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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 19, 2013

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 19, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

BROADCASTING ACT

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-552, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act (sports blackouts).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce my bill today that would ban television blackouts for live sporting events held in venues constructed with the use of public financing. Blackouts are broadcasting restrictions imposed by broadcasters, professional sports teams, and leagues.

With this being Grey Cup week, it would be great to see Canadians from coast to coast to coast gather around their television sets to cheer on their respective teams. Sorry, Mr. Speaker, go Ticats, go.

Whether it is the NHL or CFL football, Canadians have tended to support the use of public money for the construction of stadiums and arenas to house professional sports franchises. All Canadian Football League games on TSN are subject to local blackouts. Edmonton Eskimo home games are not broadcast in Edmonton or the immediate surrounding area, to ensure that fans buy tickets. In the case of the Saskatchewan Roughriders home games, the blackout zone covers the entire province of Saskatchewan, largely because the team relies more on the whole province for support.

However, these stadiums did receive some public funds. With that, it is only fair that leagues offer some reciprocity and allow fans to watch the games on television without the threat of local or regional blackouts.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-553,

An Act to amend the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (non-application in Quebec).

He said: Mr. Speaker, recent discussions about Quebec values have very clearly demonstrated the fundamental difference between Quebec and Canadian perceptions of common values and the integration of newcomers.

Given that Quebecers form a nation, they have the right to decide themselves how to define their identity and protect their common values, particularly regarding the protection of the French language, the neutrality of the state and gender equality.

That is why I am introducing a bill today to exclude Quebec from the jurisdiction of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which is not adapted to Quebec realities.

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

* * *

• (1005)

[*English*]

PETITIONS

SHARK FINNING

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first is from petitioners who say that measures must be taken to stop the global practice of shark finning and to ensure the responsible conservation and management of sharks. They call upon the Government of Canada to immediately legislate a ban on the importation of shark fin to Canada.

SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD DAY

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the second petition, petitioners are calling for a national sustainable seafood day. They say that overfishing and destructive fishing practices are threatening marine life and the health of our oceans.

Over 120 million people are dependent on fish as part of their income, but over the last century, wild fish populations have declined dramatically. Canadian consumers want to support sustainable seafood options. Canadian seafood industries are providing increased opportunities for consumers to make sustainable seafood purchases. Therefore, petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to designate March 18 as national sustainable seafood day.

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CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have four petitions from Alberta, Ontario, and B.C. areas. Petitioners are calling on Parliament to amend the Criminal Code to decriminalize the selling of sexual services, to criminalize the purchasing of sexual services, and to provide support to those who desire to leave prostitution.

As we know, this is a very relevant issue, harming a lot of very innocent victims. Therefore, I submit these petitions to Parliament today.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition on climate change. Climate change is expensive. By 2050, the economic cost could be \$21 billion to \$43 billion annually. Flooding damage to coastal buildings, resulting from climate-change-induced sea level rise and storm surges, could cost \$1 billion to \$8 billion, with higher costs in Atlantic Canada. Poor air quality from higher temperatures will lead to more hospital visits in Calgary, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver.

The petitioners are calling on the government to cost out and model climate impacts to inform decisions about adaptation policies and to allocate scarce resources to help Canadians adapt.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling a petition from Edmontonians and people from Sherwood Park calling on the House of Commons to intervene in the Canadian Museum of Human Rights. The petitioners state that the Government of Canada has recognized fundamental human rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and has provided substantial funding for capital and operational funding to the museum.

Since the Government of Canada has recognized the Holodomor, they are calling on Parliament to ensure that the Holodomor and Canada's first national internment operations be permanently and prominently displayed at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions. The first petition represents thousands of people from British Columbia. The petition highlights that 22-year-old Kassandra Kaulius was killed by a drunk driver. A group called Families For Justice, made up of people who have also lost loved ones to impaired drivers, states that the current impaired driving laws are much too lenient. They are calling for new mandatory minimum sentencing for people who have been convicted of impaired driving causing death.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): The second petition is signed by thousands of Canadians. The petition highlights the fact that women are being discriminated against through gender selection and that 92% of Canadians believe that this is wrong and should be made illegal. The Conservative Party of Canada condemns this act. The petitioners call on all members of Parliament to condemn this act of discrimination against women and girls.

[Translation]

GENDER PARITY

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we know, ministers are the ones who appoint the presidents of crown corporations. At present, there are 84 crown corporation in Canada, and 16 of the 84 presidents, or just 19%, are women. With Bill C-473, we are asking for a better balance.

* * *

• (1010)

[English]

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]

SAFEGUARDING CANADA'S SEAS AND SKIES ACT

The House resumed from November 4 consideration of the motion that Bill C-3, an act to enact the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, to amend the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address a bill that has several significant parts, a bill the official opposition will be supporting to study at committee. It has the electrifying title of an act to enact the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, to amend the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. While that might not seem all that gripping a title, the actual impacts and effects of the bill are significant and do mean something, particularly to the people I represent in northwestern British Columbia. Very specifically, these are the aspects around oil tanker traffic.

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In northern British Columbia, a company out of Calgary called Enbridge is proposing the northern gateway pipeline. It is a pipeline that would stretch 1,100 kilometres from Alberta to B.C.'s coast at Kitimat. The company then proposes to put it into supertankers that would run the inside passage out Douglas Channel, make three hairpin turns on their way out to the open ocean, and then go on to, one presumes, China and the rest of Asia.

I specifically note China in this proposal, simply because the Chinese government has funded a large sum of the \$100 million Enbridge has been using to promote its project. It is not an equity stake. It is just money given by the state-owned oil enterprise in China to promote a Canadian pipeline project. One wonders what the motivations are for companies, especially those state-owned by the Chinese government, to offer it up. It may be an administration that some admire, but others of us have some questions for it.

It seems to me that the aspect of this project that is worrisome to many of the people I represent, and this has been going on for a number of years, is the complete lack of social licence the company has been able to attain. That is, in part, aided, if I may use that term for such a scenario, by the Minister of Natural Resources, who has suggested that anyone who has concerns or questions about this project must be, in his words, a radical and a foreign-funded enemy of the state.

For a federal minister and a government to use such heated, overblown rhetoric, such offensive and abusive language, is obviously a desperate attempt to try to push a project that has failed time and time again to gain the social licence of the people who are along the route. It demonstrates a government that simply sees the Canadians who live along the proposed pipeline route, or who may be impacted by an oil spill from the supertankers implicated by the project, as simply in the way. They are seen not as citizens, not as people in the communities taking the most risk, but as a bothersome quotient for the government to simply bully and have removed.

Bill C-3 has some aspects that we, in the small measures that are made here, support. They deal particularly with liability for oil spills. The liability regime in Canada to this point has been incredibly weak. It is much weaker than the regime that exists in the United States and certainly is dramatically weaker than that which exists in Europe and many of our other trading partners.

If we look at the oil tanker accidents around the world, proving causal liability is one of the more difficult levels to attain in a court of law. Even when that is done, under Canadian law as it exists right now, the amount of damages the company is on the hook for is minimal.

The Canadian taxpayer is meant to pay the rest, and not just for the costs incurred in the actual emergency in deploying of the Coast Guard and other emergency services. For the eventual damages that would be awarded or given to the public, the companies are still restricted in their liability exposure. Who picks up the rest of the damages for the impact on fishing communities and other economies that are trying to exist? Never mind just the economic impact. There are the straight up environmental impacts. We see even in this bill an extension of the liability, but certainly nothing that would move toward full responsibility.

The companies themselves, Enbridge and others, which ship oil, have declared, perhaps to their credit, that they cannot guarantee that there will not be spills. The reason they cannot is that they have spilled so many times in the past.

• (1015)

There was a relatively recent incident in Michigan, near where your home riding is, Mr. Speaker, in Kalamazoo River, in which bitumen being shipped by Enbridge leaked out of a pipe. The Environmental Protection Agency in the United States, which conducted the review afterward, showed that the company was “the Keystone Kops”. The spill had been noted and the emergency lights went off in Calgary. They were shut down on three separate occasions while the spill into this river continued to exist. It is a relatively small river, by British Columbia standards, and it is very slow-moving and warm, conditions that would be more ideal, if there is such a thing in terms of cleaning up an oil spill. Still, the company desperately struggled to attain anything close to a cleanup.

We now know from British Columbia's assessment and from the Auditor General of Canada, concerning the ability to clean up oil in the marine environment, that success would be deemed somewhere around the 5% rate. If there were a major oil spill, the company's expectations and those of the Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia for the amount of oil that would actually be recovered would be about 5% at best, because of the conditions that exist on B.C.'s north coast. It is recognized by anyone who has ever lived there or visited that we have a somewhat precarious set of environments in which it is difficult to gather back oil, particularly bitumen, which is the notion of many of the projects that the Conservative government is promoting.

This is the government's Wild West energy plan: to ship as much raw bitumen and material out of the oil sands as is humanly possible, thereby forgoing all of the economic benefits that would come with actually upgrading the oil, at least to a state where it would look like a more conventional oil that we have traditionally seen, and then upgrading again and refining that oil into products that consumers would actually use. These would be gas, diesel, and the rest of the products that come out of a refinery.

The challenge for us is that, on the environmental front, the Conservative government has been an obvious failure. The meetings going on right now in Poland with respect to climate change have Canada ahead of such environmental luminaries as Saudi Arabia, Iran and a third country, which escapes me. We are down in the pariah list when it comes to dealing with the impacts of carbon. There are very few behind us, and there are many, much poorer, countries ahead of us that are doing more to deal with climate change than the Conservative government has.

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The government has completely abandoned even its own weakened targets, which is amazing. The Prime Minister's Office has to prepare better speaking notes for the new Minister of the Environment because on her way to Poland to these UN climate talks, she said that Canada is a leading voice for climate change and that it is doing its job. However, Environment Canada now says we will miss by a mile even the weak and very watered down targets that the government has set for Canada. We will be way above even those weak commitments we made to the global community.

With the increase in intensity of storms and natural disasters that are hitting, we know that these costs are real. We know the impacts of climate change that were predicted by climate scientists. We have said time and time again that we would see more dangerous impacts and more dangerous effects. We have yet to properly deal with and realize the impacts of a rising sea in the world and the impacts on those coastal communities on the Vancouver Lower Mainland, on our east coast and in the far north.

We know that these impacts are real and we know that these impacts are expensive. These impacts are destabilizing, and we have a government that refuses to even follow its own weak targets and projections. It then says to the industry and to the broader Canadian public that Canada is doing its part. That is hogwash. The government knows it. No one believes its spin. The fact is that it is more dangerous than just the typical lies and half truths we get from government, because this one has real generational impact.

On this particular bill, the government has gone to some half measures. The member for Burnaby—New Westminster attempted to expand the scope, because if we want to deal with certainty and the public interest when it comes to shipping oil or raw bitumen through tankers, we need to deal with the full scale of interests, bring liability rates up to the proper level that would be even a medium global standard and deal with the impacts of the cuts that the same government has made to our ability to deal with oil spills: the cuts to the Canadian Coast Guard; the shutting down of the Kitsilano base; the shutting down of the oil spill response centre in British Columbia.

Here is an ironic moment. We have a government that is out shelling for industry, pushing every pipeline it can find and saying we are going to have the best standards in the world, yet at the same time presenting a budget that we vote against, which shuts down the B.C. oil spill response centre, the very thing that is meant to reassure the public in the event of an accident, which is somewhat inevitable in the oil industry. The very centre that is charged with dealing with an oil spill response is the very centre that these guys thought they should shut down, and then say to the public, "Never mind, never worry". It is a fact that the public paid attention to.

● (1020)

There was the shutting down of the Kitsilano Coast Guard base, one of the busiest in the country, thereby increasing dramatically the response times for people in distress on the water when accidents occur. We have very heavy traffic around Vancouver, not just with tankers and cargo ships but with ferries and personal pleasure craft. However, with an increasingly busy marine environment, these guys said that shutting down the Coast Guard base was a good idea. Meanwhile, they have billions and billions to spend on pet projects

and tax incentives, which do not work, for companies that are already in the massive profit range, so taken in full, it is no wonder that Canadians, particularly British Columbians, have lost complete faith in the current government's intention or its ability to deal with the impacts of heavy industry development.

The Conservatives have proposed their pipelines and they insult any Canadian who happens to have questions or concerns, which I think are natural. As Canadians, it is not only our right but our duty to hold government to account, which is what New Democrats do here as the official opposition to the government each and every day.

