. Again, the government said no. Yet all Canadians are asking for such a provision. Trust in police investigations has to be rebuilt. When a police force investigates another police force, there may well be a conflict of interest or a perceived conflict of interest.

If the Conservatives do not want to listen to Canadians or the opposition, perhaps they should listen to the former chair of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP, who stated that the bill did not meet the standards of review set out by Justice O'Connor and that it did not meet the needs of the Canadian public or even the RCMP itself. I would like to point out that Justice O'Connor, in the Arar inquiry, said that Parliament should create an oversight body for the RCMP. It would appear that these remarks, like all those that are not in line with Conservative ideology, have fallen on deaf ears.

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The bill will give the RCMP commissioner new power to decide on appropriate disciplinary measures. This includes the power to appoint and dismiss members at his discretion. During my first speech on this bill, I said that the approach taken by the Minister of Public Safety was perhaps a little too simplistic, considering the size of the problem. It is not enough simply to grant final authority for laying off employees to the commissioner.

This is why we put forward an amendment to solve the problem and to create police forces that are better balanced in terms of human resources by eliminating some of the more draconian powers given to the RCMP commissioner and strengthening those of the external review committee in the case of potential layoffs from the RCMP.

As I mentioned earlier, although Bill C-42 gives the commissioner the power to establish a more efficient process to resolve harassment complaints while at the same time giving more disciplinary authority, he will not be able to bring about a real cultural change in the RCMP, a change that is necessary not only to get rid of sexual harassment issues, but also to deal with discipline and behavioural issues more generally among RCMP officers.

As evidence, Commissioner Paulson himself stated that legislation alone would not be enough to preserve public trust and that extensive reform would be necessary to address the serious underlying problems within the RCMP, in order to create a workplace that is more open, more co-operative and more respectful of everyone. We can see that the minister failed to provide the necessary leadership to deal with the broader issues faced by the RCMP.

Commissioner Paulson told the Standing Committee on the Status of Women that he thought the problem was bigger than simply sexual harassment. This situation must change, and the minister should have taken the commissioner's extensive experience in the RCMP into consideration.

All the witnesses told us that this bill would not be enough to establish an open, co-operative and respectful working environment, and that giving so many powers to the commissioner would lead to more problems than it would solve. The Mounted Police Professional Association of Canada shares our view. In committee, an association representative said that Bill C-42, rather than mitigating the issues mentioned, would only make them exponentially worse.

If Bill C-42 is adopted as it is—including the charter violations and the measures enabling managers to continue abusing their powers—rather than correcting the problems that undermine the RCMP, our Parliament will be promoting misconduct and the culture of cronyism by legitimizing these kinds of behaviours.

For all these reasons, we will vote against this bill at third reading.

• (1540)

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Bergen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to NDP members speak one after the other on Bill C-42, and it is clear that the majority of them have not read the testimony with regard to this

bill. They have not even read the blues or the transcripts from the meetings. For example, most of the amendments were ruled out of order, including the amendment they introduced regarding an independent investigative body. It was poorly written, introduced late and ruled out of order by the chair.

I am wondering about a couple of things. Did the NDP members who are speaking one after the other bother to actually read the documents and know what happened at committee with some of these very poor amendments that were ruled out of order and defeated—for example, silly ones like changing the short title? Has he bothered to actually read the legislation, and does he know that not only the RCMP but the commissioner and the chair of the commission said they need this to provide the framework to change the culture? The legislation will not do it alone, but the legislation is needed. Has he even read the bill?

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for her question.

I may actually not have taken the time to read all the committee “blues”, but the parliamentary secretary is reporting only what suits her, in this case, because there were admissible amendments. They were all completely shrugged off by the government, as is the case every time in every committee, not just this one. It happens every time a bill is introduced and reasonable amendments are proposed, as in this case. A number of amendments were proposed. Some of them may have been ruled out of order, but that is not the case for all or a majority of the ones we proposed.

That is completely despicable. The parliamentary secretary says they were out of order, but most of them were not.

The government is not listening to Canadians. Canadians want a civilian police force that investigates the police and they are tired of having police investigate the police. There is an appearance of a conflict of interest there, and once again, the government is disregarding the opinion of Canadians.

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed quite despicable to hear the parliamentary secretary asking us whether we have read every line of the committee transcripts, when in fact we need only look at the witnesses that are called. They are often in a conflict of interest and are not free to speak, and that discredits most of the things they say.

The few witnesses who are genuinely free to speak all agree with us. That is true at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security and at the Standing Committee on National Defence. So this is indeed despicable.

I would like my colleague to say more on this point, because it is absolutely unbelievable to hear the parliamentary secretary say this.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saint-Jean for his comments and his entirely accurate observations.

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We see in the committees that nothing suits the government, and often the witnesses they invite are not completely free to state their opinions or real, scientific facts. Nothing we propose suits it. That is more than despicable, because this government is anti-democratic in a number of ways. The way it behaves is quite frustrating, and not just in the House of Commons where it constantly muzzles us and imposes gag orders. It also uses its majority in committees to present bogus studies, and so on.

The government's behaviour is simply despicable. That is the word that comes to mind, and that is what it is. It cannot be repeated often enough. With this government, doing anything in the House of Commons or in committee is an exercise in frustration.

[*English*]

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would actually like to begin where I was going to conclude with my speech, after hearing the, frankly, rather arrogant question coming from the parliamentary secretary.

We all know what the government does in committee time after time after time. Any amendment, however well framed, is voted down by the majority. There is almost a zero per cent passage rate of NDP, Liberal or independent members' amendments in committee in this Parliament, so to pretend that the fact of the writing of a few amendments by the opposition in this process would have made an iota of difference is the height of arrogance.

I would also like the House to know that in this context, most of the opposition witnesses were in the last two days, the majority on the last day. The majority on the committee voted to make sure that the amendments from the opposition came in three and a half hours after the session. Can we imagine, in the context of a complex bill like this, putting together well-crafted amendments when put up against an artificial deadline like that? This is the behaviour of the government in that committee. Committees do not function in any kind of straightforward or good-faith legislative manner.

I would like to address how far Bill C-42 diverges from and does not respect the recommendations from Justice O'Connor and the Arar commission for a proper review mechanism for the RCMP. Most of the other interventions have talked about other areas of the bill and other issues, but I would like to talk about how the bill does take a small step in the direction of the Arar commission recommendations, but ultimately stops far short. This is consistent with how the government has truly resisted appropriate oversight mechanisms for any body that deals with policing or security matters.

For example, in another bill that is before the House now, Bill S-7, Combating Terrorism Act, Conservatives have stoutly resisted any form of serious oversight or monitoring. In my speech on that bill, I will go into some detail on that. In each case, the NDP has proposed more than a dozen carefully considered amendments that would help make good on the Arar commission's exhaustive second report on a review mechanism, yet every one was voted down or ruled out of order.

This is consistent with the general approach of the government to the Arar commission. I had the fortune to be in the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security when the Minister of Public Safety appeared to defend the report called

"Building Resilience against Terrorism", and I asked him what the government's intention is with respect to the recommendations on a review mechanism coming out of the Arar commission report. It was absolutely clear from his response that the government has no interest in that report or using it as any kind of a reference point, baseline or road map. Bill C-42 has made that completely clear.

I will proceed as follows. I will provide a short overview of what the Arar commission did recommend by way of review mechanisms, and then I will look at how Bill C-42 on at least four points does not take those recommendations at all seriously.

The report I am referring to from the Arar commission is called "A New Review Mechanism for the RCMP's National Security Activities". Before proposing the exact mechanisms, Justice O'Connor, who is of the Ontario court of appeal, outlined reasons for the inadequacy of existing accountability and review mechanisms for the RCMP's national security activity. In general, he pointed out that there has been an evolution and a deepening of the RCMP national security role, despite the fact that CSIS itself was peeled off from the RCMP at some point. Obviously in the post-2001 climate, we know that to be true and why that is true. He emphasized three elements.

First of all, there has been enhanced and deepened information-sharing with other countries and among federal, provincial and municipal agencies, and increased integration and national security policing. We know that information-sharing was at the heart of what happened to Mr. Arar.

Second, he talked about comparative and other Canadian experience with both policing and security intelligence review that led him to conclude that there was the "inability of a complaint-based approach to provide a firm foundation for ensuring that the often secret national security activities respect the law and rights and freedoms".

● (1550)

Third, he said that the existing Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP has encountered "difficulties in obtaining access to information from the RCMP". We will see that this is the understatement of the century when we look at some of the testimony.

For the information of the parliamentary secretary, I did read the blues and I did consider the testimony of various witnesses, including Mr. Kennedy, the former head of the CPC, whose testimony is irrefutable. The government did everything it could in committee to try to underplay and deflect the impact of that testimony.

Justice O'Connor recommended a number of features that the new review mechanism would have.

First, it must be authorized to conduct self-initiated reviews in the same way and to the same extent as SIRC, the Security Intelligence Review Committee that oversees CSIS. He talked about the need for these reviews not just at the time when activities were deepening, but in the context in which national security activities by definition were conducted in secret and received little by way of judicial scrutiny or other independent scrutiny. He emphasized how a self-initiated review had to be linked to the criterion of independence from the RCMP and the government in the right of access to information and to initiate those reviews.

The second feature that he felt would be important was that the body had to have investigative powers similar to those that public bodies had under the Inquiries Act. He emphasized a few things. Some of them are in the bill, such as the right to subpoena documents and compel testimony. Also, the review body has to have the right to decide what information is necessary and not have barriers put in front of it in making that decision or accessing the information.

Third, he stated:

—the review mechanism must not be hampered by jurisdictional boundaries. It must be able to follow the trail wherever it leads, to ensure full and effective investigation or review of the RCMP's national security activities.

With those principles in mind he went on to recommend a new independent complaints and national security review agency for the RCMP that would replace the CPC and would also take on the role he recommended for overseeing the Canadian Border Services Agency, the CBSA.

He went on to talk about the need for coordination across the various bodies, this new body he recommended, the existing SIRC, Security Intelligence Review Committee, and the commissioner for the CSE, the Commissioner for the Canadian Security Establishment, who also has broader and wider powers than what is found recommended in Bill C-42.

What is in Bill C-42 that falls far short of these recommendations?

The first major problem is that Bill C-42 does not give the new review body uninhibited access to information that the body deems necessary and relevant. In committee the Conservatives tried to avoid acknowledging that the bill would give the power to the RCMP commissioner to prevent examination and review of a broad range of privileged information. From lots of experience, we know how various bodies, including the RCMP, have abused the claim of privilege.

Mr. Kennedy, the former head of the CPC, noted in testimony before the committee, the findings of former Supreme Court Judge John Major in the Air India inquiry, who experienced first-hand the abuse of privilege by the RCMP.

Mr. Kennedy stated:

—with reference to the privilege. Justice Major, whom I talked to, was scathing in terms of his comments that the RCMP over-claimed privilege, concealed information from him, and in some case a witness who wanted to testify, they claimed they needed the information for investigative purposes which wasn't true.

The second major problem is that the RCMP commissioner can force the chair of the new recommended body, the CRCC, to suspend an investigation by means of a simple request in a letter on

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the grounds that it would compromise an ongoing investigation. Mr. Kennedy commented how this completely gutted the credibility of this body in the eyes of the public. It completely undermines any sense of independence of the body.

The third major problem is that the bill is largely void of timeframes within which the RCMP must respond to requests and findings of this new review body. As Mr. Kennedy said:

● (1555)

Inordinate and unjustifiable delay was the hallmark of the RCMP during the four-plus years that I was chair of the Commission for Public Complaints...

There was one fourth major problem, but perhaps a question will elicit that.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a comment on the hon. member's speech. I find it very interesting that when the other side of the House disagrees with this side of the House, this side of the House is automatically wrong. There is a possibility that side of the House is wrong. Just because this side of the House does not accept an amendment as proposed by that side of the House, then, again, we are wrong.

However, the truth of the matter is that many of the amendments do not meet the constraints of the bill. They are outside of the bill and do not add anything to it. In fact, they may well detract.

Therefore, prior to the hon. member's speech, his view of what happens on this side of the House, I respectfully submit, is very clouded, one-sided and without precedence in terms of any direct evidence that says what he is saying makes any more sense.

● (1600)

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, I completely accept the member's observation that just because we take different views, it does not mean that one side is automatically right or wrong. I was simply responding to the rather strongly worded criticism coming from the parliamentary secretary.

I also pointed out the context in which amendments had to be drafted in this context: three and a half hours after the end of the majority of opposition witnesses were there.

I also noted that it was the practice of the Conservative government, working through government members on committees, to accept virtually no amendments across all committees. If the member has evidence to refute that claim, I would absolutely love to see it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his presentation.

As someone who used to wear the uniform, I found his excellent remarks very interesting, critical and detailed. I would like to hear the rest of his presentation.

[*English*]

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, we are the party of co-operation.

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I was simply add one further point, which is there is indeed something on which I would compliment the government. It did include the chair-initiated complaints procedure investigation procedure. However, it comes with a couple of conditions, one of which is that the commission, this new review body, cannot proceed on its own motion to investigate “if there is another review or inquiry that has been undertaken on substantially the same issue by a federal or provincial entity”. This may seem like a reasonable provision, but it opens the door for delay and challenges by the RCMP, including in court.