When we talk about defending our coasts, we are actually talking about defending Canadian values, such as the right to speech without being bullied by government and ministers of the crown and the right of first nation people to be duly consulted and accommodated, but the Conservative government treats that as an afterthought. When did constitutional requirements become an afterthought for the federal government of Canada?

First nations have had to go to court time and time again. There are various cases, many of them emanating from the first nations of northern British Columbia, such as the Haida case, the Delgamuukw case with the Wet'suwet'en and the Gitksan and many other cases that followed, to prove what we all know: first nations have rights and title to the land.

However, when it comes to the tanker traffic and the pipelines that are proposed, first nations are treated as if they were some sort of "special interest group", as the current government calls them. They are not a special interest group. They are a group that is at the heart of this conversation, but they are treated with such disrespect.

The other day, I asked a first nation leader what specific things the federal government could do to help first nation communities across Canada. He asked me to please ask the Conservatives to stop suing them, because it is costing them millions upon millions of dollars in litigation to prove something that has been proven time and time again: that there is a duty owed to the first nations by the federal government to consult and accommodate. That is not up for debate. It is not up for some token that can be traded back and forth.

The government whip, who represents Vancouver Island North and deals with many first nations across Vancouver Island, knows that these responsibilities cannot simply be dismissed; or because there is some industrial imperative or some oil lobby that the government is cozying up to, it pushes those rights and titles out of the way. That is a fallacy and, ironically enough, it creates an enormous amount of uncertainty for the oil and gas sector, the industry to which the government spends so much of its time pandering.

The same Conservative government has sowed the seeds of doubt with the Canadian public by stripping away basic environmental protections, like the Navigable Waters Protection Act. The Environmental Assessment Act has been weakened. Previously, the federal government enacted somewhere between 3,000 and 4,000 environmental assessments a year. The Auditor General of Canada now tells us that those assessments will be reduced down to between 12 and 15 per year, under the Conservative government's stripping away of protections.

The Fisheries Act has been completely gutted. It was one of our foundational acts to protect what was considered an important economic generator for the country, as this habitat can be impacted by industrial development. The fish habitat was important to maintain our fisheries. There was no more important act in the Canadian law and jurisprudence, because it had been relied upon time and time again to hold industry to some level of account and make sure the projects it built did not leave massive legacies.

Last year, as my friend for Yukon would know, we Canadian taxpayers spent somewhere in the order of \$150 million to clean up old abandoned orphaned mines that were leaking into the environment. That was \$150 million just last year for no noticeable economic benefit. We had legislation in place at the time those mines were built, in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, that did not properly protect the environment; so we have learned that if we have the wrong guidelines for industry, most of industry will attempt to hold things to a higher standard than the government calls for, but some will not. Some will cut corners.

• (1025)

If a government allows them to do it, as the government does, the legacies will last for generations to come. The acid leaching of some of these mines is incredibly damaging to things we care about, like drinking water, like fisheries. We have a government that refuses to remember the lessons that were so hard learned and continue to be so expensive.

We come to this bill, Bill C-3, which is a small attempt of the government. We can see how much interest the government has in speaking to this bill. In the last Parliament, before the government killed the legislation, it had one speaker at second reading and made a few passing comments, and that was it. This is supposed to be a priority for the government. It makes no argument, no support for the legislation.

I do not know if there are going to be government speakers today. I look forward to hearing what Conservatives actually think and maybe to hearing it address some of the concerns of Canadians that exist regarding the legislation: that the scope is so narrow that it does not expand a full and proper liability; that it does not address all the other aspects of shipping oil by water, which exist and are realities and create uncertainty for industry.

If the public does not have confidence in the process, which it does not with the government running the show, then how will industry gain that social licence it so desperately needs, to actually create those jobs that the government is so keen to talk about?

We are all for promoting the resource sector. We have to do it under guidelines that promote the very best, not encourage the very

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worst. We see the government, time and time again, stripping away environmental protections, dismissing first nations' obligations, not holding and creating proper liability regimes; so that this creates no certainty for industry. This creates no confidence among the public.

Coming from a resource part of the world, I deal with many industries, which seek this social licence and community support for their projects. Their investors seek that same support. This has bottom-line impacts. Ask Enbridge how it is going, with the fake ads about shipping oil and how incredibly safe it is, when we know the facts are otherwise. The Conservatives simply cannot outspend the public will or cover over a bunch of lies with a bunch of ads in between hockey games and pretend that will somehow gain the social licence and support.

Enbridge has a partner in the government, which continually lowers the bar, waters down what few regulations we have to protect the environment, and then pretends we still have world-class standards. How can that be true? The government members will repeat it today, if they bother to speak at all, and say we have world-class standards. If they just spent the last six or seven years destroying aspects of environmental legislation, watering down and gutting the Fisheries Act, cutting Coast Guard funding, cutting funding to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, removing things and protections that Canadians relied upon, they still cannot have world-class, leading standards. That is simply not true.

Conservatives cannot have it both ways. If they cut all those protections for Canadians, then clearly they have not maintained any sense of having the basic understanding of what it is to develop industry.

Industry needs a couple of things. It needs a fair set of rules. It needs consistent application of those rules. It needs an investment climate that allows for investors to feel confidence in these major investments, because none of these projects that are entertained in this kind of bill are small. They start at a few billion dollars and go up from there, and they last a certain amount of time.

The Enbridge northern gateway predicts it would be around for 45 or 50 years, give or take. Under that regime, it would also have about 12,000 supertanker sailings through some of the more treacherous waters known around the world. There would be 12,000 sailings with weak protection and minimal ability to clean up in the event of a spill, as has been reported by the federal Auditor General and has been reported by a study by the British Columbia government. These are not the wild-eyed, wide-eyed environmentalists that Conservatives always like to point at.

We know for a fact that, time and time again, the government in its pandering to one small interest group, the oil sector, has actually weakened the argument for the oil sector's ability to actually promote projects. It has weakened the ability of industry to have the confidence of the Canadian public, which it needs to build the projects it wishes to build.

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Why not take a step back for a moment and listen to some of the critics rather than trying to insult and bully them? Why not step back for a moment and develop a national strategy for our energy, as the Premier of Alberta and many other premiers across the country have asked for?

• (1030)

Industry has asked for it and the Canadian public has asked for it, yet the government sits on its hands and pretends that photo ops and spin are going to get the job done, along with bills that go only halfway. New Democrats will support the bill and try to improve the bill. We will allow Parliament to do its work and hear from witnesses and experts who know a lot more about this than anybody sitting over there.

Again, the government has a missed opportunity. It could do so much more both for industry and the public, and a failure on the government's part will do nothing for the Canadian economy and certainly nothing for the Canadian environment.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his comments and well-thought-out proposal.

He talked about the Enbridge proposal and the government's gutting of environmental protections. He mentioned the Fisheries Act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, and the Navigable Waters Protection Act, to cite a few. He talked about the government shutting down the Kitsilano Coast Guard station, the oil spill response centre, and others.

Let me get this straight. The government wants to increase marine traffic in the form of huge oil tankers on our west coast, and at the same time it is weakening marine safety by closing down Coast Guard stations, et cetera, as my colleague pointed out. Therefore, my question is this: what are the jobs that will be lost with a weakened marine safety support system?

He touched on the salmon economy and other impacts to first nation culture and tourism. What are some of the impacts of going forward with a weakened environmental safety regime and marine safety regime in terms of economic losses on the west coast?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, we know, particularly in the north, that boom economies are also bust economies, and that if we put all our eggs in one basket while times are good, they can be very good, but when they go bad, because we only have one leg to stand on, they go bad quickly. Obviously, creating a diversified economy with diversified markets is absolutely essential to Canada's growth and prosperity.

With reference to the fishing community, just the wild salmon economy in the northwest is a \$150 million per year sustainable economy. It can continue forever if it is done right. The fishing economy across British Columbia is more than \$1 billion. Tourism on Canada's west coast is even more than that. With those two economies in the mix, weakened environmental assessments and weaker protection in the event of oil spills will put all of that at risk to ship 500,000 barrels of raw bitumen a day out of Alberta to China.

One would ask why we are shipping it out raw. We have experience in another important economy in British Columbia, the lumber industry, in which the provincial government continually

pushes for export of raw logs, thereby leaving so much economic opportunity on the table. A mill was just lost in Houston, B.C., with 225 workers, in part because of fundamental government mismanagement and the promotion of exporting raw logs to China.

Now we are moving it up the scale and saying we should do the same thing with oil. The only difference is that the stakes are even higher. The amounts of money we are talking about are even higher when we forgo the benefits of upgrading it to conventional oil and then refining it even higher. Why do we not give preferential treatment to companies that actually invest in the technology to add value to our resources?

The Conservatives have nothing to say about this. They say their invisible hand is always magical and always correct. If China wants to fund the promotion of an oil pipeline like this and buy Nexen, which is supplying most of the oil for the gateway, and if China owns the source of the oil, promotes it, maybe ends up owning most of the pipeline in this project, and is also the consumer of this project, this presents no cautionary tale to the government whatsoever.

At what point does it stop becoming a Canadian project? It is when somebody else owns it.

Those resources that are our endowment, our heritage, and our inheritance are forgone by this approach, meanwhile threatening other economies that we know are sustainable, such as the tourism and fishing sectors. All the while, these guys are racing to approve pipelines, racing over the interests of the public, racing over the concerns of science, which the Conservatives refuse to listen to, and becoming international pariahs on the climate change front.

This is a bad cocktail mix and a bad formula. It is bad for the economy and increasingly bad for our environment.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP asked that the scope of Bill C-3 be broadened by referring it to committee before second reading so that the committee could study the possibility of including a full range of measures to protect Canada's coastlines.

Can the member tell us why the Conservatives rejected our proposal to broaden the scope of this bill?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

The Conservatives reject nearly every idea that is not their own. It is odd, because Parliament is supposed to examine bills to make improvements. However, the Conservatives introduce massive omnibus bills and always claim that they are perfect. This one here is a small omnibus bill.

There are many examples of times when the Conservatives refused to improve bills and listen to experts and witnesses. Then, after a few years, it became clear that these bills were complete disasters, but the cases had gone to court. That is a problem, because it costs Canadians a lot of money.

I think it is a problem when the government outright rejects ideas from the opposition and the New Democrats. The government is being arrogant and does not operate very well. That is this Prime Minister's attitude. He always thinks he is the smartest person in the House and in any room. That is a problem. It is arrogance, and it is the same thing we have been seeing with the Senate scandal.

The Conservatives do not listen to anything, and that is a problem with this bill. Why not listen to the experts and witnesses who are saying that we need to open and improve the bill? The government cannot keep such a narrow vision. It needs to find something that addresses Canadians' concerns.

[English]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was glad to hear the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley mention the U.S. report that came out accusing Enbridge of being Keystone Cops. The same report also said the company was engaged in a culture of deception.

Last fall, in 2012, a video was released by that company that showed the Douglas Channel free of any obstacles or islands. It was a very misleading video.

I know people in Ocean Falls and all along that coast who are very concerned about tanker traffic. My question for the member is simple. Why is the government silent on this issue, when it is clear that the company was engaged in a culture of deception? Again, why is the government silent on this issue? Why is it not standing up for people on the west coast?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, “culture of deception” sounds familiar. It sounds like what was going on in the Prime Minister's Office. According to the Prime Minister, he was being deceived, and there was some sort of conspiracy around him in which only one person was involved in the scandal with Mr. Duffy. Then there were a few people involved. Then last week it sounded as though there was one, Mr. Wright, who was fired, and then he was not fired.

It seems to me that the seeds that one sows eventually bear fruit. The government that seems so at ease with the truth, so at ease telling half-truths and outright lies straight-faced into the camera about things that matter, also seems to have no problem with a company that practises those same deceptions with the public.

The video my friend is referring to was an ad, one of those ads paid for through Enbridge by the Chinese government, showing that sailing out of Kitimat Harbour took place on a beautiful clear horizon of flat water with nothing between us and Asia. It was a straight shot.

It had to be a cartoon, because an actual photo of the departure from Kitimat Harbour would show that ships would have to dodge and duck through a series of channels and islands, some of which we consider kind of important. If any are run into, there will be an oil leak. There will be disasters, as happened with the *Queen of the North*, one of the largest ferries in Canada. It hit one of those islands

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that Enbridge pretends is not there when talking to the public about the nature of their project.

This is the way the company thinks it wins people over: with little cartoon drawings of how perfect the scenario is and how easy this is going to be to do. What do these angry natives and environmentalists have a problem with, when it is just that easy and it is just right there?

It seems to me that the first step in a conversation is being truthful and honest. The government has refused to do that with respect to our ability to clean up oil spills. The companies that promote these projects do themselves no favours when they pretend that we do not have things like the Internet and maps and facts. We have those things and we will rely on those things, not on the words of the Conservatives and not on the words of companies looking to shill for friends across the way.

● (1040)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-3.

First, I would like to note that we will support the bill at second reading, but not very enthusiastically. The bill contains slight improvements in marine safety, but the government could have done much better.

I am going to take time to read the title of the bill because I believe it will help people understand: Bill C-3, An Act to enact the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, to amend the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

Many people will realize in reading its title that the bill is probably more than two pages long. It obviously addresses many points, and its approach is designed to achieve safety. If we are starting in on a bill that will amend several acts, it is worth expanding its scope to ensure we cover everything.

When you conduct a study, you may realize later on that you could have added a part. That is not efficient. It is important for us to bear that in mind as we begin a study as broad as this one on aviation and marine safety.

That moreover is the reason why the NDP proposed to expand the bill to include more specific measures that would protect Canada's coastlines, for example, and that would neutralize or reverse Conservative cuts and closures associated with marine safety and environmental protection.

[English]

I think when we are doing a big study like that, when we have a bill that concerns different laws, we have the responsibility to do the study really seriously and to try to extend the study to every measure that might be concerned. That is why the NDP has proposed to do a good study on the bill that would cover all the files. Unfortunately, the Conservatives say yes and then no.

Government Orders

When we want to try to have a really good study, it is very disappointing when the Conservatives have this attitude and say, “No. This is our bill, and it is what we are studying.” The NDP is really concerned to improve the law. It is not a question of partisanship; it is a question of improving Canadian law, and the Conservatives refuse to do it.

[*Translation*]

Let me briefly explain the various acts affected by Bill C-3.

Part 1 enacts the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act. In practical terms, this will authorize the Department of Transport to undertake to indemnify certain airlines for loss, damage or liability caused by war risks. We agree that these are not frequent occurrences.

However, if an airline’s aircraft are damaged in a sudden and unexpected war, the Department of Transport will be able to indemnify it. I do not believe this measure will be used very often, but it appears in the bill.

Part 2 concerns the Aeronautics Act. It will enable certain persons to investigate aviation accidents or incidents involving civilians and aircraft or aeronautical installations operated by or on behalf of the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Forces or a visiting force.

I see this may be useful, particularly in the event of an incident involving visiting forces. For example, it might be more difficult for Canadians to investigate an incident affecting visiting forces, considering the different cultures involved. People might be less responsive.

• (1045)

The fact that the parties co-operate could therefore be useful in some instances. If there is a language barrier, for example, they will be able to give us more information. Questions arise in my mind. Will those people be required to issue a public report on their investigation, as is the case when the Transportation Safety Board of Canada investigates? Some questions have to be asked, and it will be worthwhile exploring them in committee.

Part 3 amends the Canada Marine Act respecting the effective date of the appointment of a director of a port authority. I believe the first three parts are the ones involving the fewest problems. However, it seems to me that parts 4 and 5 raise more questions. I will bear them in mind as I listen carefully and read the committee proceedings so that I can then take a position and decide what I think the NDP should do when this bill reaches third reading. That is why I sincerely hope the Conservatives will be receptive in committee and prepared to really discuss marine safety, for example, when the committee begins its study.

Part 4 amends the Marine Liability Act to implement the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea, 2010. This deals with liability in the event of a spill, for example, and provides that a ship's owner is liable for the costs and expenses incurred by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans if it has to intervene or by another response organization that might have been designated by the department. It also confers

powers, duties and functions on the administrator of the Ship-source Oil Pollution Fund.

One question is not specifically addressed in the legislation, but it will be interesting to discuss it in committee, even though it falls under another heading, and that is the question of insurance coverage. As we unfortunately saw at the time of the Lac-Mégantic incident, people realized that MMA did not have enough insurance coverage to pay the costs of the accident. I therefore hope the committee will be studying that question as well.

If these people are responsible for paying, adequate insurance coverage must be available. Consequently, a fairly accurate valuation of what a major incident might cost must unfortunately be made. This is essential so that we can be sure that these people have adequate insurance coverage and that no companies will be unable to pay. If that were to happen, spills might continue spreading as no one would take action because no one would know how the bill would be paid. This is a very important question that should be discussed in committee.

Part 5 amends the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and introduces new requirements for operators of oil handling facilities, including the requirement to notify the minister of their operations and to submit plans to the minister. There are a number of parties involved. In this part of the legislation, however, I hope the persons responsible will be compelled to provide an accurate chemical description of the oil being transported. We have realized that the action taken sometimes differs somewhat depending on the type of oil or oil products that may be transported. I hope that will be part of the discussion in committee.

A new requirement in this bill will also compel operators of oil handling facilities to submit their emergency plans to the minister. I hope and trust that if they have an emergency plan, it means they have also consulted local coastal communities. I hope that there will be co-operation and that they will make sure local people who could possibly help them are familiar with how they can respond, and what they can do. I hope they are also trained. This is a question, once again, that will have to be considered in committee.

• (1050)

There is also a question of civil and criminal immunity for organizations involved in response operations. I wonder whether it is really immunity that applies in all cases, or whether it applies in cases where people have acted to the full extent of their knowledge and skill? For example, if a response agency is cutting a lot of corners, will it possibly be covered by such immunity? I believe it would be important to clarify this, because it could give members a better understanding of the bill.

Government Orders

I will now discuss the application of the new enforcement measures and monetary penalties. They also grant new investigative powers to Transport Canada investigators. I believe that when it is a question of monetary penalties, among other things, it is important to give careful consideration to the amount. Is the amount sufficiently large to have a real deterrent effect? If the amount is not sufficient, people will take risks regardless. I believe it is very important to take the time to consider what monetary penalties are appropriate and will actually achieve the desired result.

One aspect of the bill that should be noted is that there may be some lack of credibility on the part of the Conservatives, particularly with respect to marine safety, aviation safety and their policies in those areas. In some budgets, there have been significant cuts in the area of safety. A marine safety bill has now been introduced. Perhaps the Conservatives would not have lost so much credibility if they had not cut so much in the area of safety.

The member seated near me made a good defence of the Quebec City search and rescue centre, which is essential. The Conservative government has closed the only French-language marine rescue centre in the country. The centre is responsible for rapid action in the case of distress at sea. All at once, the Conservative government wants us to rely on it in matters of marine safety, when it has placed people's lives in danger. There are people who were able to respond in an emergency. In my opinion, we should be wondering whether response staff will be increased to ensure safety. For example, will there be people able to respond in both official languages and understand people when marine accidents or spills occur? These are questions we have to ask ourselves.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives did not help when they made cuts in the area of marine safety. They also eliminated the positions of people with practical local knowledge. I have seen this regularly. People often use very local expressions when speaking of their location. If the person concerned is not familiar with the waterways, minutes and even hours will go by before there is a response. In the case of a spill, the longer it takes to respond, the bigger the spill will be. I therefore feel there is a real danger.

So far, unfortunately, the Conservatives have failed to impress me in the area of marine safety. I have genuine concerns about this, and I believe we should really make sure that the bill is complete. Unfortunately, if they refuse to expand the scope of the bill, we cannot be reassured and we cannot go as far as we would wish. We tell ourselves that, perhaps, we will have a bill, but eventually we will realize there is something it does not cover, and we will have to introduce another one. In the end, we will realize that the new bill does not cover everything, and another one will therefore be introduced. The process will extend over time, whereas we could have done the right thing, completed the work and made a serious and comprehensive study of marine safety.

● (1055)

It seems that is not the way the Conservatives like to operate, however. One could certainly say that logic is in short supply in their application of proposed legislation.

There is another aspect that is worth looking into. The Coast Guard is very much involved in marine safety. Our defence critic recently put questions to the Minister of National Defence and the

Minister of Public Works. He asked what had become of the shipbuilding program, because people who recently assessed the program had said that the money allocated to the program would very likely be insufficient to complete it. Naturally, vessels used by National Defence will also be used by the Coast Guard. If we are already short of ships to provide marine safety, I believe there is a serious problem, particularly considering the fairly substantial increase not only in the number of vessels plying our waterways, but also in their size and the potential dangers of a spill.

If the government were really serious about marine safety, it could have taken many other measures. For example, it could have cancelled the Coast Guard closure and service reductions like that in Kitsilano, British Columbia. It could have cancelled the reductions in marine traffic communication services, such as the Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centre in St. John's. Anyone with an elementary knowledge of Canada's geography can understand that these are two crucial points with respect to marine safety in this country, on the east coast and the west coast. Given current traffic, these two service centres should not only maintain their capacity, they should also be able to increase it. At this time, that is not the case, and their services are in fact being reduced.

It is also important to require the Canadian Coast Guard to work with its U.S. counterparts and conduct a parallel study to examine the risks resulting from additional tanker traffic in Canadian waters. Of course, ships do not simply remain in Canadian waters. They move. That is why it is particularly important to conduct joint studies. We also need to be able to talk to our American counterparts about involving them in response plans. If, unfortunately, a ship has an accident at the edge of Canadian and American waters, we need to be able to respond efficiently as a team and know exactly who is fulfilling what role.

I would like to point out that the NDP's goal is to never have a spill occur. However, given all the Conservative cuts to marine safety, I feel our concerns are legitimate. We would like to know for certain what direction marine safety is headed in. We would like to know who will respond if there is a spill, how quickly they will respond, the target timetables and what our capacity is for controlling a minor or major spill. According to experts, we currently do not have the capacity for containing a major spill. The ships are so large that we do not have what it takes to respond.

I find that extremely worrisome. In committee, we will be able to look at these points more closely and ask questions. I hope that the Conservative government will be truly open to improving Canada's marine and aviation safety, for the benefit of all Canadians.

● (1100)

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her speech on this important matter.

Government Orders

Yes indeed, our party has agreed to support the bill being sent to committee for discussion. I wonder if the member could speak to this. I know she has worked in the military, and in the military there is a lot of attention given to ensuring that military personnel are properly staffed and trained for any initiative or mission.

Something that troubles me with the repeated actions of the Conservatives is that they table laws to amend the Criminal Code, introducing new provisions to regulatory statutes and now matters dealing with very serious issues including aeronautic safety and marine spills, yet they have not simultaneously tabled a policy and strategy for ensuring improved enforcement and compliance or for staffing and training to ensure these measures are lived up to.

I wonder if the member could speak to that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, based on my military experience, I can say that the clearer the procedures, the more specific they are and the more suited they are to different scenarios, the better equipped we will be to intervene quickly. The more we work in a vacuum, the vaguer the data, the more questions we have to ask, and the longer it will take to respond.

Therefore, the better the response plan and the greater the collaboration with local authorities, for example with the U.S. authorities in the event of a spill in U.S. and Canadian waters, the better prepared we will be and the more we will be able to intervene.

When we talk about this kind of bill, it is important to take the time to study it properly, ensure that its scope is broad enough to cover all possibilities and ensure that we are ready to take action if necessary.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech, which was well researched as usual.

The bill indicates that organizations must be able to respond to a spill of 10,000 tonnes, but we know that most tankers carry much more oil than that. Therefore, that amount may not be enough. One association even said that the best figure would be 50,000 tonnes.

Could the member tell me if 10,000 tonnes is adequate for the current movement of oil products?

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, the current limit of 10,000 tonnes is not enough. One of the proposals we would like to introduce would significantly increase the limit associated with a spill cleanup. Obviously, this change would be based on consultations with experts appearing before the committee. They can tell us what the appropriate limit should be.

We need to keep in mind that the limit is currently 10,000 tonnes. That means that all companies need to be able to handle spills of that size. If they cannot handle the cleanup, the Canadian Coast Guard has the authority to intervene or to give other response organizations the mandate to clean up the spill. If a company cannot cover the cost of cleanup efforts, the Canadian Coast Guard may request funds from the ship-source oil pollution fund. This implies that the government should be responsible for any costs exceeding what the fund can pay.

There is a problem, however. In March 2013, the fund had a balance of \$400 million. To illustrate how insufficient that amount is, I would like to use the *Exxon Valdez* accident as an example. After the disaster, cleanup costs and compensation for damages totalled \$3.5 billion. Clearly, there is a problem. The amount available is inadequate. Even the oil pollution fund could not cover the costs resulting from a major spill.

• (1105)

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was born near the Gaspé Peninsula, and the St. Lawrence River flows through that area. We have had what we call the marine park since approximately the 2000s. Park employees study the entire marine environment and are trying to provide education and acquire tools.