The judgment about whether it is germane to the commission to initiate its own investigations, frankly, should be with the commission. There should not be a mechanism whereby the RCMP can push back, including by using and drawing on government lawyers. There is a further provision that indicates that possibly the minister himself or herself could challenge. Therefore, the granting of a commission-initiated review or investigation is partly undercut by these conditions, and that was my only other point.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about unrestricted access to the commission, something that would ultimately be necessary for the success of this bill. Could he further expand on this?

[*English*]

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, the only thing that I would mention is what was said by the former head of the CPC, Mr. Kennedy, which really stood out during the seven days of testimony. He talked about the context in which government bodies, including the historical pattern within the RCMP, invoke privilege—the idea that documents are privileged—as a way to shield from external agencies documents that had no reasonable basis to be excluded. He gave lots of examples.

The very idea that the minister can both set regulations on the scope of privilege and also have the RCMP commissioner, separate from the minister, actually decline to provide documents based on his or her own judgment of what is privileged in a way that would unduly affect the RCMP completely undercuts the independence of the body.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-42, Enhancing Royal Canadian Mounted Police Accountability Act. The official opposition has been waiting for a long time for this enactment, which seeks to establish a new independent civilian commission to replace the present RCMP public complaints commission.

First, it is important to remember that, between 2005 and 2011, over 718 internal complaints were filed with the RCMP. These complaints related to sexism, bullying and reprisals. Worse still, the RCMP public complaints commission says that “these numbers probably only reflect part of the situation, because the Canadian federal police way of doing things does not encourage employees who feel wronged to file a complaint”.

A civilian member of the RCMP even contends that: “It takes an incredible amount of courage for people to step up with complaints such as these—to have them continually diminished, deflected and

dismissed is an outrage. Further, it promotes an environment where people don't speak up.”

Our federal police also showed that when, in 2012, 150 women announced their intention to file a class action suit against the RCMP for sexual harassment. Despite mounting evidence, the institution's first reaction was to deny everything. Such is the climate in the RCMP. Such is the internal culture that prevails in our federal police.

In light of these harassment scandals, and other abuses such as the Maher Arar affair, the NDP has always argued for a major reform to oversee the internal practices of that institution. Unfortunately, these cases have tarnished the RCMP's reputation. They deserve strong action by parliamentarians. Bill C-42 should have been that answer.

Our party supported the bill at second reading, since its objectives were laudable and we were hoping to take an in-depth look at this legislation in committee. We wanted to work with the government and develop an effective act to tackle the various issues that need to be dealt with.

Given the bill's objectives, we thought it was critical to reform the processes relating to disciplinary reinforcement, human resources management and complaint handling. We also felt essential to create an independent and transparent investigative body to tackle the whole issue of harassment in the RCMP. In this respect, the NDP proposed several amendments to improve Bill C-42 and to better meet existing needs.

We proposed mandatory harassment training for all RCMP members to promote better prevention and to provide employees with the right tools to react more appropriately. The NDP also proposed the establishment of a civilian body to deal with complaints filed against the RCMP. This was to ensure an independent investigative and handling structure that would have been accountable to Parliament, and not directly to the minister, as proposed by the Conservatives.

In the same vein, we also wanted to set up an independent investigative body, because the current situation may leave room for partiality that should not exist and that could be reversed by a structure that is separate from police forces and from the department. As regards human resources, we were hoping for a strengthening of the RCMP External Review Committee to tighten up internal mechanisms, particularly in cases of harassment.

The Conservatives rejected all these proposals, which deserved special consideration and which would clearly have improved the government's legislation. In doing so, the government went against the recommendations of several witnesses who supported such measures and who were asking for more independence in the RCMP's investigative process.

The Conservatives also ignored the recommendations of Justice O'Connor in the Maher Arar inquiry to improve the RCMP's review standards.

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•(1605)

The government completely ignored Commissioner Paulson's comments that much more extensive reform was needed to address the issues and to promote a more open, co-operative and respectful workplace.

For months now, the NDP has been calling on the government to make sexual harassment and institutional abuse at the RCMP a priority. Throughout the legislative process, we have advocated for measures that would have helped change the culture at the RCMP. By refusing to accept our party's suggestions, the government chose not to address the problem. By giving the commissioner more powers over discipline and complaints management, Bill C-42 does not directly address the problem of harassment anymore than it will change the corporate culture within the RCMP.

The government is keeping the existing structures and refusing to completely overhaul the internal processes. By allowing the RCMP to investigate the RCMP—the police investigating the police—the Conservatives are not addressing the issues. They are refusing to bring in a truly independent structure that operates at arm's length from the institution. There is nothing here to change the atmosphere at the RCMP.

With the new civilian complaints commission proposed in Bill C-42, the government is not straying far from the RCMP public complaints commission. We find it regrettable that the commission is not fully independent since it does not fall under the jurisdiction of the House of Commons, but it will instead continue to report to the Minister of Public Safety.

In conclusion, the government went against the recommendations made by a number of witnesses, Justice O'Connor and Commissioner Paulson. Not only did the government reject the opposition's amendments outright, but it also clearly refused to make the RCMP's internal investigation process more independent and transparent. It refused to fix the systemic problems within the RCMP.

Bill C-42 is not an adequate response to the culture of secrecy and harassment that unfortunately exists within our federal police force. It is also not a response to these women and men who have been the victims of bullying, harassment and retaliation.

•(1610)

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before asking my question, I would first like to congratulate my colleague from Saint-Lambert on her excellent speech.

I would like to share with the House something that has been bothering me about this whole sexual harassment issue. This regards a document that was released recently in response to an access to information request made by *La Presse*. According to that document, some female employees may be reluctant to report sexual harassment because they have no faith in the RCMP's current complaints process. The fact that women are afraid to use the current complaints process is very troubling.

I would like to hear my colleague's comments on this. Is she horrified to know that, because of the current system, women are afraid to speak up about misconduct? Could she comment on the fact

that, with Bill C-42, the Conservatives are sadly refusing to protect female workers who spend their lives in the service of our country?

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question, which is truly of central importance. Where victims of harassment are concerned, of course, they already have difficulty in reporting what has happened, because announcing that you have been harassed is not easy, and it is even less so if they do not find the necessary and essential trust within the institution to be able to submit such complaints.

If a climate of trust has not been established, and a climate of violence is in place, because we can see that these women are victims of harassment and we do not find in Bill C-42 the necessary and valid responses to address this kind of situation, I totally agree with her that it is absolutely deplorable.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned in her speech the importance of the change in culture within the RCMP that we hoped to see effected, or at least addressed, by this bill.

At committee stage, an NDP amendment I find particularly interesting was rejected by the Conservatives, with no debate or discussion. It involved adding mandatory harassment training for RCMP members to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act. I find it absurd, in fact, that such training is not systematically provided.

I would like to hear my colleague's comments on the impact mandatory training for RCMP members would have in terms of the cultural change we of the NDP are calling for.

•(1615)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Regardless of the location, in point of fact, whether in a private enterprise or within the RCMP, when you are dealing with a change in culture, it is fundamental to build it up through a coaching process. It becomes feasible when the necessary training has been put in place to enable people to talk about harassment.

In terms of training, talking about harassment means being aware of the fact that you can be a victim, or an abuser. It is important to have the necessary information and resources to avoid becoming a victim, and as a victim, to have the opportunity to make a complaint. Also, as a perpetrator, you can avoid becoming an abuser and find help, if needed, on the same basis as a victim.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry, Environment; the hon. member for Alfred-Pellan, Correctional Service of Canada.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Drummond.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak to Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts.

Before beginning my speech, I would like to stress how committed the NDP is to this legislation. Many of my colleagues have risen over the past hour to show their commitment to addressing the problems within the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

On that note, it is important to stress just how disinterested the Conservatives are in this important legislation and in improving the RCMP. We have done very serious work in committee. Moreover, I would like to highlight the work of my colleagues who sit on this committee. They work very hard and have introduced amendments that, unfortunately, have not been accepted.

Now, what does this bill contain? To begin with, Bill C-42 adds new provisions to the sections on labour relations and gives the RCMP Commissioner the power to appoint and dismiss members as he sees fit. Secondly, it attempts to reform the process pertaining to disciplinary matters, complaints, and the management of human resources for the members of the RCMP. Finally, it is an attempt to reform the former RCMP public complaints commission by establishing a new civilian complaints commission.

As members can see, Bill C-42 reintroduces several provisions included in Bill C-38 of the 40th Parliament. At that time, the NDP criticized the bill because it did not go far enough in reforming the disciplinary inquiry procedures. The most notable difference between Bill C-42 and former Bill C-38 is the fact that the new bill says nothing about the issue of unionizing the RCMP.

On that note, I would like to remind members that the NDP is the only political party in the House of Commons whose employees are unionized. We are very proud of this. It is something that we care about deeply. For that reason, we stand behind workers and cannot stress enough how important it is to respect the work they do. We are proud that our employees are unionized. I take this opportunity to put the ball in the courts of the other parties, so that they, too, begin negotiating with their employees. I think that all employees of the House should have an opportunity to become unionized.

The NDP supported the intention of Bill C-42 to modernize the RCMP and to address problems such as sexual harassment, about which my honourable colleagues have spoken. The NDP voted in favour of referring the bill to committee. As I mentioned, my colleagues who sit on this committee have worked very hard, and very seriously.

After hearing from witnesses and experts, however, it became obvious that the bill had major shortcomings, and would not succeed in improving the RCMP's oversight mechanisms. Moreover, Bill C-42 does not reflect, for example, the recommendations of Justice O'Connor emerging from the inquiry into the Maher Arar case, which also sought to improve the RCMP's review standards so as to meet the needs of Canadians.

The Conservatives introduced Bill C-42 as the solution for the problems of the RCMP, which has become somewhat dysfunctional; on the contrary, however, this is not the solution. The bill does not

directly address the problem of sexual harassment, as I said just now, and as my colleagues explained so clearly in their speeches earlier. Nor does it address a number of other issues that were the subject of NDP amendments at the committee stage, and which the Conservatives unfortunately rejected.

The NDP put forward a range of amendments designed to ensure that Bill C-42 reflected the challenges the RCMP is now facing. Once again, I take my hat off to my colleagues, who did such careful work in committee.

● (1620)

The main thrust of the amendments related to the following points. The first thing was to require all members of the RCMP to take harassment training, under the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act. Unfortunately, this was rejected by the Conservatives. Next, we sought the establishment of a completely independent civilian agency responsible for investigating complaints against the RCMP. Unfortunately, this was denied by the Conservatives. We also proposed adding a provision to set up an independent national civilian investigating body to avoid having the police investigate themselves. Again, this was rejected by the Conservatives. We also wanted to develop more balanced human resources policies by withdrawing some of the draconian new powers suggested by the RCMP Commissioner, and strengthening the RCMP External Review Committee in cases involving discharge. Unfortunately, this too was rejected by the Conservatives.

So the Conservatives rejected all these NDP amendments, ignoring many recommendations from witnesses who had given up their valuable time to come and speak before the committee and explain their points of view, and to suggest amendments and ways of dealing with the shortcomings. We are in fact in favour of the RCMP review principle. We even supported this bill at second reading. Unfortunately, it is not well enough developed at this stage because the Conservatives botched the committee work. They rejected the amendments proposed by witnesses and members of the NDP in committee. That is why we are going to vote against this bill at third reading.

I will now return to the point we were speaking about just now about misconduct and sexual harassment. It is an exceedingly important point, one that has been very much in the news recently and needs to be addressed. Bill C-42 has not gone nearly far enough. Furthermore, as you know, we are asking that this bill should at least provide for training at the RCMP on sexual harassment issues. We are still awaiting the conclusions of the two reports that should shed light on sexual harassment at the RCMP—the investigation by the RCMP public complaints commission and the RCMP gender issues report.

Another problem I discussed earlier, which I find extremely important, is unionization at the RCMP. As I mentioned, we in the NDP are very proud of our support of the unions. We take pride in having unionized assistants and we would like to allow all employees to be unionized. The bill does not address this matter, which is currently before the courts. The RCMP is the only police force in Canada without a collective agreement. Imagine that.

Government Orders

For 35 years, labour relations representatives have been elected to manage employment-related matters. However, this way of doing things, which established a democratic process for employee representation, is a consultation process rather than a true collective bargaining process. As I mentioned, only the RCMP does not yet have a collective agreement and is not yet unionized. This is a shortcoming that needs to be dealt with and which this bill unfortunately does not address.

I could mention a number of other points like that to illustrate the failings of the bill and to explain why we will be voting against it. Among other things, it is because the Conservatives did not take the trouble to listen to the conclusions of the excellent work done by NDP members, in this committee and elsewhere.

I am available to answer any questions you may have about this. I would be more than happy to go into detail about a number of subjects, like sexual harassment and unionization, neither of which this bill deals with.

• (1625)

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many MPs have said that this arrogant government thought our amendments in committee were not good.