Since many oil tankers pass through that area, can the member tell us whether special measures are being taken to ensure marine safety in that area and in other areas where there is a marine park?

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, from what I have read, no practical measures are being taken to protect that region.

I would like to come back to what I was saying earlier about the expertise of Quebec City rescue centre employees. They were able to respond to distress calls; however, such calls could also pertain to accidents involving a potential oil spill. That francophone expertise is being lost. The government is telling us that bilingual expertise will be available elsewhere, but such is not the case as of yet. In my opinion, that is cause for concern.

The public has legitimate concerns. The communities are very close and the damage could be significant. The St. Lawrence River's wildlife is rather exceptional.

What is more, the Gaspé Peninsula's economy is mainly based on tourism. Imagine the impact an oil spill would have on tourism in the area. Tourists would stay away for months because many attractions, including beaches, would not be accessible. That could have a major impact not only on the area's wildlife but also on the local economy of a tourism-based region.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to ask my colleague another question.

In her speech, she mentioned companies' insurance coverage. She gave the example of Lac-Mégantic, which pertains to rail transportation, but the same principle could be applied to marine transportation.

Government Orders

Do companies have the insurance they need to clean up messes such as oil spills, which can cause considerable and devastating damage? How important is it for these companies to have a fair bit of insurance to deal with damage related to the quantity and the hazardous nature of the products being shipped?

• (1110)

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, that is indeed a critical point.

When this is studied in committee, I hope that the experts will provide concrete examples of incidents around the world and say how much cleanups have cost in practice. Earlier, I gave the example of an incident where the cleanup cost \$3.5 billion. I think this is quite a substantial amount.

Through the testimony of these experts, the committee will be able to determine what the insurance coverage should be, based on past incidents and other potential costs associated with larger ships, to ensure that companies do not fail to pay.

Obviously, there should not be any situations where responses are inadequate, companies are no longer able to bear the costs, there is no compliance with the polluter-pay principle and, ultimately, the federal government and Canadian taxpayers have to foot the bill, all because a Conservative government refused to support legislation to adequately protect our waterways and ensure marine security.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at this point, I should inform you that I will share my time with the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, who will take over for me.

First, I would like to provide some context for Bill C-3. My colleagues have already discussed it a bit this morning, but I think that, as the member for Sherbrooke, it is important for me to speak to this bill and inform the House about the concerns of my constituents. I do not represent a coastal riding, but my riding is close enough to the east coast of Canada and the U.S. that these issues are important to my constituents. In fact, anything that has to do with the environment affects the people of Sherbrooke. I am pleased to speak to Bill C-3 here on their behalf.

As hon. members know, this bill was introduced during the last session, that is, during the first session of the 41st Parliament. At that time it was Bill C-57. Since we already had the opportunity to study it during the last session of Parliament, this bill is somewhat familiar to us. My colleagues already know that we will support this bill at second reading.

I would also like to remind the House that we tried to broaden the scope of the bill, and I will say more about that later because I have not yet explained exactly what the bill is about. Our attempts to broaden the scope of the bill were fruitless. Now that Bill C-3 is before us, we are trying again; we are speaking up. We hope that our attempts to improve it will be successful so that we can support it all the way through the process. Between now and then, we would like to send the bill to committee for a thorough review to ensure that it meets our constituents' expectations.

This bill amends five acts and has four main parts. I will focus on the last parts.

Part 1 would indemnify certain air carriers for loss, damage or liability caused by war risks. I am not really sure where this

legislative change comes from, but if there is a crisis or a war, the government would compensate air carriers for damage caused by illegal attacks, such as armed conflict, rebellion or hijacking. I will not go into any detail about that part.

Part 2 is about air transportation and amends the Aeronautics Act to provide certain persons with powers to investigate aviation accidents or incidents involving civilians and aircraft or aeronautical installations operated by or on behalf of the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Forces or a visiting force. This is interesting, actually. We would like to talk about an issue in this part of the bill. I think that this issue will come up in committee when we take a closer look at the bill.

Right now, the Transportation Safety Board of Canada is responsible for investigating aeronautical accidents involving the armed forces. According to this bill, the armed forces would take over that function. A military investigator would be responsible for that and would have to report to the Minister of National Defence. We would like to know if those reports will be made public.

Currently, reports produced by the TSB are made public. In recent months, unfortunately I must say, we have come to learn a great deal more about the TSB. It really is not clear from the bill whether the reports produced by the Department of National Defence investigator will be made public. Obviously, these questions will be raised later in committee. I simply wanted to point out that we have some reservations about part 2 of the bill.

• (1115)

Part 3 does not call for any major amendment. It pertains to the appointment of port authority directors. The appointments would take effect on the day on which notice of appointment is received by the port authority. I will not elaborate further on this part of the bill.

This brings me to the two main parts of the bill that are of great concern to us and that we find especially important, specifically the amendment to the Marine Liability Act. The bill provides for the coming into force of the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea, 2010, pursuant to an international convention concluded in 2010.

This part covers the costs and expenses incurred by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans when a spill occurs. The company responsible for the spill must have adequate insurance in place to cover the financial cost of the cleanup. It is important to understand that tanker traffic continues to increase. Traffic has increased in recent years and is on track to quadruple by 2016. So then, given the rapid increase in tanker traffic, this is an especially important consideration today.

Government Orders

As tanker traffic increases so too do the attendant risks. The same holds true for highway traffic. The more automobiles and people travelling on our highways, the greater the risk of accidents happening. It is no different when it comes to oceans and waterways. Fortunately, accidents are not a daily occurrence, but when they do happen, the consequences can be quite devastating. We have a number of examples to draw on from around the world, whether it is ships that have spilled some of their cargo, or accidents occurring on offshore oil rigs. One recent example was the spill that occurred in the Gulf of Mexico. I am sure everyone remembers the extensive damage done to coastlines. The damage does not last only a few weeks. We are still seeing the effects of the spill today. It has had a major impact on ocean ecosystems.

So then, it is important for companies that take the risk of transporting these products to be able to respond when an accident occurs. That is the least they can do. When a company is responsible for shipping oil products, it must be held liable when an accident linked to its activities occurs. The public or governments should not be held liable. By government we mean the public because the government operates on taxpayers' money. In short, the government should not have to bear the full cost when an accident occurs. The companies should be the ones assuming the risks. Moreover, government authorities should put in place regulations to ensure that everything is in order, that inspections are carried out and that shipping companies abide by a minimum set of rules. Every single accident cannot, however, be prevented. That is impossible. So, when one does happen, companies must be able to take responsibility for the damage that they have caused.

This brings me to part 5 of the bill which amends inspection provisions in order to ensure that companies have plans in place in the event of an accident and that they submit them to the government so that authorities, whether local, provincial or federal, can respond immediately to an accident. These authorities would therefore already have the plans in hand and would be aware of the nature of the products being transported. It would therefore be much easier to respond quickly and effectively in such cases.

The bill is a step in the right direction. We support the small positive steps that are being taken. Therefore, we will be happy to support the bill at second reading. In committee, we will look at what can be done to continue moving in this direction.

● (1120)

As opposition members, our job is to suggest measures. That is what we will continue to do when the bill is examined in committee. We will try to improve upon its provisions, so that it is the best possible piece of legislation by the time it is adopted.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I am struck by one thing. This government bill focuses on safety, a right to which the public is entitled. However, not every Conservative member is rising to speak to the bill. I would like to get my colleague's opinion on the fact that the government is not defending its own bill or speaking to it. What does my colleague think of that?

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: I thank my colleague for her relevant question, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, I am just as amazed as he is. The Conservatives claim to want to make the bill a priority, and yet not a single one of them is willing to rise to defend it. The least government members can do is represent their constituents in the House and state their position by showing that they support the bill. So far, it is hard to tell whether Conservative members even support it. They do not even dare speak to it. Perhaps the Prime Minister's Office, which controls all, does not wish government MPs to speak for fear of what they might say. I can neither understand nor explain their silence. That said, I look forward to hearing them speak to the bill. I do hope they will state their position, which would be quite interesting and most appropriate given its importance. They claim the bill is important, yet their actions say otherwise.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for sharing his time with me. He is a very eloquent speaker in the House and an extraordinary chair.

As with the issue raised by my colleague, I remain extremely puzzled. The Conservative government prorogued Parliament because it told the public that it was going to reconfigure and have a whole new agenda. However, bill after bill is being tabled that is exactly the same legislation that was brought forward before the government prorogued.

One would have thought that if the Conservatives wanted to reconfigure and rethink their legislative agenda, this would have given them ample opportunity to consult and confer with the public, potentially impacted Canadians on the three coasts, and the official opposition. We have offered to recommend additional amendments and measures that could be taken to ensure greater marine and aviation safety.

I wonder if the member could speak to our complete puzzlement that none of the Conservative members seem to think that safety in aviation and the response to oil spills are matters worth debating.

● (1125)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: My colleague asks a very good question, Mr. Speaker. I very much look forward to her upcoming speech. She is very knowledgeable about these issues.

To answer her question, I too am puzzled as to why the Conservatives prorogued the House only to bring forward the very same legislation, as if nothing had happened. One has to wonder why they prorogued in the first place, other than to get media exposure and distract people from the Senate scandal. I wonder what the real reason was for the prorogation. The first thing the Conservatives did when the House reconvened was to reintroduce all of their bills at the same stage they were at in the previous session. It was as if nothing had happened. I wonder what the real reason was for all this, other than to throw up a smokescreen and change the channel. In my view, that is the simplest and most obvious reason to have prorogued the House.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour and pleasure to rise and speak to Bill C-3. It is yet another omnibus bill and an omnibus bill that, frankly, our party would have been happy to support had it included many of the additional measures needed to improve aviation safety and the shipping of oil along our three coastlines.

Bill C-3 amends a number of statutes, including the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act, and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001. These are very important measures. They are definitely worth a lot of discussion and consultation well in advance so that we can ensure that the bill is comprehensive.

Mr. Speaker, I am having a little bit of trouble concentrating, because there is a lot of conversation on the other side. I am wondering if they could take it outside.

The Deputy Speaker: Including myself in that regard, if we can, let us keep the chatter down. If members want to have an extensive conversation, perhaps they should move out into the foyer.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, again, it is my pleasure to rise to speak to this bill. As my colleagues have pointed out, we are supporting sending the bill to committee. Our preference would have been that the bill go to committee before second reading. That would have provided, in the custom of the House, ample opportunity for amendments. There is a particular concern that the government is not open to amendments coming from the opposition.

In the interest of Canadian safety and in the interest of the public and the security of our three coasts, we certainly encourage the government to take seriously recommendations from witnesses, recommendations made by the opposition, and the amendments that we might put forward.

For the record, I would like to share with the House a number of the measures that the New Democrats have called for to ensure the safeguarding of Canada's seas and coastlines. They include: reversing the cuts to the Coast Guard; the closure of Coast Guard stations; the scaling back of services; cancelling the cuts to the marine communications traffic service centres in Vancouver and St. John's; cancelling the closure of B.C.'s regional office for emergency oil spills responses; cancelling the cuts to Canada's offshore oil, gas and industry research centre; reversing the cuts to key environmental emergency programs, including oil spill response for Newfoundland and Labrador and British Columbia; reinforcing the capacity of petroleum boards to handle oil spills as recommended by the environment commissioner who reports to Parliament; and requiring the Canadian Coast Guard to work collaboratively with its U.S. counterparts.

Additional recommendations were made by the official opposition in response to what the communities were calling for with growing concerns about the potential for oil spills. Of course we have offshore oil activity on our eastern coast, and there have been proposals for offshore in British Columbia, thus far not moving forward. The biggest risk being posed is tanker traffic, if the government in its wisdom decides to support any of the recommendations by the National Energy Board for the shipping of raw bitumen and other products to the coast and shipping by tanker.

I would like to bring to the attention of the House the experience I had in the past when I was the chief of enforcement for Environment Canada. I became the chief in the wake of a very serious aeronautics accident in northern Alberta, which tragically killed a number of people, including the then leader of the Alberta New Democrats, Grant Notley.

To its credit, the then government, the Mulroney government, brought together a team in treasury board and justice personnel to take a look at Crown liability and to make clear, to all of the federal regulatory authorities, their responsibilities and liabilities where they failed to adequately inspect and enforce federal laws.

It is a deep concern to me that the government in its wisdom has not seen fit to table an enforcement and compliance policy and strategy, coupled with this legislation. If it is in fact sincere about improving our capacity to reduce the risks of spills and the capability to respond, I would certainly encourage the government to step up to the plate and do so.

Of equal concern is the fact that I understand it has appointed a three-person panel to look into marine safety. The wise thing would have been to wait until the recommendations came from that panel before tabling a bill. One would presume that it will come forward with useful recommendations.

I would like to raise a couple of specific provisions. Part 2 of Bill C-3 adds a new section 6(1), which gives complete discretion to the Minister of National Defence or an officer so appointed to exempt any persons or facilities from liability under the statute. There is no provision for any consultation whatsoever. It is complete discretion. That is a little worrisome given the issue at hand.

I have some greater awareness of the necessity for expanded aerial surveillance. This certainly arises when we are talking about dealing with marine spills and the inspection of tankers coming into our three coasts. I had the honour, when we had the program for members of Parliament, to spend a week with our armed forces, to spend it with the SARs, the search and rescue teams, on the east coast of Canada. That included flying with the surveillance airplanes, which communicate with the ships going into our ports.

It became very evident to me and my colleagues that we were in need of giving greater attention to improving surveillance ability and to very dated aircraft, both airplanes and helicopters.

Government Orders

•(1130)

In part 4, dealing with the Marine Liability Act, proposed section 74.28 prohibits the entry into a port without a certificate issued under the act. There are various provisions. The certificate is issued by Canada if the ships are owned by Canada, but probably in the vast majority of cases these oil tankers will be owned by some other foreign national. It raises the question of at what point in time officers will be able to stop those ships if they are already in port and if we will be stuck with tanker ships that are not seaworthy. There are a lot of big issues that merit discussion in committee, including the capacity, staffing, and training of officers to intercede in all of these ships.

I see the need for the tabling, simultaneously, with an enforcement compliance strategy. Are we, as the government likes to say, “shovel-ready” to enforce these new provisions if they come into effect? What is the capacity on the coast? There have been a lot of cuts to enforcement and scientific agencies.

As I mentioned, we would appreciate getting the report from the three-person Tanker Safety Expert Panel. It would be very helpful to the review by the committee. We cannot ask the government the obvious question, because it is not standing up and being held accountable for the bill, but I am curious to know what marine law experts it consulted with. It is very important that we know our law is well-founded and that the provisions of the convention that are brought forward actually reflect what is stated in law. In proposed subsection 74.4(3), the power to make regulations, there is absolutely no requirement to consult experts in the field, to consult on the potential impact to communities, or to consult military experts.

The proposed provisions to amend the Canada Shipping Act are very interesting to me. I come from a province where there is a several-hundred-fold percentage increase in the rail shipping of raw bitumen. There are two major terminals now being built in Alberta that will allow for 24-hour loading and movement of rail-loaded cars with bitumen. I would have thought at the same time the government would have come forward with legislation to ensure that when we set up these terminals, we would ensure we would have greater provisions to prevent incidents and respond to spills. A decade ago, there was the largest freshwater spill of bunker C oil in Lake Wabamun. The response was a complete disaster by both the federal and Alberta governments. I would like to see similar action by the government in all ways that we are shipping petroleum products to improve safety.

•(1135)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thought I saw some movement on the Conservative benches for legislation that they said was so critical to their economic agenda, yet they refuse to speak to it or address any of the concerns we raise. I do not think that speaks to their confidence in the topic at hand, which is how we protect Canadians when we are sometimes shipping hazardous products by rail or on our oceans.

I come from the west coast. My friend is from Alberta. The proposal is to ship bitumen, in particular, from Alberta through British Columbia, which is a great distance, 1,100 kilometres in the case of Enbridge and twinning the Kinder Morgan pipeline. That

brings with it questions. Those questions deserve to be answered by the government, which promotes one side of the conversation enthusiastically, although the Minister of Natural Resources said in British Columbia the other day that the government did not promote any oil pipeline projects and it was neutral, except that it spent hundreds of thousands of dollars running around the world promoting the exact same pipeline projects.

The question of balance is important. How do we protect the other economic interests on B.C.'s coast, which can be fishing or tourism and the public at large? My friend, who worked in Alberta for many years trying to enforce basic public protections, has also seen, like me, many of the environmental considerations, laws and foundations that we hold in the country stripped away by the Conservative government.

I am wondering how the people in Alberta view the stripping down of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the gutting of the Fisheries Act and the weakening of things like Canada's Coast Guard. The Auditor General of Canada has said that we do not have the capacity to clean up marine spills from supertankers. The B.C. government said the same thing. Now B.C. and Alberta are in this discussion about how to promote the export of raw bitumen through British Columbia from Alberta.

What does it do to the industry and the larger and broader public interest when governments introduce legislation that guts environmental protection or when they make efforts to perhaps enhance liability and protection of the public but refuse to justify or make any arguments as to why it is important or address the weaknesses and offer strength? What does this do to the general public confidence and the social licence that companies are so often seeking from the public to promote their projects?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has a deep love of his constituency, which would potentially bear the brunt of the major risk of proposed tanker trafficking of raw bitumen.

The member raises a lot of cogent points. One of the most important ones is the abject failure of the government to respond to even its own officers' recommendations. The commissioner for sustainable development has made recommendation after recommendation for either improving the legislation or improving the monitoring and enforcement of that legislation.

The question is this: why is the government not responding to those independent recommendations coming from the leading experts in the country?

Deeply troubling is the emasculation of federal environmental legislation, which I am very privileged to have had a part in preparing.

Scientists and technical people and even the industry are deeply troubled with the direction in which the government is going. Throne speech after throne speech and budget after budget have been clear. The government's intention is to fast-track resource extraction. What it has promised is balanced development.

Government Orders

However, in committee yesterday, we heard from the MPMO, which is a body created relatively recently specifically to override all environmental protections and fast-track. It was very clear in its presentation that it no longer really saw its role as this double one of both ensuring efficient reviews and ensuring they were effective, in other words, ensuring the environment was protected.

Evidence of that is found in the Center for Global Development report issued yesterday, which stated that Canada had dropped from 12th to 27th place out of 28 wealthy nations in the world, for our environmental record. That tells us right there.

How can the Canadian public have confidence in the government? It is one thing to enact legislation that would put into effect an international convention; it is another thing to actually put into place the mechanisms that would ensure Canadian safety on the three coastlines.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: I must advise hon. members that the time allocated for 20-minute speeches has expired. The debate will continue with 10-minute speeches and five minutes for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to begin, what strikes me in this debate is the deafening silence of the Conservatives despite their claim that this bill is important for the protection of the environment, for the Canadian economy and for the protection of Canadians. It seems my Conservative friends have nothing to say about their own legislation.

Let us face it, this bill is not good enough. We, the official opposition, the NDP, feel that it does not go far enough even though, in some respects, it is a step in the right direction. It is incredible. If, all of a sudden, the Conservatives are unable to speak, perhaps they can suddenly start listening. That would be a first.

My colleagues from British Columbia and Alberta made that point very clear. It is about having the tools to better protect our environment but also, and more specifically, to better protect our coasts from the threat of toxic or dangerous spills for our ecosystems. Such spills would threaten the extraordinary Canadian biodiversity and the habitats close to areas where our fellow citizens live.

Every step in the right direction helps avoid catastrophes that are not natural disasters. These catastrophes are often the result of negligence, abandonment and a lack of seriousness in the rules. They are directly responsible for tragedies that have occurred all too often in the past.

Canada is surrounded by water. We are even reminded of that by our motto. Therefore, we cannot help but be concerned by the protection of our coasts, particularly with respect to oil spills. Indeed, there is a lot more shipping of oil and gas products, or of very heavy products that can have a devastating effect on the environment.

We wonder why the Conservative government is suddenly so keen on protecting the environment. I have a feeling that some members

opposite may have recently felt the need to soften their image and to balance their message to Canadians and Quebecers since becoming a majority government.

They always pit the environment against the economy. We, on this side, believe that the two must go together. It is only normal that sustainable and responsible economic development would go hand in hand with the protection of ecosystems and of the environment.

I am reminded of a quote attributed to David Suzuki that says “without an ecology there is no economy”. Without a healthy environment, we cannot do business or trade. This is why we need to find a good balance. I am delighted to see the Conservative government starting to show an awareness of these issues. The timing seems somewhat opportunistic, however, with less than two years until the next election. Nevertheless, if it can really make a difference, so much the better.

Making a real difference requires resources. On the official opposition side, we have some concerns in this regard. Do we have the resources we need to implement the rules in Bill C-3, including protecting the coastline after a toxic or hazardous spill?

If we look at food inspection or railway safety inspectors, the Conservatives' record is hardly reassuring. Nowadays, for inspectors who oversee and monitor railways, the ratio is one inspector to 4,000 railcars. That is beyond absurd.

The Conservatives say they have not eliminated any inspector jobs. However, there has been a huge increase in rail transport of hazardous materials in Canada over the last five years. Many more tanker trucks and railcars now go through our cities and towns, but no one has allocated resources to determine whether they do so in the safest way possible. We have every right to wonder: are we in the same situation again?

• (1145)

The government told us it would eliminate 19,600 jobs in the public service without affecting anyone. It said that there would be no impact, that it would save money on administration and red tape. One may wonder just what these people used to do at the office. They used to do things that no one is left to do now.

Government Orders

We can also look at toxic spills from the other side of the issue. We can give ourselves the tools to conduct inspections and audits, but has a strategy been put in place to prevent spills? Is research being done to improve the equipment? Are we having a dialogue with our international counterparts on international standards and the steps that must be taken to ensure that cargo ships are safer and that inspections take place elsewhere as well? The cargo ships that sail near our shores are not always Canadian. What can we do to work together internationally so that double-hulled cargo ships become the minimum standard and so that we can reach an agreement on the thickness of the materials used to build them? Instead of cleaning oil off the backs of birds on the shore, we could ensure that the standards are the same for everyone, even if it costs a bit more. There would be a level playing field, as the saying goes. We would actually have an accident prevention strategy instead of just cleaning up after a spill.

Part 5 of Bill C-3 “amends the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 to introduce new requirements for operators of oil handling facilities”. This has to do with the permanent equipment on our shores that enables us to import or export those types of products. The bill sets out the requirement to inform the minister of any operations and to submit plans to the minister.

Part 5 introduces a new requirement whereby the operators of oil handling facilities must submit a response plan to the minister. It extends civil and criminal immunity to response organizations engaged in response operations. It also introduces new enforcement measures and monetary penalties, in addition to granting new investigative powers to Transport Canada investigators.

I wonder if there will be enough Transport Canada investigators to get the job done. My colleague from Edmonton pointed this issue out earlier. That is a valid question. It looks good on paper, but if, tomorrow morning, the Transport Canada investigators are swamped because they must do everything and do not have the necessary personnel and resources, will there be a real impact? Will there be a real change in the right direction? We hope so. That is a small improvement and change.

The NDP will support this because it is a step in the right direction. However, we would have expected the Conservative government to take this more seriously. We were expecting a more comprehensive strategy.

We are disappointed that the Minister of Transport did not reply to a letter from the NDP, dated April 5, 2013, in which we asked that the bill be sent to committee so that it could be examined more thoroughly and so that meaningful work could be done. Unfortunately, the Conservative government ignored that request.

The NDP is committed to ensuring that an oil spill never occurs on our coasts. That should be our goal. The Conservative track record makes it increasingly difficult to believe that the concerns of Quebecers and Canadians are being taken seriously.

Bill C-3 is a thinly veiled attempt to compensate for past inaction and Conservative cuts to marine safety.

The measures in Bill C-3 that are designed to improve safety are relatively weak compared to the risks posed by closing the oil spill response centre in British Columbia, closing the Kitsilano Coast

Guard station and cutting environmental emergency response programs.

It is so contradictory and muddled that I think the Conservatives should stop trying to tell people things. Either they seem to hurt themselves or they sit silently and do not talk, as is the case today. They have no idea how agonizing it is for those of us who are trying to understand. We want to know where the Conservatives are going with this and what exactly the message is. Unfortunately, they do one thing and say another, or say one thing and do another. It is like saying that it was not me; it was the previous government. It is not my fault; it is the Liberals' fault.

We, the official opposition, want the Conservative government to be straightforward, consistent and clear. Unfortunately, yet again, that is not what we are seeing today.

● (1150)

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to the discussion from the other side. The members fail to point out that this government has taken incredible steps in environmental protection. We have worked with our partners in Ducks Unlimited and Nature Conservancy. We have put in place Nahanni National Park in the north. We have preserved territory unlike any other government in Canada. We will continue to do so because we know that working in partnership with our environment is so important to the health of Canadians and industry across this country.