Has my honourable colleague, who has heard the same things I have, had the same experience in the committee on which he sits? Do the Conservatives listen to the experts who appear there with an open mind, or are they always closed-minded? Do they always ask to proceed in camera, and do they merely do as they please?

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague from Repentigny for his excellent question.

Before going any further, I would like to name the four NDP members who are doing an excellent job on this committee: the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, the member for Alfred-Pellan, the member for Compton—Stanstead and the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

My colleague from Repentigny is absolutely right in saying that it is hard to work on the committees at times. In my committee, the hardest thing is that, from the moment we want to talk about amendments, the meeting goes in camera and we cannot report on what happens there.

In a democracy, the public must know what is going on. When the Conservative government does not support our amendments or the recommendations of experts, and when it does whatever it wants to please its little buddies and to attend to its interests, the public must know. We have to tell the public about this so that they vote against the Conservatives in the next election and let the NDP win the election instead. That is what we will do in 2015.

• (1630)

[English]

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member on the other side of the House for his position with the RCMP.

I would not hesitate to suggest that perhaps we are tarring the whole force with one brush. We are saying that the RCMP has no union. I respectfully submit that I am not sure it has ever asked to have a union. Somehow the hon. member has decided that is part and parcel of what should be in place and therefore, if the Mounties do not agree with it, they are out of sync. I have trouble understanding that.

Just because we do not agree does not mean we are arrogant. If we do not agree with something, it may well mean that we do not believe in it or that we do not think it is pertinent to the bill. I think we have to continually question ourselves. When we make an agreement and then we decide that we want to make a recommendation around the agreement, around the bill, and the other side does not accept it, then is the other side obviously wrong? In my way of thinking, that is the wrong premise to work under.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, it is entirely natural for us to have different positions. That is not a problem.

However, we are here to do a job, and we must do our work properly in committee. We invite witnesses because we want to hear their comments, recommendations and expertise. When we invite knowledgeable witnesses, we listen to them; then we introduce amendments and improve the bill. That was not done in this case.

It is not right that our NDP colleagues on this committee listened to the expertise of witnesses and introduced amendments, yet the Conservatives refused to implement them for purely ideological reasons. These are very serious, very grave matters. Sexual harassment is very serious. We must tackle it, but this bill does not. That is why we will vote against it.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to discuss solutions to the very serious problems of sexual harassment, abuse of power and bullying in the ranks of the RCMP.

Bill C-42 was introduced by the Conservatives to address serious allegations of abuse, bullying and sexual harassment that had been made by a number of female members of the force.

Those members reported that they were the target of sexist comments, sexual pranks and derogatory remarks in the workplace, and had been for decades.

The harassment came from co-workers as well as superior officers. They said the work environment was hostile and unhealthy for women. The abusive behaviour had become standard practice, one of them reported. According to these women, an abusive work environment had existed for years.

I am pleased that we are finally discussing this bill in the House of Commons. I hoped we would come up with workable solutions. I think we all agree that something has to be done to ensure that these RCMP employees are able to work in a healthy and safe environment.

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The Conservatives introduced Bill C-42 as a solution. This bill gives the commissioner of the RCMP the ultimate power to discharge members for administrative reasons only and to appoint managers to resolve conflicts and investigate problems relating to harassment, in particular.

It also establishes the civilian review and complaints commission for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the CRCC, to replace the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP.

The new commission will do its own reviews of RCMP policies to ensure compliance with the minister's directives, the act and the applicable rules. It will have access to information under the control or in the possession of the RCMP. It will establish new investigative powers, such as compelling witnesses and officers to testify and compelling the production of evidence and documents. It will report to the Minister of Public Safety and the commissioner, and its recommendations will be non-binding.

The bill also creates a mechanism for investigating serious incidents, that is, deaths or serious injuries involving the RCMP.

I will remind my colleagues that the NDP supported this bill at second reading, because in principle, we wanted to rectify the serious sexual harassment situation in the RCMP.

In committee, my colleagues listened carefully to the experts' testimony. The witnesses were clear: this bill would not be sufficient to create an open, collaborative and respectful work environment.

Giving the commissioner more powers is not the solution. The RCMP and the government have to go further in their effort to modernize the RCMP.

My colleagues on the committee proposed amendments in good faith, based on the experts' testimony, to strengthen the bill and try to genuinely solve the problems of abuse in the RCMP.

For example, we proposed that the bill be worded more proactively to combat the systemic problem of harassment, and particularly sexual harassment, among members of the RCMP. That amendment was rejected.

After hearing the testimony of Yvonne Séguin, executive director of the Groupe d'aide et d'information sur le harcèlement sexuel au travail de la province du Québec, we proposed amendments that would tackle the hostile and sexist work environment head on: incorporating mandatory training on harassment for RCMP members into the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act.

When she appeared before the committee, she said:

With the 32 years of experience we have, we have found out that when companies do have a clear policy, when employees do know what is acceptable and not acceptable, it makes it much easier for management to deal with the problems.

This mandatory training would help establish a clear policy and a respectful work environment.

That amendment was also thrown out.

My colleagues also tried to guarantee the independence of the body set up to investigate complaints in the RCMP, which is an essential part of making the organization more transparent and responsible. That, too, was rejected.

• (1635)

The list goes on. The Conservatives voted against all of our amendments in the House without any discussion. They feel that the RCMP commissioner should have complete control over the RCMP. Concentrating power in one person's hands is not the solution. That is not how we will make the RCMP more transparent.

I would like to point out an important difference between the Conservatives and the NDP: we listen to experts and we are open-minded. When we look at a bill, we consult experts in the field, we do our research, and we study and consider numerous options. It is important not to focus on one opinion and cast all others aside. We do not start with a preconceived notion and ignore all those that differ from ours.

I would like to talk about the specific context of this bill. This issue is of utmost importance. We need to ensure that the female officers in the RCMP and the public served by the RCMP can trust our police system. I do not feel that this bill goes far enough to address the female officers' concerns. They asked for immediate, tangible results that will foster a safer and more open work environment. But the Conservatives have proposed giving the RCMP commissioner more power.

A recently published Human Rights Watch report describes how aboriginal women in the west mistrust the RCMP. Fifty women shared their experiences in the report. They alleged that the RCMP ignored their requests for help, abused its power and harassed them. They no longer call the police because they no longer trust them. This is only one example of the Canadian public's loss of confidence. Why not take appropriate steps now to deal with the problem?

It is important to deal with serious internal problems of abuse, intimidation and harassment in order to regain the trust of Canadians. We hoped that this bill might be a step in the right direction, but unfortunately the Conservatives chose to ignore all the recommendations made by the stakeholders. The solutions they have come up with would make things more difficult for employees who encounter abuse and bullying. This serious problem calls for real solutions and actions.

To conclude, I fail to understand how my colleagues on the other side of the House could have rejected all the amendments without any real discussion. I know that our points of view are different, but that is what debates are for. We might be able to find a middle ground. It is important not to forget the victims in this kind of situation. We are here to improve things. It is our duty to do so and that is what bills are for.

[English]

We have to go 110%.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

A small step is not enough to tackle this matter; we need to do more. No matter what form harassment takes, it has serious consequences for the women or men who are affected. There are psychological consequences, like fear that the charges will be rejected, fear of being accused of provocation, anger, frustration, feelings of powerlessness, shame, intimidation, humiliation, depression, stress and anxiety, as well as a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Harassment can also have serious tangible effects, such as poorer quality of work, job loss, loss of benefits, a bad reference from the employer, a tarnished employment record, unfair performance evaluation, or having one's work sabotaged. The victims' burden can take many forms.

It is totally unfair. That is why we have to change things and improve practices at the RCMP. People are supposed to have confidence in the RCMP and in this government. That is why I believe that we are not going far enough and not doing our duty.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we train a lot of police overseas. In the past, we have trained police in Kosovo, and we look at what is happening in Afghanistan.

One thing that is fundamental when training police is that the police have to understand that they have a responsibility to the people they protect. There has to be accountability within the police service. To do that, we often push for a lot of training and education on sensitivity. When it comes to sexual harassment and the use of power within the ranks by those who are in senior positions, we have to be vigilant to ensure that there is not an abuse of power. What we put forward as amendments to the bill was to have that accountability in there. It is not good enough to have these prescriptive pieces of legislation: we have to back them up with something. We put that forward in amendments, as my colleague described.

I wonder if my colleague could provide her perspective on the need to have that embedded in our police services. It is not just a matter of having the legislation, which is fine; we also have to have that other piece. We have to ensure that we are vigilant in making sure there is accountability.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I am not a police officer, but I do have work experience. I know that people have to have a good work environment and a healthy work environment. They have to trust in the people they work with, trust in the bosses and trust in the system. When there is no trust, the system will not work.

What we have asked for in our amendments is reasonable. I do not understand why they were not accepted or even discussed, because they came from witnesses. We did not just pluck them out of the sky because we thought we could make the bill bigger. There was a reason behind the amendments. Adding mandatory harassment training for RCMP members would help. Education helps. It helps to know what is right and what is wrong. It needs to be deep-rooted.

There needs to be a systematic change in how the RCMP proceeds. We know that there is a problem, and this is our moment to change it. If we do not go all the way, what is the point? That is why we are against this.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé to comment on the process used at committee stage.

Of the nineteen witnesses who appeared before the committee, twelve had been called by the Conservatives and only seven by the opposition. The first of the seven opposition witnesses was not heard until the fourth meeting. As a result, most of the opposition witness testimony was squeezed into the last meeting. The Conservative majority on the committee also forced the opposition to table its amendments by 3:30 p.m. on that same day, the day of the last meeting.

Since some questions from the government side implied that they were right and we were wrong, could my colleague comment on the process the Conservative majority chose to use at committee stage?

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his truly relevant question.

The work we do in committee is quite important. No matter how we add things up, there are simply too few NDP members to move things forward and win votes in committee. Things might change in 2015; let us hope they do.

I would still like to congratulate my colleagues who sit on the committee. It is not an easy job to draft amendments in less than three hours. Several amendments were brought forward without debate, and then a vote was held, but there were only four New Democrats, so we lost the vote.

I would like to point out that, when I was elected on May 2, 2011, I knew there were differences between Conservatives, Liberals and New Democrats, but I was convinced we could find common ground, or at least agree on some potential solutions. We are stronger when we work together.

It sometimes pains me that we cannot see eye to eye.

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Bill C-42. Frankly, it is a privilege for me to speak to this issue, because I wore the uniform for close to 18 years. Incidentally, I want to salute all the people I met, including my RCMP friends, my son's godfather and all those who have worn the uniform and who have worked extremely hard. During the 18 years before I became a member of Parliament, I was a manager, a first responder, and even a trade unionist. I worked in the public, parapublic and private sectors, both in open and secure custody.

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This is a special environment. Today, I heard my colleagues make very pointed and appropriate statements. I am pleased to participate in this debate. So, I decided to talk about the environment, because I think it is important. People who become police officers, or who wear the uniform and play a regulatory role in society, all do so with the best intentions. My son, who is five years old, wants to do like his dad and wear the uniform. He has a beautiful and idealistic perception of that. Before I wore the uniform, I myself had this noble ideal, which always stayed with me. We must have the strength to protect those who need to be protected. Even now, as a member of Parliament, it is still the same.

Throughout my career, I met people who wore the uniform and who did extraordinary things, who went above and beyond the call of duty and who saved lives. One of my colleagues, who was retiring, took the time, after attending the party organized in his honour, to go out and meet all the people he had dealt with at one time or another during his career and who were out on the street. He simply wanted to say hello to them and to ask if they were all right. He did that on his last day at work. Another one of my friends jumped into the water to save a woman in distress. He was prepared to sacrifice himself for her. I remember the explosion at the Accueil Bonneau, in Montreal. There were many victims. I was one of the first responders. There were many people, but no one was paying attention to what the others were doing. Everyone was there for the right reasons.

Despite all this great energy, there is also a very negative and dark side. During my career, I met people who committed suicide. They felt the environment was excessively hard and, despite all the representations to managers and all the efforts in their private life, they would have wanted to be listened to more carefully, and they would have wanted support mechanisms to be put in place. Unfortunately, these support mechanisms were not available. They made a choice with which I do not necessarily agree, a choice I find extremely sad and which affected me and many of my colleagues. We hope that this no longer happens.

Today, we are talking about harassment, and that is a reality in every environment where people wear uniforms. There is a culture and an isolation, but that must no longer be tolerated. In 2013, we still see practices that existed 40 years ago. I can guarantee that these practices are not those of front-line and street workers who are there every day. They want to move forward and to evolve, but there is a political and an administrative culture that stifles them and prevents them from getting out of this rut.

When I was a manager, I was given the opportunity to test new approaches, and I did. I had 34 people wearing the uniform and working under my authority. They were being treated like kids. Problems were kept secret and we did not want the media to know that these problems existed. I proposed an organic, dynamic, proactive and inclusive system. We were trying to reconcile administrators, workers and the population. We sat around the table, we talked to each other respectfully, and we tried to understand the problems and frustrations that had been lingering for a long time. We had to realize that these people have problems with schedules, which are often very demanding, and also with extremely demanding legal pressures.

They do not need to get hit with a club. They simply need to be listened to and to be given the opportunity to put in place appropriate mechanisms. That is often what we see. That is the criticism we heard today in the House and also in committee. I sat on four committees, and it was the same thing in each one of them: the meeting was held in camera and people were never prepared to listen to what others had to say.

• (1650)

We say this is arrogance because witnesses tell us that what is being put in place is a half-measure, that improvements should be made but that the government is not making them. Why? What is the intention here? These witnesses are professionals, people who impress me; my colleagues impress me, but the government is not listening to them. How are the people on the front lines at the RCMP supposed to feel helped and supported if the government is not even prepared to listen to them when they come and testify? There is a problem here.

Bill C-42 is a half-measure at best, and once again we are talking about administrative oversight. When we move an amendment to provide employees with training on harassment to support and help them in their distress, it is brushed off. Why? This is a simple measure that could have been put in place, but it was rejected.

What message is being sent? Are we saying that harassment is all right? Are we being tolerant and agreeing to perpetuate a closed environment in which there is a gulf separating oversight, police officers and civilians? The government wants to put measures in place, but not to increase transparency or accessibility.

When I was a manager, I had the opportunity to put in place mechanisms that helped bring together schools, issue tables and street workers. However, the solution to the problem was also to include workers and people who were on the front line. We sat down and held open conversations about each party's frustrations so that there could be a reconciliation and we could grow.

We are talking about a constant culture of separating entities and increasing secrecy. When I was a manager, I never once saw any danger of a leak on operational matters. That had nothing to do with anything. However, the workers were highly motivated, and mutual respect made it possible to achieve progress and a unique dynamic. People felt increasingly supported.

It should not be forgotten that the primary mandate of law enforcement agencies is to be there for the public, not for the government. This is not an oversight mechanism based on dubious policies. They represent and defend the people, and the government represents the people. It must not use police services merely as it wishes, especially if it has made bad policy that is thrown back in its face. This is creating a cycle.

I have a great deal of respect for those who wore the uniform for many years before me, just as I have for all the MPs who were members for 20 or 30 years. It is a great pleasure for me to sit down with them and to understand the mechanisms that were previously in place. Those people said a number of times that there was a culture of isolation and that they were being completely excluded. That creates a gulf and mistrust, which is absolutely unacceptable.

Government Orders

We are seeking amendments that are more than reasonable. I do not understand why there cannot be a reconciliation so that we can move forward. This makes no sense. Let the Conservatives remain arrogant and maintain their position. That is up to them, but there is no way that will reconcile law enforcement agencies with the public service.

I recently read a quote by Nelson Mandela. He said that when he was imprisoned in South Africa, he spoke to the prison warden and told him that the relationship they had today would be important tomorrow because tomorrow their roles would not be the same. How will we eat tomorrow's meal? How many people have I seen become professional police officers as adults, and how many police officers have I seen become civilians? The same is true of MPs and the relationship we have in the House today.

In a recent speech, President Obama said we are not here to be perfect, but to do a job. Unfortunately, every day in every committee, there is a barrier that should not exist because we are trying to move forward, to listen and to put appropriate mechanisms in place. The amendments we proposed are more than reasonable. The Conservatives could have kept at least one of them, but they did not.

We are trying to come up with a policy of reconciliation. It is a positive and constructive step, one that would result in more transparency and accessibility and an improvement in services in the field. I am proud of our workers in uniform because they do an excellent job. I am proud to have worked with them and to have been one of them. However, there are some serious issues that need to be dealt with.

•(1655)

We must put a stop to the harassment in this work environment. Let us put an end to it once and for all.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by the member. I know that even shortly after I was first elected to the House, the issue of sexual harassment in the RCMP was a big issue. I know it has been raised for a number of years now, and it is one of the reasons I believe that the RCMP commissioner ultimately went public in providing a letter saying that he wants to have more ability to discipline RCMP officers in situations such as sexual harassment.

It is somewhat frustrating that when we get good ideas on this side of the House and an amendment comes up, it does not seem to matter if the amendment is good or bad; it just does not have a chance at passing because there is a new mentality with the majority government that if it is an opposition amendment, it is automatically bad.

I wonder if the member would like to comment with respect to amendments and that process. I know there was an attempt on their part to try to improve the legislation because, like the Liberal Party, they believe that the bill falls short and that the government could have done more.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Larose: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and comments.

Having sat on four committees, I can indeed confirm that amendments are always dealt with in the same manner. I once pleaded with the Conservatives, in camera, saying I understood their position but disagreed with them, and I asked if we could at least meet halfway in order to move forward.

I know the members of the committee because I have had to replace one of them in the past. They are quite professional and thorough. I even heard someone say how good it was to have someone who once wore the uniform, because no one else had that experience. Unfortunately, however, no one there really listened.

All questions raised and solutions brought forward are brushed aside. I believe the people know better and will draw their own conclusions regarding the government's intentions.

•(1700)

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his great experience with this segment of our society, which makes his words even more powerful.

The Conservatives have a thing about amendments. With regard to Bill C-47, some 50 amendments were put forward. Most of them came from northerners, and the bill was on the north. Most of the amendments came from witnesses from across the north, who brought them forward in amendment form, and that made the body of the amendments that were put forward. None of them were voted for by the Conservatives, of course.

I want to clarify something with respect to these amendments that were brought forward. What was the position of many of the witnesses before the committee as to these amendments?

Mr. Jean-François Larose: Mr. Speaker, I was not in committee, but I did read the blues and I did go through all the material. I would say the majority of them said two things. First, they said that Bill C-42 fell short. That was all there was to it. It did not address their issues. Second, the amendments that were brought forward were brought forward with the information of the witnesses.

I do not understand what the position of the government is. They bring in witnesses who contradict Bill C-42 and say that it is a good step but it is far from being sufficient and it needs to be modified. This is how they see it. Then we propose the amendments, both sides, the NDP and the Liberal Party, and the Conservatives systematically vote against them. I am a little confused. They can say they listened to the experts, but when they bring in their own experts, they do not even listen to them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleagues who spoke before me, especially my colleague who has a great deal of experience in this area.

The NDP has often wondered why RCMP members were not really consulted.

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The government says that 12 members of the House used to be police officers in various parts of the country and that they should understand the situation and the changes and amendments that need to be made to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act. I am sorry, but the 20,000 officers in the field who serve every day across the country were not consulted. They will be the forgotten ones in this process. We are not asking that each and every one of them be consulted, but only that the government go out into the field. Did the famous government members go back to the field to see how things are going? Do they know how all the changes resulting from Bill C-42 will pan out?

Having said that, I would like to express my gratitude for being able to speak to Bill C-42, Enhancing Royal Canadian Mounted Police Accountability Act, more commonly known as the modernizing RCMP services act. If we want to modernize a service as important to public safety and national security as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we must establish a certain process for consulting its members.

I was a human resources manager. When you want to make changes to an organization and its members, you must consult them, listen to them, be receptive to their comments and especially take care of their injuries. Whether or not they are unionized is not part of this discussion. Some have been carrying around not only physical injuries, but also emotional and psychological injuries for too long at the RCMP. They are not being consulted. They are not being listened to. They carry weapons. It seems to me that the government should feel a sense of responsibility to them, should listen and be attentive to them, especially those who are in distress.

It is a matter of national security. Sometimes, they are the first line of defence. But the government is not listening to them. They seem to have been left out of a process meant to enhance performance and increase efficiency so that they can protect us faithfully. I know some of them. I have come to know them since I was elected. They are very proud of their work, their history and the culture of their police force. A negative culture may have permeated the RCMP over the last few years, but we must look at the evidence, examine the situation coolly, and then make changes and implement them in the field.

We know how important it is to have not only an effective police force, but also police officers who have optimum working conditions, especially when it comes to public safety, as I mentioned. Everyone acknowledges that Canadians should be able to trust their national police force. This is indisputable.

This bill emphasizes that civilian oversight of the RCMP is critical to promoting accountability to the public and ensuring transparency in police forces. There must also be transparency in the review process when legislation that is as important as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act is being rewritten. Similarly, civilian oversight should increase the RCMP's accountability to the provincial governments that its forces serve. All too often we forget that, throughout Canada, the leading police service is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

• (1705)

The legislation is also meant to provide the Canadian government with a framework that would be used to launch an ongoing

modernization process. As I said, unless the government consults and goes to see what is happening on the ground, we will be unable to accept any of its measures, and so will Canadians and people in the RCMP. When such huge changes are being considered, they must be acceptable to everyone involved.

As I said, since I was elected on May 2, 2011—almost two years ago—I have had many opportunities to meet members of the RCMP and to learn about the extraordinary work they do, despite the limited human, materiel and financial resources available to them. Because they are expected to do more work with less money, major components of our national security are at risk.

We are talking 2,500 km. There are six border posts in my riding. We have 22 in Quebec. We have the east coast, the west coast, the north and the Arctic. The RCMP is a sizeable police force. Over 20,000 workers have been and will continue to be subject to accusations and cuts, over and over. In spite of everything, they have to continue to perform their duties under difficult conditions. Morale has been seriously affected. How can they ensure the safety of Canadians and, often, that of visiting dignitaries, summit security, as we have seen, and sometimes even the Prime Minister?

As a manager, I would tend to pay attention to the mood of such people. This is important to me because I do not like to see workers whose basic right to be heard is being disrespected, especially when they are showing signs of distress. There is plenty of that within the ranks of the RCMP.

Yes, the intent of the bill is good. They want to resolve matters, but are they not trying to resolve the image rather than the real problem that exists within the RCMP?

In terms of organizational structure, it is the same thing. They are going to give more and more discretionary powers to the commissioner. They say:

It modernizes the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's human resources management regime [and] authorizes the Commissioner to act with respect to staffing...

I know very well that staffing is involved. They are replacing trained RCMP officers with civilians in public service positions. They go on:

disputes relating to harassment and general human resource management.

The Commissioner can have a right of oversight, but it is not up to him to do that.

In big corporations, they never let senior management decide everything—not under these conditions. It is unacceptable. People must be listened to and consulted. Human resources management is done by professionals. I look forward to hearing the reaction on the shop floor when they appoint a human resources management professional as commissioner. They will say he knows nothing about the job, because he has never worked on the shop floor.

This is what they are doing. They are leaving the management of things as important as promotions and complaints to the commissioner. He will not even be bound by observations made by the civilian review body.

Government Orders

• (1710)

Under these conditions, it is unacceptable to have a police force the size of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police which also has to cooperate and share responsibilities with provincial and municipal police forces in many provinces. As for First Nations police officers, they were not even heard from in this process, yet they are an important part of the equation.

I could discuss this at greater length.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate and thank my colleague from Compton—Stanstead for the work he did on this file in committee.

In his speech, he clearly pointed out how the bill should have been improved. Sadly, the Conservatives rejected every excellent amendment the expert witnesses had suggested. It is very disappointing.

I would like my hon. colleague to tell us more about the work he did at committee stage. I would also like to hear his thoughts on the fact that the Conservatives rejected all the amendments from our NDP colleagues. Could he tell us how this attitude interferes with our work as MPs and is forcing us to vote against this bill, when we could have supported it had the amendments been passed?

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank my colleague from Drummond, who does an excellent job on environmental issues in his riding and in our party.

The committee members get along well. We all agree on some points, but on other issues, we hit an unbreakable wall. There is a total rejection of any recommendations that come from NDP-supported reports and a total rejection of NDP amendments.

We even see personal attacks at times. The Minister of Public Safety himself has launched attacks against NDP members instead of answering questions.

The government claims that, because some of its MPs are former police officers, it knows exactly how to fix that type of legislation. This attitude is unacceptable. Once again, the government rejects all collaboration. It does a sloppy job on bills, rushing to get rid of them. Canadians will have to live with the consequences.

• (1715)

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we were talking about sexual harassment in the RCMP. One thing worries me. Victims are afraid. How can a woman speak about such a difficult situation when she is ashamed? There are many other factors that come into play. If the person harassing her is her boss—the one who makes the decisions—she is out of luck.

Could my colleague explain how it is possible to introduce a bill that is so lacking in that area.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, a report was released by the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP on February 14. That is not that long ago. Ian McPhail made 11 recommendations aimed at improving the manner in which the RCMP deals with workplace conflict. He recommended enhanced reporting and tracking of harassment complaints. Some complaints in the RCMP have been collecting dust for four or five years. When it comes to a harassment or other complaint, if there is a delay of four or five

years, it is easier to forget the victim and the person who might be accused of harassment or wrongdoing. Then what happens?

There are 900 RCMP positions in Canada. The answer is far too easy. I have heard about officers who worked for 10 to 15 years in their province and then were transferred when they were suspected of doing something wrong. They were moved three or four provinces to the east, west or north to remove them from the situation and demoralize them further until a proper procedure was put in place.

Every employee in Canada's public service, every provincial employee and even every non-unionized worker has access to a labour relations grievance process. But the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is not entitled to have a process that is fair for both the victims and those accused of negligence.

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on Bill C-42, the Enhancing Royal Canadian Mounted Police Accountability Act.

We can see quite clearly, through the work that has been done by our side of the House in exposing it, how difficult it was to get any amendments to this bill and how difficult it was to deal with the real issues that witnesses in front of the committee brought forward. This is a pattern that the Conservative government in its majority has worked on pretty hard. It exists in almost every committee of this House.