This is more of a comment than a question. I would encourage my colleague, who was not here in 2010, to go back and review the legislation we put in place. It requires ships anywhere in Canadian waters to have double hulls, because we know we want to prevent spills in our territories rather than clean them up.

We also brought in the Arctic waters act. I was on the transport committee in 2008 when we put that piece of legislation through.

I am happy that my colleagues across the way will be supporting this bill at second reading. However, I would encourage my colleague to go back and review these other pieces of legislation. They have been put in place by this government, and we want to continue to work to keep our environment safe.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her comment. I am sure it will make excellent YouTube videos for her constituents.

I, however, find it unfortunate that she is wearing rose-coloured glasses. She just confirmed what I said a few seconds ago—that sometimes the Conservatives should stop trying to tell people things because they are completely out of touch with reality. What the Conservatives are saying is not based on facts but on what they want Quebecers and Canadians to believe.

Government Orders

The Conservative government has a disastrous record when it comes to the environment. The Conservatives are using this bill to try to make up some lost ground. However, the government basically eliminated the serious environmental assessment processes that this country had in order to expedite certain projects, with disastrous results. The government is not doing anything. It is standing idly by during the biggest environmental crisis the country has ever faced: global warming. The government has a terrible international record when it comes to the fight against greenhouse gas emissions, yet it thinks that everything is fine.

I am sorry, but the government is completely irresponsible when it comes to the environment, and people will be there to judge that.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly, the government is waging a misinformation campaign. Government members are patting themselves on the back and saying that they are the ones who required oil tankers to have double hulls in 2010, when an international agreement has clearly required tankers to have double hulls since 1993.

The fact is that Canadians are concerned when they hear a natural resources minister taking credit for implementing a standard that actually dates back 20 years. Canadians know that double hulls have been required for 20 years. However, it was not until 2010 that the Minister of Natural Resources woke up and realized that Canada had to comply with a regulation that had been in place for 20 years.

Why is the government being so silent? Has the misinformation campaign affected even government members?

• (1155)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The government is losing momentum; it is tired, worn out and running out of steam. It is attempting to rejuvenate itself, but no one is falling for its political stunt. Let us not forget that this same government shut down British Columbia's oil spill response centre, shut down the Kitsilano Coast Guard station and slashed environmental response programs.

If the government truly took this issue seriously, it would not have made those decisions and it would be sending a much more coherent message than the one it is unfortunately attempting to send today.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was excited to come to the House today, knowing that the Conservative government wanted to reconsider things and explain the relevance of the measures in Bill C-3. Surprisingly, no Conservatives are rising to justify the bill. That is ridiculous. Not only are they gagging the opposition with motions to limit debate, but they are also not even participating in the debates. They introduced the bill and they do not want to hear the opposition debate it. They introduce the bill and could not care less about any amendments the opposition might suggest. This is an attack on Canadian democracy. "All you madmen, where have you gone?" Quoting Daniel Boucher seemed appropriate this morning.

I would like to quote another songwriter:

Sitting on the edge of the Cap Diamant, dipping my feet in the St. Lawrence.
I chatted a while with the great Jos Monferrand

We spoke of rain and good weather, then Jos Monferrand asked, "Are you ready?" "Ready for what?" I replied. He said, "Are you ready for a huge spill in the St. Lawrence River?"

The Minister of Natural Resources says we are ready. The Premier of British Columbia does not think we are ready for this kind of spill. There is massive pressure from the oil lobbies to export Alberta oil. One aspect of this strategy is to transport the oil to oil terminals in the St. Lawrence via pipelines. The oil would then be sent to foreign markets.

Right now, before the two pipeline projects have even been implemented, 82 ships with 150,000 tonnes of oil travel the St. Lawrence every four days. They supply the Ultramar refinery, among others. The idea is to reverse the flow and use the St. Lawrence estuary to ship refined oil, and probably crude oil, to foreign markets. The energy east pipeline would make it possible to transport a million barrels of oil a day to oil terminals in Quebec and New Brunswick.

Now I am going to talk about the Gulf of St. Lawrence, my gulf, my St. Lawrence, my Big Blue. It is a majestic, unique and fragile ecosystem, an incredible environment conducive to the reproduction of dozens of marine species, several of which are endangered. Some of those species at risk include the cod, the blue whale and the leatherback turtle. The gulf ecosystem plays a fundamental role in the health of the river's ecosystems and estuary. As many as 350 rivers flow into the St. Lawrence. Apart from its biological richness, the St. Lawrence is also characterized by its great geological richness. As a result of the sedimentation process, there are also oil sources in the St. Lawrence. There are hydrocarbon deposits. The Old Harry oil exploration project, for example, apparently represents two billion barrels of oil. However, developing that oil, like exporting Alberta's oil via the St. Lawrence, entails incredible risks. Whether large or small, there will inevitably be spills.

The Gulf of St. Lawrence is an inland sea one-sixth the size of the Gulf of Mexico. Of course, all the oil spill computer simulations show that oil spilled in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, as a result of a platform failure or a supertanker on the river whose tanks have burst, would have an incredible impact on the five maritime provinces. One feature of the St. Lawrence River is that it is the largest water pump in the world.

• (1200)

The St. Lawrence River has what are called changing tidal streams. In large tides, the 12 km/h east-west current reverses to west-east at 10 km/h. As a result, everything that is spilled in the Gulf of St. Lawrence flows upriver to the secondary rivers and tributaries of St. Lawrence. The tide rises three or four metres. Oil spilled in the Gulf of St. Lawrence would thus not only wind up in the gulf itself, and therefore in the maritime provinces, but would also flow up the St. Lawrence into the Saguenay, Matane, Manicouagan and Outardes rivers. All those rivers would also be affected by a major spill.

Government Orders

Are we prepared to deal with that kind of spill? We know that oil tankers in the past managed to transport one million barrels of oil. Supertankers now carry as much as two million barrels.

There is obviously a permanent risk involved in transporting this substance. Will there be other spills off our coasts? Of course there will. There have been 10,000 spills around the world since 1970. There have been some very large ones. Here in Canada, we obviously remember the *Exxon Valdez*, but 2.9 million litres of oil were spilled in the Singapore Strait, in Malaysia, in 2010. Also in 2010, another tanker spilled one million litres of oil on its way to Texas.

Currently, under the provisions of this bill, a tanker would be required to have an oil recovery capacity of 10,000 litres. We are not in the same league. Here we are talking about 1.7 million and 2.9 million litres of oil. How can we deal with that kind of spill under the proposed measures? The fund that would have to support all that oil recovery work represents \$400 million. The oil-recovery and site-decontamination effort following the *Exxon Valdez* spill alone cost \$3.5 billion.

We obviously cannot imagine the costs that would be incurred if that kind of spill happened in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. What we do know is that they would necessarily be borne by Canadian taxpayers, whom our friends opposite love and systematically defend. That is what we are going to do as well. We are going to do it better than they because we are going to demand that the ceiling, this minimum of 10,000 litres of oil, be increased. It is unrealistic to claim that we will be able to protect our coastlines with that guarantee when supertankers containing two million barrels could run aground there.

Moreover, as everyone knows, the St. Lawrence estuary is where there is the greatest risk of collision in the world. The ships that sail the St. Lawrence are required to use pilots to avoid the many shoals, crosscurrents and reversing currents. Hundreds of obstacles in the St. Lawrence mean that transportation by oil tanker is dangerous, especially with the cuts that have been made to maritime surveillance. I am thinking of the Quebec City centre that the government wanted to close and that is in the process of closing. That centre received no fewer than 1,500 calls.

I would like to cite Mr. Émilien Pelletier, director of the Canada Research Chair in Marine Ecotoxicology, who says that, for the moment, our oil recovery methods, particularly in wintertime—because it should not be forgotten that the Gulf of St. Lawrence freezes—are 30 years old, and we have not invested enough in research to develop more effective methods. We still use barriers, a system that is not effective and often fails.

I will answer questions now.

• (1205)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Quebec.

This is interesting, because people have very strong feelings about this issue. It is interesting to me because I am from the west coast. In north-western British Columbia, we have many questions about this government's plan—if such a thing exists—to approve natural resource projects, particularly those associated with oil. Canadians are asking a lot of questions because they want our rivers and the

environment to be protected. Currently, the government's problem is that it does not have the people's trust, and Canadians are wondering whether it is truly committed to the public interest. The government gives its full support to the oil companies and does not listen to the opposition, the experts or the witnesses.

My question is, will there be a day when this Conservative government will listen to the opposition in order to improve such bills as Bill C-3, and improve conditions for Canadians with respect to the transportation of oil and other hazardous substances?

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, one would have hoped that, given the enormous pressure on the oil export issue, the Conservative government would take all necessary steps to ensure that this was done, not just according to the standards, but rather according to requirements that go beyond international standards.

However, we see precisely the opposite. We see that the government is watering down all the legislation that ensures greater control of oil production and the laws governing oil transportation. They say they will be monitoring all this. I read Bill C-3. We will be monitoring the movements of oil tankers from high in the sky. I am sorry, but if there is a spill, it is nice that we can watch it from the air, but we must have the resources required to address this problem immediately, and clearly those resources are not there.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising because I am very worried about the marine park located at the mouth of the Saguenay. Whales are attracted to this area because of the special ecosystem and environment.

I am worried, and I would like to know if the member shares my concern for these ecosystems and the resulting problems if a tanker accident were to occur.

• (1210)

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. I am sure she knows that I sail a lot on the St. Lawrence, especially in this part of the marine park where whales are often spotted. However, there are some species that we hardly see any more.

Of course, at present this is not due to oil pollution. It is common knowledge that the St. Lawrence River lacks oxygen. Scientists at the Matane or Rimouski marine centre who were studying this problem have lost their funding.

My greatest concern is preserving the water quality and icebergs in the St. Lawrence River and ensuring that the animal and human populations living in this ecosystem are truly protected from a catastrophe such as a two million litre spill of crude oil in the St. Lawrence, which would be a global, not local, catastrophe.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this bill today. It is a bit of an omnibus bill, since it will affect five other pieces of legislation. I have to say at the outset that I am originally from the Gaspé, from Grande-Rivière to be precise, a small village between Chandler and Percé. It is such a wonderful place. I invite all Canadians to come and visit this magnificent region one day.

Government Orders

As I said, I am originally from Grande-Rivière, a small village between Chandler and Percé. I mention this because, on the one side, we have Percé, well known for its rock, which is practically recognized as a world heritage site—and I hope one day it receives the UNESCO world heritage designation—and on the other side, we have Chandler, which was an industrial town with paper mills and the non-stop traffic of ships transporting lumber. They are on the St. Lawrence, which, as we know, is a seaway that allows oil tankers to travel to major centres and large cities and back again.

I was born and raised in Grande-Rivière. My father's family was born in the Gaspé and my husband's family was born in the Gaspé, so we are people of the peninsula. Water is as much a part of us as the blood that runs through our veins. One of my children was also born in the Gaspé. We began raising our family in the Gaspé before moving to the north shore. The St. Lawrence actually runs between the two regions. From there we regularly see boats passing by, including everything from small craft and sailboats to larger vessels such as tankers, cruise ships and so on. Near Les Escoumins and Grandes-Bergeronnes, there is a small street called rue des Capitaines, which is where ships sailing on the St. Lawrence change pilots. Why would there be a change of pilots? Because, as we know, navigating the St. Lawrence can be very tricky, and a pilot from another country will not know the waterways or exactly where to sail to avoid serious accidents. Therefore, something very important happens there.

The St. Lawrence River is a part of all of our lives. The NDP tried asking the Conservative government to refer the bill to committee so we might study it closely and broaden its scope.

Many foreign tankers navigate these waters. Several of them also drop anchor locally so they can be cleaned after they have been emptied. This increases water pollution, which we have to be increasingly mindful of.

We are lucky that we have not had a major environmental disaster. I cannot help thinking about the magnificent marine park that is the mouth of the Saguenay River, where there are minerals and marine wildlife that are found nowhere else in the world, because this is where the Saguenay, the St. Lawrence and the Atlantic Ocean meet. These characteristics make for an extraordinary natural environment. It goes without saying that we want that environment protected. The marine disaster response act directly relates to this sector, because it is very important to have the means to protect our waters in case of a marine disaster.

We support this bill at second reading. However, it only moderately improves marine safety. We would like to see more in the way of protection.