While I support the need to modernize the workplace of the RCMP, this bill does not do enough to reach that objective. My colleagues on this side of the House have gone through the process and raised many valid issues and complaints.

As a person from the northern regions of Canada where the RCMP is the only police force, and having lived there all of my life, I see that there is really a requirement in small communities across the north for RCMP officers to have the opportunity to have a very direct relationship with others that they can get hold of in order to deal with the kinds of grievances that may arise in very small detachments. I just do not see that this bill is adequate to deal with that.

Having said that, I want to focus on two proposed new subsections of the act that maybe have not received much attention and that I think are very interesting subsections of the bill. We need to look at subsection 31(1.3) and subsection 31(1.4).

Section 31 of the act sets out when an RCMP member may make a grievance and sets out limitations to when an officer may not make a grievance.

Proposed subsection 31(1.3) reads:

A member is not entitled to present a grievance relating to any action taken under any instruction, direction or regulation given or made by or on behalf of the Government of Canada in the interest of the safety or security of Canada or any state allied or associated with Canada.

In other words, officers who refuse to carry out an unlawful order can be disciplined up to and including dismissal from the force, and they would not be able to complain that they are being punished for refusing to obey the law.

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This section could also mean that RCMP officers who blow the whistle on illegal orders would also be subject to discipline, including dismissal, and would have no right to complain that they were being disciplined for revealing illegal activities inside the RCMP, even if they were under the instruction of the government—especially if they were under the instruction of the government.

Retired RCMP officer Rob Creasser, spokesperson for the Mounted Police Professional Association of Canada, said:

It places RCMP members in an untenable situation when they are being directed... to break Canadian or international law.

Proposed new subsection 31(1.4) reads:

For the purposes of subsection (1.3), an order made by the Governor in Council is conclusive proof of the matters stated in the order in relation to the giving or making of an instruction, direction or regulation by or on behalf of the Government of Canada in the interest of the safety or security of Canada or any state allied or associated with Canada.

In other words, the cabinet, a small group of like-minded politicians meeting in secret, would determine which laws the RCMP would have to follow and which laws the RCMP would break, and what those mean.

Gail Davidson, executive director for Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, describes this clause as very dangerous, saying:

Police officers have special powers...to use force and to deprive people of their liberty, and the reason they have those powers is to keep the public peace.

Keeping the public peace means ensuring that the laws are upheld, and this is legitimate laws and the rule of law.

Some of the dangers in here are that these clauses could be used to condone torture and the use of information gathered through torture. Torture and the use of information gained through torture are against both Canadian law and international law. However, once enforced, this bill would negate these laws.

Upholding the law and the rule of law is something the Minister of Public Safety does not appreciate. With his directions to the RCMP, the Canadian Border Services and CSIS, he has instructed them to use information gained through torture.

Last November Surrey, B.C., RCMP Constable Lloyd Pinsent circulated a paper he wrote with the title, "The Terrorists Have Won. RCMP Ordered to Accept Torture-Tainted Information".

In his paper, Constable Pinsent lays out how Bill C-42, combined with the Minister of Public Safety's direction that it is okay to use information gathered through torture, essentially ordered the RCMP to break the law.

● (1720)

Mr. Pinsent wrote:

While the direction from Minister Toews is in contravention of existing Canadian and international law, under [Bill C-42's] section 31. (1.4) the order is to be viewed as conclusive proof and questions about the legitimacy of the order are not allowed either....

What we have here is a situation that can lead to abuse in the future. Why did the Conservative government decide to put this particular aspect into the accountability act, such as they call it? In other words, RCMP members are not accountable here, cannot be accountable and cannot stand up and speak the truth about what is happening to them or how they feel about the imposition of illegal

practices upon them through an order of the Governor in Council. The Governor in Council can make that decision in secret, based on its desire to ensure what it considers to be the safety and security of Canada. This smacks of a police state, and I think everybody would agree to that.

In this country, we always have a need for people to deal with illegal behaviour. Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which states:

No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.

Therefore, with regard to the minister's attempt to justify torture and the use of information gained from torture, any such use or activities are illegitimate under Canada's international legal obligations. However, considering recent actions, the Conservative government has little respect for the rule of law.

In June 2012, the UN Committee Against Torture released a report on Canada's compliance with the UN Convention Against Torture. In this report, the committee raised serious concerns with the Conservative's laissez-faire attitude toward torture saying that it could result in violations of article 15 of the convention. However, Bill C-42 would give more authority for any government to act in a way that is improper and could lead to Canada's reputation being tarnished before the world. It could lead to great human rights abuses. It could lead to a number of other things, such as the need for illegal wiretaps and information collection, and all kinds of activities that could take place in the name of the security of this country. These are very serious issues.

In 2006, Justice Dennis O'Connor, in his report on the events relating to Maher Arar, recommended:

Policies should include specific directions aimed at eliminating any possible Canadian complicity in torture, avoiding the risk of other human rights abuses and ensuring accountability.

These sections in Bill C-42 would go against that recommendation. These sections would create a situation in which the government would have the ability to direct the police force in a way that is inappropriate. Here we have a proposed law that would essentially make it legal for the police to break the law, and if they choose not to break the law, they may be dismissed without the right to a grievance.

This is supposed to be legislation about modernizing the RCMP workplace. However, these clauses would take it backward in time and should not have been put into the legislation. It should have been debated in a different fashion. Perhaps the laws could have been amended to provide some security to Canadians. However, when it comes to viewing these clauses in the bill and the thought of the Conservative government overriding civil rights in the name of national security, we must ask these questions: Did the terrorists win? Has the Canadian state acquiesced?

● (1725)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned Mr. O'Connor. The other person we should be listening to is Paul Kennedy. He was the one who recommended many things that the government should do to reform the RCMP.

Paul Kennedy, after having spent much time trying to deal with things internally in the RCMP and the complaints commission process, said it had to be outside the RCMP, that it had to be civilian oversight. He said that the legislation this one is based on, Bill C-42, which is a reiteration of Bill C-38, “is so riddled with loopholes it doesn't meet O'Connor's standard”.

Could he comment on Mr. Kennedy's comments about this legislation?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I have addressed my remarks to one particular section of the legislation that I find to be unacceptable, and I am sure many other people would look at it in that fashion.

Having met with the RCMP over many years here on different occasions, I feel very strongly the RCMP needs a union or an association that could protect the individual rights of the RCMP members. Until that happens, we will have the situation we have now. Thousands of grievances are backlogged, and RCMP officers are unhappy. There is no opportunity for people to deal with the kinds of situations in which they find themselves in the workplace and there is no intermediary on their side.

How can people work in that kind of environment? How can they do their jobs in the kind of risk-oriented work that police officers have to take on every day, with the stress and the strain they have to deal with, without some measure of support that is legitimate and is there for them when they have troubles or situations where they need to have someone on their side?

We can create any law we want. Without giving the police forces, our RCMP, the opportunity to have the same rights as other Canadians and other Canadian workers, this simply will not work.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Western Arctic will have, if he wishes, two and a half minutes left for questions and comments when the House next resumes debate on the question.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CLARITY ACT

The House resumed from January 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-457, An Act to repeal the Clarity Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia has four minutes remaining.

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since I am the first to speak during this second hour of debate, I would like to remind members that this bill is very important to the very foundations of democracy and the right to self-determination of a people that forms a nation. I would like to share the definition of self-determination as recognized

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in international law and by the member nations of the United Nations.

In international law, self-determination, or the right of peoples to self-determination, is the principle that a people must have the free and sovereign right to determine its own form of government independently of any foreign influence. It is a collective right that can only be assumed by a people that forms a nation.

The Bloc Québécois bill, introduced by my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska, is very simple. It contains only whereas clauses and one clause that would fix a serious violation of the inalienable right of the Quebec people to self-determine its own future if it chooses to do so.

Whereas

the Québécois form a nation;

Whereas that nation has been formally recognized by the House of Commons;

Whereas the decision on its future within Canada lies with the Québécois nation, not the federal government;

And whereas the Québécois nation has laws that give its government both the right to consult the people of Quebec by means of a referendum on the subjects of its choice and the right to determine the wording of the referendum question;

[Consequently] the Clarity Act...is repealed.

The Bloc Québécois and all the parties of the Quebec National Assembly, whether they be sovereigntist or federalist, agree that this law, which was passed by the federal Parliament, is in direct violation of the right of the people of Quebec to self-determination. The Clarity Act is an aberration. The National Assembly is sovereign and can consult its people on anything it chooses and as it sees fit.

Now, it is important to remember the very harmful impact of the Clarity Act. This law interferes in an internal debate, a Quebec debate, over which the people of Quebec should have control. The House of Commons used this law to give itself the power of disallowance with regard to the results of a referendum on Quebec's sovereignty. The House of Commons wants to determine, retroactively, whether the question is clear and whether there is a clear majority, namely, by taking into account the views of the other provinces.

In closing, since my time is almost up, I urge all members of this House who respect international law and the rights of peoples to determine their own future to support the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska's bill. Quebec, Canadian and international democracies are at stake. Regardless of allegiance, members must support this bill to uphold our values and democracy.

• (1735)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-457, An Act to repeal the Clarity Act. First of all, I must say that the NDP team is working very hard to restore Quebecers' faith in politics.

In introducing this bill, the Bloc Québécois is trying to resuscitate old debates and is proposing nothing new. In view of the fact that Quebecers have overwhelmingly rejected parties that have disappointed them in the past and those that took them for granted election after election, my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois should be ashamed.

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The NDP's approach is different. We believe the federal government should be an ally to Quebecers, as a nation, as acknowledged in the House, and that it should co-operate with the provinces in a way that respects them. This shows once again that the Bloc does not really want to help people build bridges or bring them together from sea to sea. We know that people are prepared to move on to something else in good faith and to set aside the old debates. That, moreover, is the message they sent in the last election.

The NDP has even tabled its own bill, which follows from the Sherbrooke declaration and its positive vision of federalism, which turns the page on the old debates. We believe that the leader of the official opposition is the person who can best bring together the people of Quebec and the rest of Canada to work together to build a more just, greener and more prosperous Canada. The NDP's team and leader are the only ones who really want to establish winning conditions for Canada in Quebec in a manner respectful of democracy.

Speaking of democracy, allow me to point out that, in an election, members solicit votes under a political banner with ideas and promises from the party they wish to represent. Once elected, members have a duty to respect the people's choice and be accountable to their constituents throughout their term.

I introduced a bill to that effect last year. Its purpose was to make the people's representatives more accountable and to enhance the image of the country's political institutions. That bill provided that a member's seat would be vacated and a byelection called for that seat if the member, having been elected as a member of a political party or as an independent, changed parties or became a member of another party. However, the seat would not be considered vacant if the member, having been elected as a member of a political party, chose to sit as an independent.

In other words, my bill proposed that byelections would be called when a member elected as a member of a political party chose to change political parties during his term. It proposed that byelections would also be called. That is respect for democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I do not like to interrupt my colleagues when they are in full flight. However, with all due respect for the Chair, I would like to remind him and my colleague who is making a speech that we are discussing Bill C-457. I really do not see the connection with the bill he is talking about now.

• (1740)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is the practice of the Chair to give members some latitude in terms of relevance when they are speaking to a matter before the House. I would encourage the hon. member for Pontiac and all members to make their remarks relevant to the matter before the House.

The hon. member for Pontiac.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Mr. Speaker, I am deeply disappointed that my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois have recently not exhibited the same fundamental respect for basic democratic principles and the

democratic choice of the voters in a riding located in the heart of Quebec.

Nor do the Liberals have any lessons to teach us, having led Canada to the brink of separation in 1995. The Liberals will not learn from their mistakes. Their response to the unity crisis was the sponsorship scandal. The Liberals gave up on the political battle for Canada. As a last resort, they introduced an obscure act that is far from clear.

Instead of attacking the NDP for the progress it has made in Quebec, the Liberals should be applauding it. Thanks to the NDP, a majority of the members elected by Quebecers are federalist, for the first time since 1988, and at the same time Quebecers defeated the Bloc Québécois, which wants to revive old quarrels.

As a Quebecker, I believe with all my heart that it is important to restore the hope of the people of Quebec in their country and to see that Ottawa respects the people of Quebec, while working with them to build a better future for everyone.

Quebeckers do not want to move backwards. They have had enough of the old quarrels. We have to put an end to these pointless squabbles. That is what the NDP is committed to doing.

Our team succeeded in restoring hope among Quebeckers: the hope of being heard, understood and respected in their country and the hope that their values are shared by other Canadians and will soon be able to guide a government in action.

Unfortunately, some people are prepared to stifle that hope, simply to score cheap political points, because that is precisely what the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois are trying to do by resuscitating their old debates with this motion and the Clarity Act.

That is why I will be voting against this bill. Quebeckers deserve better than the Bloc's desperate efforts, and certainly better than to pay the price for the irresponsible political games of the Liberal Party, which wants to create a national unity crisis where none exists. That is political opportunism.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am the member who has the honour to represent one of the most federalist ridings in Quebec, judging by the percentage of the vote garnered by the "no" camp during the two referenda on independence, in 1980 and 1995. I could not, therefore, stand idly by without contributing to this debate on a bill to dismantle the Clarity Act.

I also take this opportunity to salute my honourable Liberal colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville and to thank and congratulate him. I remind members that he spearheaded with great skill, intelligence and courage the Jean Chrétien Liberal government's efforts to pass this important legislation in 2000.

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I support the Clarity Act with a great deal of pride and conviction, not only because I am a staunch federalist. I also support it because my political philosophy is firmly anchored in liberalism. Liberalism rejects ideological solutions. The Liberal approach is based on well-informed political decisions. It is based on the notion that these decisions, which affect us at every level in our daily lives, must be rooted in fact and be the result of a rigorous thought process. In short, these decisions must be well informed and well-reasoned, based on transparency and a clear and thorough understanding of the issues at play.

As with democracy itself, liberalism is rooted in intellectual honesty. All those who lived through the two referenda in Quebec know from experience how unclear and nebulous the questions were that Quebeckers had to vote on in these two plebiscites. In fact, the questions, which could be characterized as two-tiered, became a sort of inside joke in Quebec, if not elsewhere in Canada.

However, the joke is not at all funny to Quebeckers. The Clarity Act requires that the question in a referendum, if ever there were to be another referendum—and it is my heartfelt hope that we will never again be called upon to participate in such a process—be first and foremost clear and that it communicate to the voters the real meaning of the decision that they are being called upon make after due consideration.

Some who oppose the Clarity Act claim that the legislation constrains Quebec and is a straitjacket that is unworthy of a free and proud people. Some have even described it as a Soviet-style piece of legislation. That point of view perplexes me. It saddens me that there are people who are capable of so gravely misinterpreting the act.

In my opinion, the opposite is true. The Clarity Act—which was spearheaded by a proud Quebecker, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier, acting under the direction of a great Québécois Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, also a proud son of Quebec—gives Quebeckers the legislative tool, affirmed by no less than the Supreme Court, to hold to account any government in Quebec City that would dare to put us on an irreversible path to independence.

In fact, the Clarity Act safeguards for Quebeckers that most cherished of freedoms: the freedom to communicate to their government their true intentions regarding their future and to protect themselves against any attempt at manipulation on the part of politicians who have a hold on the reins of power, albeit on a temporary basis.

From this point of view, the Clarity Act is a yardstick. It is part of our Canadian system of democratic checks and balances, to borrow the jargon used by our neighbours to the south. The concept of checks and balances to protect the interests of the population is, moreover, one of the great principles at the heart of liberalism.

The Clarity Act requires, therefore, that any victory on the part of the “yes” camp in a referendum result from a clear question that leaves no one confused about the consequences of such an outcome, which I hope never comes to pass.

With regard to the threshold that would have to be met in a referendum to begin negotiating Quebec’s independence with the rest of Canada, the Liberal caucus fully supports, with the strongest and deepest conviction, the Clarity Act, based as it is on the Supreme

Court opinion to the effect that the threshold must be much higher than the 50% plus one rule.

There are number of reasons for this condition. First, the 50% plus one rule is not 50% plus one in reality; voter turnout at the polls is never actually 100%. We know that those who are absent must live with the consequences, but do they deserve to lose their country and their citizenship forever if illness or some other situation makes it impossible for them to exercise their right to vote?

In the event that the “yes” side won a slight victory, would there be the broad popular consensus needed to move forward with the difficult negotiations with the rest of Canada? Or, in the wake of this kind of result, would Quebec fall into a bitter political deadlock that would undermine economic stability?

● (1745)

The answer is obvious. Many political analysts and columnists, the so-called experts, claim that Quebeckers strongly disagree with the clarity bill. The facts, however, show something different.

The Clarity Act received Royal Assent in June 2000. In November 2000, during the federal election, the Liberals under Jean Chrétien easily won 36 seats in Quebec, with 44.2% of the vote as opposed to 39.9% for the Bloc Québécois, which, it must be said, campaigned against the Clarity Act.

If poll results from that time are anything to go by, a poll conducted by Quebec sociologist Maurice Pinard showed that 60% of Quebeckers, including 53% of sovereignists, supported or strongly supported the Clarity Act. A CROP poll of 4,992 people conducted the previous year about the principles on which the Supreme Court made its ruling—principles that would later be included in the clarity bill—showed that an even higher proportion of Quebeckers demanded that a threshold of at least 60% be met before the Quebec government could pursue sovereignty.

Finally, I cannot remember any demonstrations at that time that were organized by the sovereignist leaders against the Clarity Act. That is a remarkable indication that there was not a lot of opposition to the legislation. Overall, I am very disappointed that the NDP is so fixated on the 50% plus one rule, on a matter that is as serious as the future of Canada, one of the best countries in the world.

The NDP is not on the same page as my constituents regarding the Clarity Act. However, I continue to hope that my NDP colleagues will change their position, return to the fold and stand up for a united Canada.

● (1750)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, you have listened to all of my speeches since I was elected to this Parliament, so you will probably be a little surprised that I rise today with neither a lectern nor a script.

The reason is quite simple: this speech is one that I not only wish to give by heart, but one that I intend to be heartfelt, because the bill in question this afternoon strikes at the heart of my political conviction which, alas, flies in the face of this legislation. Here is why.

Private Members' Business

Every time I tell one of my constituents that it was a long-held dream of mine to get involved in politics, I am invariably asked why I did not do so earlier. The answer is quite simple: it is uncommon that all the stars align, that one finds a party that corresponds to one's values and that lays out a suitable plan for society, that a nomination is available and that there is a charismatic leader to follow. Yet, what happened on May 2, 2011? The message was very clear.

I am from a riding that was, for some time, represented by Bloc Québécois MPs. Obviously, my election, on May 2, 2011, has nothing to do with my star quality, or lack thereof. The vast majority of people from my riding, just like the vast majority of Quebeckers, clearly demonstrated that they were ready for something different, that they liked Jack Layton's leadership style—his positive vision for the future, and the respect that he had for Quebec within the Canadian Constitution—and that they had an overwhelming desire to defeat the Conservative government. They decided, therefore, to place their trust in the NDP.

It must be said that on May 2, 2011, the NDP association in my riding would not have sufficed to get me elected. In fact, a massive coalition of constituents from my riding rallied behind a unifying idea, believed in it, and to this day believe in the basic principles of the Sherbrooke declaration. This guided my political involvement because it enabled me to meet with federalists and to tell them about the work that I intended to do in Ottawa. It also gave me an opportunity to meet with members of the Bloc Québécois and sovereigntists, and to tell them about the work I intended to do in Ottawa, and that if they truly stood by their conviction—and it is a noble idea that will probably never disappear—they would have to fight in the appropriate forum. I think that the majority of Quebeckers have a solid understanding of the fact that their future belongs to them and that it will be decided by them, at the appropriate time, if ever that time comes.

But in the meantime, on not one but two occasions, the majority of Quebeckers have affirmed that they wish to remain in Canada, and this message must be heard. Regarding the proposal by the Bloc, which I am going to vote against, everything, in my opinion, is a question of respect. Each party in the House appears to have a different approach to Quebec.

Every time I think of the Conservatives, I think of a small speech bubble in an *Asterix* comic book in which someone asks a question, and all the legionnaires start whistling and trying to do something else. In other words, we will not talk about it, there is no problem, we will forget about it and sweep it under the carpet.

For the Liberals, respect means asking us to trust them, because one day, they will be able to reply by saying that perhaps an acceptable answer to a question that is deemed to be clear after the fact is between 50% and 100%. In short, total confusion. This kind of clarity act is something that we understand full well.

What the members of the Bloc mean by their bill is that if you respect Quebec, then do not interfere in its affairs. That is my summary of it. However, telling others to mind their own business means yet again ignoring a whole segment of Quebec's population who mean business when they say they want to stay in Canada. The Bloc's position is also unacceptable.

Who then has the most balanced approach? Without a doubt, the NDP, under the leadership of the member for Outremont. We are headed precisely in the right direction. Nearly all the major editorialists agree.

● (1755)

What does the NDP bill say compared to the bill introduced by the Bloc? It says very straightforward things. An association, whether a business association, a constitutional association, or even a romantic association, is based on trust. It starts with trust. We will not change the ground rules along the way.

It would therefore be rather silly to claim that 50% plus one is enough to join Canada's Constitution, but that in order to leave, you need 66%. The rules for entry and departure should be the same. The NDP's job is to make Quebeckers feel respected and at home in Canada, thereby ensuring that the question does not come up again. If it does, then these are the conditions that will apply.

The question could not be clearer. At the beginning, I said that Quebeckers will be able to decide their future at a time of their choosing. Naturally, they will also decide on the question. The NDP believes, however, that with their experience of repeated referenda, Quebeckers have also gained maturity. We believe that it might be possible, should a third referendum be held, to follow the example of the Scottish model and agree in advance on the wording of a question that would have everyone live with the results when the referendum was over. This is a very mature approach that Quebeckers are prepared to adopt, except perhaps for those who are spoiling for a fight.

If the option has to succeed through confrontation, it is because it does not have a strong enough foundation to move forward. For those reasons, it will be very difficult if not impossible for me to support this Bloc Québécois bill, which enables us to reject a Clarity Act that I agree is utterly abominable. On this point, we will share a very broad consensus with them. However, having said that the Clarity Act is anything but clear, we cannot replace it with a legal vacuum. That would mean going back 10 years, and reviving futile and, so to speak, puerile debates.

Quebeckers have had enough. They have chosen, and will choose again in 2015, to give wide support to the NDP. They want Quebec and Canada to be governed in accordance with a positive vision. Only one party embodies that vision, from Jack Layton to the leadership we have now under the guidance of the member for Outremont. I really wanted to say his name, but I refrained.

We need a policy that puts an end to the climate of tension, that seeks negotiation or says that we will address the issue as adults who can understand each other, should the need arise one day. The reality, however, is that today the need does not arise, and it probably will not arise tomorrow or the day after. The question about when the next referendum will take place does not figure in the frequent conversations I have with people in my riding. The government now in power in Quebec, which is itself sovereigntist, does not seem to be making it a priority. It, too, is listening to the message from society as a whole, which says that its priorities lie elsewhere.

Private Members' Business

The NDP has already begun to put measures in place and propose legislation reflecting its vision to enable all Quebecers to feel at home in Canada. That is what induced me to take concrete political action, and I will continue for as long as the people of Trois-Rivières place their trust in me.

• (1800)

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to debate Bill C-457, An Act to repeal the Clarity Act.

I should say at the outset that we will not be supporting this bill. In May 2011, 4.5 million Canadians voted for a more inclusive, greener and more prosperous Canada. Some of those Canadians live in Quebec. For the first time since 1988, Quebecers elected a majority of federalist MPs to the House of Commons, thanks to the NDP.

Quebeckers placed their confidence in our progressive, federalist vision. They voted for a party that believes there is a place for Quebec in the federation. The message Quebec voters sent to the Bloc Québécois was very clear: we want to go in another direction; we want to work together to build a better Canada; we want to look towards the future, not the past. The Bloc does not seem to have understood the message, however.

In tabling its Bill C-457, the Bloc is clearly demonstrating its limitations. It obviously has little to offer Quebecers. Rather than talk about the economy, combatting poverty, the social housing crisis or job creation, Bill C-457 talks about referenda.

In 2013, Quebecers and many Canadians expect their elected representatives to work tirelessly to find solutions to such problems as the rising cost of living. They want their representatives to pressure this government to put more money into health, abandon its employment insurance reforms, ensure security in retirement for our seniors, and stop cutting the services for which they pay taxes. They also want the government to step up and ensure that big corporations pay their fair share of taxes. They do not want to hear any more talk of secession.

As our fellow citizens watch the Conservative government perform, they wonder how the next government will manage to clean up the mess it leaves behind. The NDP has practical solutions to improve the lives of all citizens.

We are fighting every day to establish a balanced 21st-century economy based on sustainable development, an economy that generates wealth, not just for a handful of industries and regions, but for every part of this country.

The NDP champions respect for democracy and for voters. On this subject, at the beginning of this Parliament my colleague from Pontiac tabled Bill C-306, the main purpose of which was to require members wishing to change sides in the middle of a legislature to run in a byelection. Unfortunately, the bill was rejected by the Conservatives. This is nevertheless the kind of commitment to respect for democracy that Canadians expect. They no longer want members of Parliament who get elected under one banner, and then change sides.

As we prepare to form the next government in 2015, the Bloc is limited to talking about referenda. Our goal is to get the

Conservative government out of power, instead of trying to get Quebec out of Canada. An NDP government will implement the progressive policies that millions of Canadians supported in the last election.

With regard to federalism, our position on Quebec's place in Canada is clearly set out in the Sherbrooke Declaration we adopted in 2006. Our approach has the merit of being firmly positive and inclusive. We want to build bridges between people, not divide them. Unlike some, we refuse to believe that secession is the only solution available to Quebecers.

• (1805)

Anyone reading Bill C-457 will realize at once that it disregards the opinion of the Supreme Court, as set out in its opinion in the Quebec Secession Reference. The Supreme Court was very clear in formulating its opinion: if a majority of Quebecers chose secession in a referendum, both parties would be obligated to negotiate.