●(1215)

I would like to read part of an article by the David Suzuki Foundation about the devastating consequences of marine spills on the environment and on communities:

It is quickly becoming clear that offshore hydrocarbon development is costly, polluting and dangerous, even before considering an oil spill. No matter how you look at it, the impacts are far-reaching and long-lasting.

Five provinces border the Gulf of St. Lawrence...

These are the same five maritime provinces, out of 10 Canadian provinces, that were at issue in the Employment Insurance Act. That act affected seasonal work, which is very common in the eastern provinces that the government has left to their own devices. That is half of Canada. Once again, these five provinces are being affected because they are located along the St. Lawrence River, a major seaway.

For example, fishing directly or indirectly affects about 75% of the people in the Magdalen Islands near Old Harry and generates close to \$78 million in revenue. That is significant. It is a lot of money. An oil spill near the islands would have a devastating impact on the inhabitants, not to mention that tourism, which is just as critical to the economy of the maritime provinces, would be decimated by an oil spill.

In addition to that socio-economic aspect, the Gulf of St. Lawrence is a unique and fragile ecosystem because it is key habitat for hundreds of species that reproduce, mature and migrate there, including the blue whale.

Under ideal conditions, only 15% of spilled oil can be cleaned up, so it should be clear that the risks associated with development far outweigh the potential benefits.

In another article, Christy Clark said, "Canada is clearly not ready to handle any major oil spills."

We know that Coast Guard numbers have been cut. Responding will be difficult. That is why the committee needs to take a closer look at this issue.

I think that supporting Bill C-3, as my colleagues have done, is important as part of an approach that goes pretty far. However, this new measure does not undo the disastrous effects of the cuts in the first budget, including the closure of the marine rescue centre. This shows just how inconsistent, even contradictory, the government's policies are. People are wondering whether this is a sincere initiative designed to protect our environment.

I have a lot of questions about another issue that has been brought to my attention. I wonder why the members opposite, who are trying to defend this piece of legislation, are not giving any speeches today to elaborate on their ideas and better explain what they want to do.

Just because a government has a majority does not mean that it can get away without explaining things to people so that they can better understand the issues and take more informed positions in debates.

Overall, as we know, Bill C-3 seeks to enact or amend five other pieces of legislation.

One of the parts deals with the aviation industry indemnity. I am concerned about the fact that, regardless of the ability of participants to obtain insurance, the Minister of Transport will undertake to help and indemnify certain air carriers in the event of loss, damage or liability caused by war risks. We know that even private insurance does not cover those types of things.

Government Orders

●(1220)

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in going through Bill C-3, I found some oddities. It is my understanding that currently in this country, one of the petroleum products being discussed for piping and potential tanker shipping from the west coast, and potentially also from the east coast, is raw bitumen, yet when we look at clause 58 in part 5 on the Canada Shipping Act, “oil handling facility” does not include the loading or unloading of bitumen.

That raises the question of how carefully the government looked at the legislation. Did it simply take international conventions and reproduce them? I am increasingly seeing serious issues.

The member has raised the concern about the lack of consultation on the development of the bill. The bill itself, in proposed section 167.2, provides for the preparation of oil pollution emergency plans. There is absolutely no provision for public consultation.

I wonder if the member thinks it would be worthwhile in the review at committee to have people who reside in communities in the three coastal areas come to talk about concerns and proposals they have for the improved development of the bill to ensure that their voices are heard.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. Operators of oil handling facilities must submit an emergency plan to the minister. However, there is no indication as to what the emergency plan will include. We firmly believe that we should meet with people in committee to ask them about the steps that will be taken from now on with regard to oil shipments. We know that when oil is shipped, if it is refined, sulphur and pollution levels go up. As a result, it is important to ship crude oil as much as possible. Some steps must therefore be taken.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her speech. This bill creates a paradox, in a way. As my colleague pointed out, on the one hand, the government is weakening safety measures, by closing the Québec City marine rescue centre, for example. On the other hand, it is introducing some half-hearted measures to slightly improve safety.

I would like my colleague to comment on the government's approach to transportation safety. We tend to forget that marine transportation plays a major role in Canada's economy.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, many Canadians may not be aware that all ships travelling on the St. Lawrence and other waterways pose a serious danger. To go back to the member's question, the right word might be “unacceptable”. The services that the safety centre used to offer have been eliminated and are no longer accessible to francophones. Moving the centre to another part of the country has weakened our position; it has made our situation slightly more risky. If every ship's cargo were checked, things might be different. We do not realize how outdated the ships can be. Sometimes, they are like potential bombs travelling on the St. Lawrence.

●(1225)

[English]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak on behalf of my constituents from Surrey North. I come from British Columbia, and we are fortunate and very glad that we have ocean on one side of the province. The pristine waters right off the coast of British Columbia and also the inland waters generate a lot of economic activity, including a huge fishing industry in British Columbia that supports families. Also, there is a huge tourism industry that uses those waters. We get visitors from all over the world who come to experience the natural beauty of British Columbia.

Having said that, it is important that we protect those waters and keep them safe from any activity that goes on in the inland waters and off the north coast of British Columbia. The government has an opportunity here to show leadership in protecting those waters off British Columbia.

I could go back into what the Conservatives have done over the last number of years. They have made cuts. They have closed a number of Coast Guard stations, including the one in Kitsilano. They have made cuts to the marine communication traffic centres, including the marine traffic control communications terminal in Vancouver and in St. John's. They are closing the B.C. regional office for emergency oil spill response. The government has also made cuts to the offshore oil and gas energy research centre.

Here was an opportunity to show leadership, to come up with a policy and legislation that would have a lasting impact on not only the environment but the pristine beauty of British Columbia. Bill C-3 addresses five different acts. It is sort of a mini-omnibus bill. We have seen this from the Conservatives over and over when they try to ram through legislation that makes changes to a number of different laws without consultation with stakeholders and without involving those people who would be affected by the legislation. Time after time, the Conservatives have had the opportunity to address those concerns, and time after time I have seen them fail that test.

Bill C-3 makes amendments to a number of different acts. As we can tell from the title of the bill, it is an omnibus bill being introduced by the government in an attempt to push through as many pieces of legislation as possible, essentially undermining democracy. The bill literally covers everything from the bottom of the sea to above the clouds in the sky.

Bill C-3 is an interesting contrast to the previous mode of operations of the Conservative government. In March, I stood in the House to address the \$108 million cuts that the Conservatives have made to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. These cuts directly impacted the Kitsilano Coast Guard station, the marine communications traffic centres in Vancouver and St. John's, Canada's offshore oil and gas research, as I pointed out earlier, and also British Columbia's oil spill response centre. They have all been shut down.

Government Orders

No one has forgotten those cuts, especially British Columbians, people in my riding, who are proud of the natural beauty and pristine wilderness that our province boasts. There has been no consideration to reverse those cuts and prove that the Conservatives value our environment and our country.

● (1230)

However, here we are now with a bill in front of us that attempts to compensate for the previous inaction and cuts to marine safety. It is difficult to trust the Conservatives trying to protect the environment, given their track record. The NDP, including my colleagues in the House, is fundamentally committed to ensuring that oil spills never happen on our coasts. My NDP colleagues and I have time and time again stood in the House demanding that the government pay attention to marine safety. Time after time, the government has failed to respond to our concerns and the concerns of Canadians. I introduced a bill in the House last spring to protect a major creek in my riding, Bear Creek.

Specifically in regard to Bill C-3, the NDP requested that the scope be broadened by sending it to committee before this debate to include more comprehensive and specific measures to protect Canada's coasts. Again, this proposal was rejected by the Conservatives, a clear indication of their dedication to the issue at hand.

Time after time over the last two and a half years the NDP has made numerous amendments, thousands of amendments at the committee stage, to different bills. Out of those thousands of amendments, not one has been accepted by the governing party. That shows a lack of commitment by the Conservatives to listen to all stakeholders who have come before committees and a lack of willingness to partner with stakeholders so that we can make the best rules and laws for Canadians.

That is a major concern that clearly shows the Conservatives are not only not looking after the interests of the environment but they are not looking after the interests of Canadians.

Clearly the Conservatives believe that their words are stronger than their actions. Pushing through a bill that increases tanker safety and environmental security will help to close the gaps in protection that exist. However, those gaps are the result of poor decisions by an incompetent government.

It is difficult to believe that the efforts of the bill are genuine, considering that the Conservatives have repeatedly prioritized the transportation of oil over the environment. This is demonstrated through their targeted closures of protection and response institutions, pulling out of the Kyoto accord, and by constantly disregarding climate change and partially muzzling our scientists.

As I do, Canadians welcome any attempt to right the wrongs that have been committed by the government, but they will not be fooled by this particular bill, which basically does not go far enough. It does not address some of the shortcomings that the government has brought upon the safety of our marinas and marine waters off the coast of British Columbia and across the way in eastern Canada.

Again, the Conservatives had an opportunity to address some of the concerns that Canadians have in regard to marine safety. The bill

basically touches on some of the issues, but it does not go far enough.

Time after time I have seen the government, whether it is on veterans' issues, unemployment issues, or immigration issues, fail to address the concerns of Canadians. The bill does not address the marine safety that is required for the pristine waters of British Columbia. I urge the government to allow and accept some of the NDP, the official opposition, amendments that we will be presenting in the committee.

● (1235)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Surrey North and welcome him to the debate, a debate the Conservatives and Liberals have decided to be absent from, somehow thinking that marine safety and aviation safety are things that do not need to have any comment from the government or the third party. It is fascinating, but it is their choice.

The interest I have here is that this is a small measures bill. It seeks to change some liability. It seeks to toughen up some of the more peripheral issues that are around shipping oil, particularly by marine through supertankers. However, it does not address some of the things that my friend talked about earlier, which are all the cuts we have seen, not just straight up money to the Coast Guard and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to enforce any of the new laws that we bring forward. We do not see the government attaching any money to these prospects. Therefore, what is the value of a law if the government does not intend to enforce it? That is a fair question.

The second piece is that the government fails to understand that by not accepting any of the witness testimony and not accepting any of the ideas that come from the official opposition, it keeps making bad laws. The way we know that is that these laws keep getting struck down in court. There was one just last week.

Refusing to listen to any criticism is an arrogance that does not work for government and it does not work for taxpayers, because none of these things actually come to pass.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, the government brought in the bill, yet Conservatives fail to stand up in the House to defend it and offer the highlights of what is so important in it. They are not speaking on it in the House.

The people in the corner over there, the Liberal Party, I do not actually know where they stand. They flip-flop depending on which way the wind is blowing. They will say one thing before the election and then they will do exactly the opposite when they do come into the House.

In committee with witnesses and expert testimony, one would think that out of the thousands of amendments, thousands of good ideas the experts and stakeholders bring in, that there would be one idea that the Conservative government would accept. It has not happened yet. I would encourage the government to listen to the experts and the opposition amendments.

Let us make marine safety a priority in this country. It is a huge economic boost in British Columbia, and I would hate to have some sort of incident that damaged the pristine waters of British Columbia.

Government Orders

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley mentioned the cost of court challenges to taxpayers. I am also concerned about the fact that Canadian taxpayers would have to pay for oil spills because the limits set out in the legislation are not high enough. When we look at other jurisdictions whose economies depend on their oil sector, such as Norway and others, they have much higher liability limits.

Could my friend for Surrey North talk about how taxpayers should not be on the hook for any pollution that occurs from oil spills?

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, it is our responsibility as legislators to ensure that there is no oil spill off the coast of British Columbia or, for that matter, off the east, west, or north coasts.

We have seen the results of an oil spill. It costs hundreds of billions of dollars to clean up. We have seen it in the Gulf. I would not want to see that off the coast of British Columbia. The government needs to ensure that we have the proper resources and that proper marine safety legislation is there. This legislation does not do that. It does not provide enough of a safety net, whether it is additional insurance money, the Coast Guard, or marine traffic controllers.

The government had a chance here to protect the waters off our coasts, but it miserably failed with a bill that basically does not address what needs to be addressed at this point.

• (1240)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to participate in the debate on Bill C-3. Many of my colleagues have spoken today, which is great, because this is a very significant bill that needs to be thoroughly debated both here in the House and in committee.

The first point I would like to make is that Bill C-3 is another omnibus bill that is being brought forward by the Conservative government.

Unfortunately, we have become used to receiving these mega-omnibus bills. This one is not as big as some of the budget bills we have had, bills that stripped away environmental protection and regulations and put everything in but the kitchen sink; this is a smaller one, but nevertheless, it is still an omnibus bill. It would make amendments to five different acts, including the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act, and the Canada Shipping Act.