The federal government would thus be obliged to negotiate, but so would Quebec. Now, in order to trigger an obligation to negotiate, there must be a clear question and a clear result.

Bill C-470, An Act respecting democratic constitutional change, sponsored by my colleague from Toronto—Danforth, responds to the Supreme Court opinion and the federal government's obligation to negotiate if a majority of Quebecers answer a clear question in a referendum.

Bill C-470 does not deal with secession, but opens the door to any question about constitutional change, because the NDP believes that Quebec's right to decide its future may also be exercised within Canada.

Among other things, the Bill refers to the integration of Quebec into the Canadian constitutional framework, the limitation of federal spending power in Quebec, and the Government of Quebec's opting out with full compensation from any programs if the Government of Canada intervenes in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction.

Bill C-470 is designed not to prevent negotiation between the federal government and the Quebec government, but to provide genuine clarification of the conditions that trigger the obligation to negotiate referred to by the Supreme Court. It also provides examples of clear questions, while recognizing the right of the National Assembly to draft its own question.

My colleague from Toronto—Danforth has introduced an excellent bill, and I wish to congratulate him on it. I should add that the entire NDP caucus is behind him in the introduction of his bill.

Unlike Bill C-470, Bill C-457 has the merit of proposing a constructive solution that moves us forward, rather than back. That is what Canadians expect: that we propose solutions for the future, rather than be content to live in the past.

We should be looking towards the future, and that is what Bill C-470 proposes.

Private Members' Business

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to all of the debate on this issue. Clearly, this debate is in Quebecers' genetic makeup. This is a key issue that is not always easy to address.

I listened to the comments made by the member of the Bloc Québécois who gave his speech a few weeks ago. Like many Bloc members, he is always trying to give the impression that only members of the Bloc Québécois or the Parti Québécois can be proud or respectful of Quebec. As the member for Gatineau, what I often hear in what these members are saying is that, if we are not with them, then we are against them, and we are not sticking up for ourselves.

As a proud Quebecer, I think that, sometimes in life, there are issues that are even more important, such as respect for the rule of law. Everyone—at least everyone in the NDP caucus, since they supported the Sherbrooke declaration—recognizes that Quebec has the right to self-determination, that Quebec is a nation and that, as a nation, Quebec certainly has the right to determine the statute under which it wants to operate. However, even if Quebec is not a signatory to the Constitution, despite what the hon. member for Papineau thinks, Quebec signed administrative agreements and operates under a very specific legal framework.

Much has been written about the issue of a Quebec referendum. Often, it seems that people are walking on eggshells because they are so scared to talk about it. Yet, Quebecers, the people of my nation, are more open than people may think. It is wrong to think that dotting the *is* and crossing the *ts*, or trying to see how Quebec operates will cause mass hysteria.

As the hon. member for Trois-Rivières was saying earlier, when I talk to the people of Gatineau, this is not the first question that I am asked, nor is it the second or the third. Frankly, I am rarely asked anything about it. However, the Bloc Québécois introduced Bill C-457. I am not surprised. That is also part of their genetic makeup. It was time it was done. Given that the Bloc Québécois held the majority of seats for Quebec in the past, I am surprised that the party waited for the mass influx of NDP members and the positive, optimistic offer that Jack Layton made to Quebecers before it finally woke up and decided that it wanted to repeal the Clarity Act. The party took its time. If this is how the Bloc Québécois takes care of Quebec's interests, then I have some news for them. They introduced the bill, but now it is in our hands.

Bill C-457 is very simple and calls for the “Clarity” Act, introduced by the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, to be repealed. The word “clarity” is in quotation marks because this bill is anything but clear. It was drafted hastily and in a panic.

In 1995, the day after the last referendum in Quebec, all of Canada woke up and realized that the results were very tight. Oddly enough, no one was talking about 60% or 65%. Throughout the night, I was providing commentary on the results for a television station in my region. No one was asking me what would happen if the results reached the majority of 51%. Although we sensed that the results would be tight, no one told me that we had to wait for them to reach 60% or 70%.

There was already a sense of normalcy. We waited to see which side would get the majority at the end of the day. The federalists ended up being successful. However, we cannot forget history. In the House and in Canada and Quebec we often forget our history, which means that we repeat the same mistakes.

● (1810)

What happened? There was a wave of panic, because people realized that they could end up in the middle of a serious constitutional crisis. They were wondering what to do. People were wondering if it would be acceptable had the results been reversed.

Then came the brilliant idea that any government with no backbone, no sense of leadership and no idea what to do would come up with: it sent the issue to the Supreme Court to ask the court to rule on the subject. The Supreme Court rendered its decision in 1998 in the Quebec Secession Reference. What it said was very clear. It had to answer three questions. Under the Canadian Constitution, could the National Assembly, legislature or Government of Quebec effect the secession of Quebec from Canada unilaterally? Could they do so unilaterally under international law? Which would take precedence between domestic and international law?

In response to the first question, the Supreme Court said that, yes, negotiations would have to take place if a clear answer were given and if the result were clear. That would force the federal government to sit down with the province that wanted to secede. An obligation would be created.

The Supreme Court was extremely clear. The members of the House will have to decide how they are going to vote on Bill C-457 and how they are going to vote on Bill C-470 introduced by the member for Toronto—Danforth, who has the courage of his convictions and is very faithful to the constitutional law established by the Supreme Court of Canada.

The Supreme Court was very clear in its response: Canada's constitutional law forces the federal government to negotiate once a clear question receives a positive response and a clear result. That question is clearly defined in Bill C-470, so we would have no choice. But what did the Liberal government at the time—that great defender of democracy, values and respect for the charter, the party that cloaked itself in the flag—do? It passed the Clarity Act. I challenge anyone, even those with a law degree, to tell me, with a straight face, that the Clarity Act is a clear piece of legislation.

What it says is very clear: we might negotiate with you but we will look at the results and the question after the fact and then we will decide whether to sit down and negotiate.

Yet that is not at all what the Supreme Court of Canada told the partners in the federation. There must be some form of respect. Things start to get off track when people start to get worked up about Bill C-470. First, this bill does not impose a specific question on Quebec; however, it has the courage to warn Quebec. That is a good negotiating approach. When I negotiate under labour law, I do not tell the opposing party that I will see what I feel like discussing and, if I feel like it, I might talk about something, but then again I might not. Instead, I provide an agenda and I announce how the items on it will be dealt with.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-470 simply gives the other side, namely, the Quebec nation, two examples of questions that have been deemed appropriate. Those questions could not be overturned and the results could not be called into question.

As others have already mentioned, Canada agreed to allow Newfoundland to enter into the Constitution based on the 50% plus one principle. I am asking those who are telling me that the NDP's constitution requires two-thirds of the votes to leave me alone. If my Gatineau riding association wants to change the NDP's constitution, then a majority has to pass a resolution. Then, it can go to the next level. It is the same thing for Canada.

Once again, for those that think that this bill is not at all democratic, I would like to say that the Clarity Act is undemocratic. What is more, the legal vacuum that the Bloc Québécois is trying to create is even more undemocratic.

As a proud Quebecker, I would be pleased to vote for Bill C-470 and to vote against Bill C-457 and would like to tell Quebeckers that they were right to democratically elect all these people to represent them.

• (1820)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate, there are six minutes remaining for the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed my honour to rise to speak in this debate and say a few words on Bill C-470, An Act respecting democratic constitutional change, which is part of the NDP's forward-looking vision for Canadian provinces and the federal government, alongside territorial and aboriginal governments, to work together toward building an even stronger country than we have now.

As I said when tabling the bill, the NDP is all about building sustainable and co-operative relationships as the essence of a democratic federalism.

[Translation]

Since the NDP adopted the Sherbrooke Declaration under the leadership of Jack Layton in 2006, it has clearly indicated its desire to play a leading role in establishing a constructive relationship between Quebec and the rest of Canada.

That is why Quebeckers, embracing Jack Layton's unifying vision, elected almost 60 NDP members.

[English]

Bill C-470 rejects the bill tabled by the Bloc Québécois, which seeks to repeal the Clarity Act, the result of which would be a legal void on the question of secession.

At the same time, the NDP supports the idea that fair and clear rules for democratic constitutional change deserve to be in place, and so we focused on replacing the problematic Clarity Act with a framework that is more faithful to the Supreme Court of Canada's judgment in the Quebec secession reference, a vision oriented to unifying and not dividing Canada.

The bill also reflects the House of Commons recognition in 2006 that the Québécois constitute a nation within a united Canada.

The NDP appears to be the only party in this House that believes that the will of Parliament, as expressed in that motion, cannot be treated as empty words.

It is very important to know that the focus of this bill is not simply secession but more the recognition of Quebec's aspiration to have its distinctiveness much better integrated into Canadian federal arrangements. The bill applies to democratic constitutional changes of all sorts. It could just as well outline the process for a rapprochement of Quebec with the Constitution Act of 1982, therefore helping to build a stronger Canada.

Let me be clear about one thing. I firmly believe that secession is made less likely by this bill, in comparison to the approach taken in the Clarity Act.

Bill C-470 emphasizes the importance of any referendum question being both clear and fairly determined. Unlike the Clarity Act, for example, our bill places emphasis on clear questions by suggesting wording that would prevent misleading statements or confusion on the meaning of the question. Because of the clarity of a question like "Should Quebec separate and become a separate country?", and also because a simple majority has the threshold for triggering negotiations, voters will know exactly what is at stake when casting their vote, and they will take their vote very seriously.

I would like to share a few words from Charles Taylor, who is probably Canada's leading moral and political philosopher of the last half century. He wrote the following in *The Globe and Mail*:

Let me be clear: I am a federalist and a Quebecker. I campaigned on the No side in 1980 and 1995. And Thomas Mulcair was there with us in the trenches, fighting—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I would remind the member not to use the names of other members even when quoting.

Mr. Craig Scott: The hon. member for Outremont

...was there with me in the trenches, fighting for Canadian unity and passionately making the case then - as he does now - for Canada, in Quebec.

He then goes on to say:

When the so-called Clarity Act was adopted by Parliament in 2000, some federalists breathed a sigh of relief. We were told this was the solution to repeated attempts by Quebec sovereigntists to break up the country we cherish....

But the new law failed to provide clarity and became yet another flash point in the ongoing constitutional debate....

But with a clear question, 50 per cent plus one becomes the unambiguous and democratic expression of the electorate. As the Supreme Court made clear, if we agree that Canada must be held together by motivating its people to stay together, and not by force, then there is no other path.

So how do we so motivate them? For one thing, we pass clear laws that avoid the kind of arbitrary after-the-fact shifting of the goalposts that has been met with such anger by Quebeckers. Independentists in Quebec have few effective battle horses left, which is why they're trying to exploit this issue, as we see with the Bloc Québécois motion in the House of Commons.

As a federalist, my message to all Canadians who want this country to stay together is simple: Let's not help the Bloc by perpetuating the confusions of the Clarity Act.

This is why I believe that rewriting this act to add clarity is helpful to the cause of unity.

I can only subscribe to the comments of Charles Taylor.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to conclude the debate on Bill C-457, An Act to repeal the Clarity Act.

Liberal and Conservative MPs both delivered their usual speeches. They stuck to their guns, which was to be expected. The Liberals brought forward the Clarity Act after being shaken by how close we came to a yes vote in the 1995 referendum. They came up with a plan B. This plan B was the Clarity Act.

I heard some fairly unbelievable things in those speeches, which is why I should inform all my colleagues that the Clarity Act was condemned by the whole of Quebec's National Assembly. By that I mean that every member of every party, federalist and sovereignist alike, rejected this ignominious law called the Clarity Act.

As for the Quebec Liberals, we know that the former leader of the Quebec Liberal Party, Claude Ryan, said that the Clarity Act placed Quebec under trusteeship. We know that Daniel Johnson, the leader of the "No" side and also the leader of the Quebec Liberal Party at the time, criticized the Clarity Act, just like Jean Charest who, when this legislation was passed here in 2000, said that Quebec was the master of its destiny. All these federalists felt that Quebec was the master of its destiny regarding its decision to become sovereign, or to remain part of Canada.

As for the leader of the NDP, he was the most surprising in this House. He too arrived here and criticized the Clarity Act. Like all NDP members who spoke to my bill, he said that the Liberal Party's Clarity Act passed in 2000 had no reason to exist and that it was disrespectful of Quebecers' rights. He also said that the debate was useless—that was also mentioned this evening—that there were other priorities, that this was an old issue, an old quarrel, and that the Bloc Québécois was only looking for trouble.

In short, he used a bazooka to kill a fly. He said he would introduce Clarity Act No. 2. He said the Clarity Act should be abolished because it deals with an old issue, it is a sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of Quebecers, who want a democratic process to decide whether or not they want Quebec to achieve sovereignty. However, he comes up with Clarity Act No. 2. The first one is useless, but Clarity Act No. 2 is so useful. So, he perpetuates the old debates by introducing this legislation.

Bill C-470, introduced by the previous speaker, the member for Toronto—Danforth, is just a bill which, like the present Clarity Act, imposes trusteeship on Quebec regarding its perfectly democratic right to decide its own future in the Canadian Constitution.

Clarity Act No. 2—that is what it is—is not simply about oversight in Quebec's affairs. It gives the federal government—the Conservative government in this case—the right to decide whether a referendum question is clear. It is written in black and white in the bill. It even goes further and unilaterally provides the wording of two questions that the NDP considers to be clear. According to the NDP, the Quebec National Assembly and the people of Quebec do not have the last word on the question to be asked in a potential referendum. The NDP has the last word in its Bill C-470.

Even if the National Assembly agreed on the wording, with this bill, the federal government could oppose the question and send it to the courts, which would certainly bring Quebec's referendum process to a standstill.

I think this comes down to trading four quarters for a dollar. The speeches we are hearing from the NDP make no sense. They are all saying that the Clarity Act should be repealed, but they do not want to vote in favour of my bill, even though the only thing my bill would do is repeal the Clarity Act.

In conclusion, I want to reach out to all members of Parliament, especially those from Quebec. I urge them to do some soul-searching, to look at themselves in the mirror and say, like Robert Bourassa and a number of federalists said, that Quebec has the right to its own destiny, the right to choose its own future, and that these decisions should happen in Quebec, not in the federal Parliament.

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for debate has expired. 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 nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 6, 2013, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the navigable waters aspect of Bill C-45.

Pollution and climate change are an increasing threat to Canadian waters, yet the government is dismantling environmental safeguards one by one and is withholding essential water quality data from Canadians.

The government stopped protecting waters and enforcing laws years ago. This negligence has been documented time and time again by biologists and the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. In a 2009 report, the commissioner said:

The Department [of Fisheries and Oceans] does not have a systematic approach to monitoring proponents' compliance with the conditions of its project approvals. Nor does it evaluate whether its decisions on mitigating measures and compensation are effective in meeting the no-net-loss principle. As a result, projects may be causing damage to habitat beyond the amount authorized, and mitigating measures and compensation may not be effective.

Instead of changing course and improving the environmental assessment process, the government decided, on the contrary, to axe it. First, Bill C-38 repealed all habitat protection measures and eliminated 99% of environmental studies.

Then, with Bill C-45, waterways are no longer habitats but merely navigable waters. What planet is the government living on? Does it truly believe that rivers and lakes are flat surfaces on which ships simply glide? Is there nothing underneath? Does it think that lakes and rivers do not have water, plants and fish? Come on. The Fisheries and Oceans Canada website clearly says that:

[The Navigable Waters Protection] Act is administered by the Navigable Waters Protection Program (NWPP)/Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

In November, when I asked the government to explain why ministers keep saying that the Navigation Act only deals with navigation, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities gave this reply:

When we talk about navigation, we are talking about the ships that are on the water, not the fish that are floating and swimming in the water.

That is totally absurd. I am not even sure he realizes the absurdity of his answer.

Before it was gutted by Bill C-45, the Navigable Waters Act ensured that bridge or dam construction projects, or any other project, did not interfere with navigation and did not cause environmental damage. This is a critical difference.

The Conservative government is treating our resources as if they were its private property. Worse still, the Conservatives are selling off our navigable waters by allowing anyone to build structures without any idea of the impact of these projects on fish habitat or water quality. This is a utilitarian and dangerous view of the economy and of our resources. It is true that once our waters become polluted and wasted we will not do anything but navigate, because there will no longer be any fish or drinkable water. The government imposed omnibus bills without consultation. The public is worried and aboriginal people are protesting.

Under the new act, only 97 lakes and 62 rivers will be protected. What will the government do when individuals or organizations take legal action to protect their lakes, since this will be the only means still available to them? Who will pay for this pollution? Is it going to be the taxpayers? Will people have to pay for their government's

mistakes? And what will happen if projects impact on ecotourism and water quality? What will the government do about that?

● (1835)

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, first of all, we will read and reread the law that we are changing.

After that, we will have noted that the Navigable Waters Act is a law about navigable waters. If the honourable member had read the act before giving her speech, she would have known that. However, she did not read it.

She obviously thinks that the Navigable Waters Act is a piece of environmental legislation. She could even have searched the terms “environment”, “fish” and other terms related to the environment on the Internet, and she would not have come up with the law we are debating.

In fact, the law we are changing is a law about navigation. I will repeat that navigation has to do with boats on the water. There are fish in the water and that is why we have a law to protect fish. We have another law to protect the environment in general. We have yet another law to protect habitats.

[English]

We have laws for the ships that go over the water and then laws that protect the fish that are under the water. We are talking about a law that deals with those ships on top of the water. Changes to that law have no impact whatsoever on the fish under the water, because they are protected by a different law.

I would be happy to share with the member all of those laws. When we do, she will have occasion to find out that there are very powerful laws protecting fish habitat, including environmental protection and environmental assessments, that are all deeply embedded in our statutes and that are very successful at protecting wildlife and fish habitat.

The reason we have a Navigable Waters Protection Act right now, and have always had, is to create a legal manner in which one person can build a bridge over a river and another person can still float his or her ship down that river. In order to balance the competing interests of those two hypothetical parties, we have a law to deal with navigable waters.

Unfortunately it applied to a whole series of waters that were not navigable. That is because the law goes back to the time of Confederation, when many people still went to work by canoe. Therefore, we have many little streams that have no navigation on them whatsoever, and those little streams do not need to have an assessment for navigation because nobody navigates on them.

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The good news is environmental laws still protect those streams. The ecology is well regulated. Our officials have the ability to prevent any action that can do damage to their ecosystems. None of that has changed. What has changed is we do not need to check if a tanker ship can go down a farmer's stream anymore before the farmer can build a footbridge across that stream.

I would hope the member, having now heard the details of the proposal, would come around to supporting it.

● (1840)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, one does not gain more credibility by being contemptuous or condescending.

With all the information given here, I would like to know who was consulted about the amendments that Bill C-45 makes to the Navigable Waters Act and other laws.

Did the Conservatives consult with first nations? Did they consult the public? I do not imagine so because, if they had, there would not be so many protests.

Did they consult with fishers? Did they consult with people who live near waterways and who would have claims to make? Did they consult with scientists who make recommendations?

I do not think so because there are still thousands of scientists from all backgrounds who disagree with this legislation, who have written about it and expressed their opinions in the media.

It seems that the people who are happy with these changes are the people from the oil and gas industry. That is not surprising because they are getting exactly what they asked for.

Through the Access to Information Act, we were able to obtain a letter written by the Association of Oil and Gas Producers asking for amendments to the Fisheries Act, the Environmental Assessment Act, the National Energy Board Act and the Navigable Waters Act. What a surprise. No scientists were consulted.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we consulted municipalities. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities actually asked for this change. We also consulted people who live on the waters. Several dozen people at Wabamun Lake, in Alberta, for example, had to wait over a year to build their little cottage docks so their kids could fish off the end of them into the lake, the same way Canadians do right across the country. They had to wait over a year to be able to build their docks because we had to do one-by-one assessments as to whether or not those docks would interrupt shipping. That is the problem with the existing law.

We are changing the law to focus on navigation, and we are keeping environmental and fish habitat laws in place so that they can protect the environment and fish habitat.

[*Translation*]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently, during question period, I asked the Minister of Public Safety what he was going to do following the tragic case of Ashley

Smith. This is a disturbing story that upset many people in Canada, including my constituents in the riding of Alfred-Pellan.

Ms. Smith suffered from a mental illness and, unfortunately, she did not receive proper treatment. Destitute and hopeless, she unfortunately took her life while under the responsibility of Correctional Service Canada. Videos released by the media clearly show that Ms. Smith received inadequate treatment, given her condition. This is unfortunate and unacceptable in a country like ours.

In light of these revelations, I asked the minister to put in place an action plan on the mental health of people under the responsibility of Correctional Service Canada. That was several months ago and we are still waiting for a reaction. The minister did meet with his provincial counterparts recently, but why is he still waiting instead of moving forward?

Data provided by the mental health screening computerized system and used by Correctional Service Canada for its initial assessment indicate that, in 2012, 62% of the offenders placed in a penitentiary were deemed to need mental health assessments or follow-up services. Moreover, 50% of federally-sentenced women have a history of self-injury. This confirms the need for more professionals to care for inmates and ensure their rehabilitation and the safety of our communities.

This issue needs to be dealt with on an urgent basis. We have been aware of this issue for a long time. Several experts have sounded the alarm on many occasions. The story of Ashley Smith is but another tragic example. That case was the straw that broke the camel's back.

It is all the more disturbing because, to this day, the minister still refuses to apologize to the victim's family and friends. I am convinced that my colleague is just as upset as I am by what happened during this tragic episode. I know that, deep down, he also feels that this kind of treatment is unacceptable.

I just wonder why he refuses to apologize on behalf of the service that he runs. Why? That gesture would help Ms. Smith's family go through the grieving process. It is a simple and compassionate act that could do a lot of good. I invite the minister to sincerely apologize, without further delay, through the parliamentary secretary.

This is not the first time that I have risen in the House to call for real mental health measures in cases such as that of Ashley Smith. Some of my colleagues and predecessors have done so before me. The government responded each time with empty talking points and partisan rhetoric. It has never wanted to take real action. Now that the parliamentary secretary is present, I will reiterate my request.

Will the Minister of Public Safety finally explain how he plans to manage cases of inmates with mental health issues? Will he take this opportunity to apologize to the family and friends of Ms. Smith?

• (1845)

[English]

Ms. Candice Bergen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to the question that has been raised by the member for Alfred-Pellan regarding a couple of issues.

First, she spoke specifically about Ashley Smith and that very tragic incident. She is also asking about Correctional Service of Canada and the treatment that offenders with mental health issues receive, measures that are very important and that are taken very seriously by this organization to prevent death in custody, such as in the tragic case of Ashley Smith.

Given the ongoing coroner's inquest into Ms. Smith's death that is currently under way, my hon. colleague will understand that it would be very inappropriate for me or any of us to comment on this situation specifically. Any loss of life is significantly tragic, and this is something our government takes very seriously. That is why our government directed Correctional Service of Canada to fully cooperate with the coroner's inquest. To Ashley's parents, her family and her friends, all of us agree that this is tragic. Our thoughts and our prayers go out to them and for the suffering they continue to endure.

On the issue of Correctional Service of Canada, I assure members that since this incident, CSC has introduced a number of additional initiatives and programs specifically aimed at the preservation of life in an effort to prevent death in custody. Furthermore, CSC continues to pursue initiatives that will help it position itself to avoid such tragedy in the future. It is obvious to all of us that this is not a stagnant process. This process has to be continuous, with CSC learning and developing best practices all the time.

Since 2006, our government has invested nearly \$90 million in mental health specifically for inmates. We have taken action to improve access to mental health treatment and training for staff. These investments have helped us implement critical aspects of Correctional Service of Canada's mental health strategy, which is a leader in developed countries. These include building capacity in federal institutions and supporting offenders to return safely to communities, which is another very important part of rehabilitation. We also have, for example, ensured faster mental health screening. We have created a mental health strategy for prisoners. We have extended mental-psychological counselling and we have improved staff training, which is an important part of making sure that these tragedies do not happen again.

CSC continues to show its commitment to managing the mental health needs of offenders within Canadian correctional facilities, but work certainly remains to ensure that individuals receive the most appropriate care, which, by the way, may not be in a federal correctional facility. That is why it is important to recognize the dedication and professionalism of the vast majority of CSC staff who work very hard every day, in very difficult circumstances, to make a

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positive difference in the lives of offenders across this country. Our government is dedicated to promoting CSC's efforts to prevent death in custody and to meet the mental health needs of federal offenders. We will continue to support its work toward ensuring the safety and security of all Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for her comments.

I think that she missed the point. Now is the time to put words into action. What I understand from the other side is that there are a number of things we completely agree on, such as prevention, rehabilitation and the need for federal correctional officers to have tools to deal with mental health issues. We cannot deny that these issues exist. We cannot simply say that they should not exist, because they do. There are mental health issues in our prisons, and the Office of the Correctional Investigator pointed that out in its last report. I think it is extremely important for us to look at this issue.

It is not only important in light of the tragic cases we mentioned, such as the case of Ashley Smith, but it is also important for all those who truly want to work in prevention programs, which are eliminated here, and for our prison and security workers.

What is being done? Will they really invest money to help our prison workers?

• (1850)

[English]

Ms. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we have done. We have put our money where our mouth is. This government, through CSC, is committed to ensuring the safety and security of all Canadians, including staff working in correctional facilities and the offenders who reside in them. That is why we have committed over \$90 million alone to deal with mental health among offenders. In doing so, Correctional Service of Canada is determined to prevent death in custody and to improve its capacity to deliver treatment programs and services for federal offenders with mental health needs. It is for this reason I would like to again reiterate for my hon. colleague that since 2006, our government has invested \$90 million in mental health for federal offenders, and we have taken real action to improve access to mental health treatment and training for staff.

We have taken action. Unfortunately, the majority of times we try to take action, the New Democrats do not support us. They criticize and do not support the work we do. However, we are doing work, and we are proud of the work we are doing.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:52 p.m.)

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