I am not going to focus on all aspects of the bill today, because I have limited time to speak. I want to focus particularly on the Canada Marine Act and the aspects pertaining to marine issues because I am from British Columbia and this, of course, is a huge issue for us on the west coast.

First of all, I would say that there are some positive aspects to the bill. We have gone through it very carefully and we can see that, for example, it would require pilotage and increased surveillance for boats and tankers coming in, which is certainly a small step in the right direction.

However, we note that the bill is too limited. There is still a lot more to do. Certainly one of the things that needs to be done is for

the government to reverse the effects that the drastic cuts in last year's budget have had on tanker safety on the west coast.

When we read Bill C-3, I think we can see that it is a pretty thinly veiled attempt to compensate, like window dressing, for previous inaction and the Conservative cuts to marine safety.

The measures that would improve safety in Bill C-3 are relatively small in comparison with the risks that are posed by closing the British Columbia oil spill response centre, shutting down the Kitsilano Coast Guard, and gutting the environmental emergency response programs.

We see a bill before us that would have some limited effect, but it does not address the serious and major issues facing British Columbia in terms of marine conservation, tanker traffic, and safety. The bill would not go nearly far enough. It would probably be 5% of what needs to be done.

I know many of my colleagues have addressed this aspect today, but I will add my voice to make it clear that we in the NDP are committed to ensuring that oil spills never happen on our coast. Maybe some people think that is not a realistic position, that it is really just about damage control and mitigation of problems and disasters, but we think the policy we should work from is to ensure that spills never happen.

That means taking a very different kind of approach. It means taking an approach based upon the precautionary principle. It would be an approach based upon the public interest. It would be an approach based upon the fact that we believe the federal government has a critical role in making it clear that for marine industries, for tanker traffic, there have to be strong, clear, consistent rules that all the players adhere to so that oil spills can never happen.

Why would we take that approach?

We take that approach because the prospect that any of the incredibly beautiful and rugged British Columbia coastline could be spoiled by a spill is something that one does not want to contemplate. It is not only the disaster that occurs at that moment, but the impact.

I remember when the *Exxon Valdez* had its historic spill many decades ago. It was in the news for days, weeks, months. The devastation to the environment was enormous, while the response to the spill was very limited.

• (1245)

People learned a lot from that, not only in B.C. but globally. Public consciousness about the safety of tanker traffic and the risk of spills increased enormously.

Government Orders

That was many decades ago. Now we are talking about an environment and an industry in which supertankers with much greater capacity make the *Exxon Valdez* look like a mini-tanker. On the one hand we are told that safety provisions, improved design, double hulls, and so on have improved the situation, but in fact accidents and spills still take place even when the hulls are doubled, so we think that taking the perspective of the precautionary principle is important. As a result, we are committed to ensuring that there is legislation, policy, and regulation to ensure that oils spills never happen on our coast. That is something we are committed to.

I believe it was in 2011 that we debated an NDP motion that sought to put into effect the existing verbal agreement that has banned oil tankers off the coast of B.C. for the past 40 years. This so-called moratorium came about as a verbal commitment with the Province of B.C., but nothing was ever put in writing.

It was a very good motion and a very good debate. The motion to have the moratorium put into legislative effect passed in the House at the time. Unfortunately, the government never followed up, so we still have this very uneasy situation in British Columbia: on the one hand we have this 40-year-old moratorium, but on the other hand there is no paperwork to show that it exists.

The Government of Canada website states:

There is a voluntary Tanker Exclusion Zone off the B.C. coast that applies to loaded oil tankers servicing the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System between Valdez, Alaska, and Puget Sound, Washington. This zone does not apply to tankers travelling to or from B.C. ports.

It is very clear that it is limited. Basically, it is a very particular exclusion zone, and it is voluntary. That is the basis of the moratorium.

That is not good enough. It needs to be enshrined in a proper legislative process. If we are to protect future generations, then we owe it not only to residents of B.C. and our global community today but also to future generations to ensure that such protection does exist.

The NDP's call to ban oil tanker traffic through this corridor is supported by first nations; local, regional, and provincial politicians; environmental groups; tourism, recreation, fishing, and other potentially affected industries; and over 75% of B.C. residents. Members can see that this is a huge issue in our community.

I stated at the beginning that in principle we support this bill going to committee. However, when it does go to committee, there are many issues that we will be raising. For instance, we want to see reversal of the Coast Guard closures, including the Kitsilano Coast Guard station, which was done in an appalling way. Basically it was a unilateral decision to close the station despite an uproar in metro Vancouver and the fact that its closure would not serve the community well.

We also want to see a cancellation of the closure of B.C.'s regional office for emergency oil spills. It is unimaginable that we do not have a regional office for emergency oil spills and responders. To me that is incredible.

To sum up, we feel that a number of issues are not addressed in this bill and we will be following up on them at committee. If we are

to have safety on the west coast in terms of tanker traffic, this is imperative if the bill is to have any meaning at all.

• (1250)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also appreciate the speeches from my hon. colleague. She has many years of experience in this House; I believe she has been here for 16 years. The advantage of being here for that amount of time is that she has been able to see not only a Conservative government in action, but also Liberal governments.

Since I was not here at that time, my question is this: was the record of the Liberals any better on these issues of environmental protection and action on climate change?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I think it is a very pertinent question. After being here 16 years and after seeing a Liberal majority government and minority Parliaments as well, I can say there has been a very sad, slow, and steady decline in environmental protection and regulation under Liberal governments, and now that decline has escalated under Conservative governments.

However, regarding the moratorium I spoke about, certainly there were Liberal governments of the day and Liberal cabinet ministers from British Columbia. This is not an issue that has just appeared over the last couple of years. Tanker safety through coastal waters has been a long-standing issue. There were numerous opportunities to ensure that the moratorium actually meant something and to improve and enhance our environmental protection, but we have never seen it happen.

So here we are today at a crossroads. Now time is running out. B. C. residents have made it very clear that we oppose the Enbridge northern gateway pipeline and oppose the supertanker traffic that is going to bring in millions of gallons of bitumen from the oil sands. These are very significant issues in B.C., and unfortunately we saw nothing from Liberal governments that would have laid the groundwork to ensure that we might have been better off today than we are.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her excellent speech. I know that she is really concerned about oil tankers on our waterways.

I was wondering if, like me, she believes that it is important for businesses to take responsibility when transporting hazardous materials, whether by water, road or rail? Does she believe that, in the event of an accident, companies should be ready to respond and to pay because they are responsible for the products they transport, in this case across the ocean.

Is it important for companies to be able to provide an adequate, efficient, quick and financial response to the damage that accidents can cause?

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, we believe very much in the principle of polluter pay. In fact, one of the issues that is not properly addressed in this bill is that we should be raising the limit for cleaning up spills. There is something called the Ship-sourced Oil Pollution Fund, which does provide a source of funds through levies when there is a major spill; however, it is interesting to note that no levy has been imposed since 1976, and although that fund now has \$400 million in it, which might sound like a lot, if there were actually a major spill, it would go in a flash.

Just to put it in context, the total cleanup for the *Exxon Valdez* was \$3.5 billion. Of course, as I mentioned, we are now dealing with supertankers that are much bigger than the *Exxon Valdez*, so the Ship-sourced Oil Pollution Fund would really be just a drop in the bucket if there were to be a major spill. We believe the issues of polluter pay and of increasing the limit for cleaning up spills are very important priorities, but they are not addressed in the bill.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of Bill C-3—tentative support, I should add. The bill includes the enactment of the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act and amendments to the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act, and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001. The bill also makes consequential amendments to other acts.

Yes, Bill C-3 is an omnibus bill that makes amendments to five acts. Is that too much legislation to stuff into one act? Well, of course it is, but such is the *modus operandi* of the Conservative government: pack and pile as much legislative change as it can into an omnibus bill so as to limit the opposition's scrutiny and to get as much by Canadians as possible.

However, Canadians are catching on to Conservative tactics and tricks. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians caught on a long time ago, but then the rising usually starts in the east. That said, we support the bill at second reading because there is a modest improvement to marine security, the key word being “modest”.

Our support for Bill C-3 is cautious. Our support is moderate at second reading. Committee scrutiny and input with expert witnesses will determine whether we will vote for or against the bill at third reading.

What I want to focus on is the government's complete lack of credibility on issues regarding marine safety—complete lack of credibility, the absence of credibility. That side of the House is where credibility goes to die.

We know there are two sets of response times for the Canadian military search and rescue. During banking hours, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday to Friday, the military's Cormorant search and rescue helicopters have a wheels-up response time of 30 minutes to get off the ground and respond to a distress call. After 4 p.m., Monday to Friday, during evenings, weekends and holidays, the wheels-up response time is two hours. That is what I mean when I say there is no credibility on issues regarding marine safety; it is where credibility goes to die.

Ask the family members of Labrador's Burton Winters about credibility and they will tell us about the death of their 14-year-old son because help did not come quickly enough. Marine safety and

Conservative credibility do not belong in the same sentence. Marine safety and Conservative credibility do not belong in the same breath.

The parts of the bill that I want to concentrate on include those sections that deal with marine safety in relation to the oil industry. We had requested that aspects of Bill C-3 be broadened to include more comprehensive measures to safeguard Canada's coasts, certainly not packed into an omnibus bill. These comprehensive measures to safeguard Canada's coasts would have neutralized or reversed Conservative cuts and closures specific to marine and environmental safety.

The Conservative government rejected our proposal to broaden the scope of the bill. There is no surprise there. Not a single soul in this country wants to see an oil spill. New Democrats are obviously committed to ensuring that oil spills never happen, but the Conservative record is making it increasingly difficult to trust that the concerns of Canadians are being taken seriously.

Trust is another word like credibility. Trust and credibility should not be mentioned in the same sentence, in the same breath, as Conservatives. The bill is a thinly veiled attempt to compensate for previous inaction and Conservative cuts to marine safety.

There are measures to improve safety in the bill. The required pilotage and increased surveillance is a small step in the right direction. So are increased inspections of foreign tankers. However, those small steps are just that—small—compared to the risks associated with the closure of British Columbia's oil spill response centre, the shutting down of B.C.'s Kitsilano Coast Guard station, and the gutting of environmental emergency response programs.

● (1255)

Again, this legislation appears to be part of a concerted effort by the Conservatives to try to address their non-existent credibility in areas of transport safety, particularly concerning oil tanker traffic on the west coast and mounting opposition to the northern gateway pipeline.

The scaling back of Coast Guard rescue capacity and facilities is not just isolated to the B.C. coast. In my neck of the Canadian woods, the Canadian hinterland, Newfoundland and Labrador, the Conservatives have shut down the marine search and rescue centre in St. John's. We had a rescue coordinating centre with Coast Guard people who knew every nook and cranny of thousands of kilometres of coastline. The rescue centre was shipped out of Newfoundland and Labrador. That can only be described as negligent.

Government Orders

What would New Democrats like to see in this bill? What measures would New Democrats want to see in a bill to safeguard Canada's seas, to protect our people and protect our environment? In B.C., reverse Coast Guard closures. Cancel the closure of B.C.'s regional office for emergency oil spill responders. In B.C. and Newfoundland and Labrador, cancel cuts to marine communication traffic centres, including the marine traffic control communications terminals in Vancouver and St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. Reverse cuts to key environmental emergency programs, including oil spill response for Newfoundland and Labrador and B.C.

What other measures do New Democrats want to see in a bill to safeguard Canada's seas? How about reinforcing the capacity of petroleum boards to handle oil spills, as recommended by the environment commissioner? What capacity do petroleum boards, like the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, have to handle oil spills? The answer is none. It is non-existent.

The C-NLOPB needs to build in-house expertise to manage a major oil spill, with the creation of an independent safety regulator. That was the chief recommendation of the Wells inquiry into the 2009 crash of Cougar flight 491 off my province's coast, a crash that killed 17 people. The chief recommendation was for the creation of an independent safety regulator. Where is that independent safety regulator? Where is it? It is nowhere to be seen.

There are problems with the offshore regulator, the C-NLOPB, and the Conservatives are in no rush to fix them. The public's confidence in the C-NLOPB was already shaken, following a string of political appointments as well as the board's failure, to date, to follow through on an independent safety regulator. Last winter, this country's environment commissioner released a report that revealed that the C-NLOPB, the board responsible for regulating the offshore oil industry, is not prepared for a major offshore oil spill. If that is not a shocking combination that undermines what little public confidence remains, I do not know what is.

The C-NLOPB has not yet completed an assessment of the oil spill response capabilities of the offshore operators, which are required to respond to spills, almost five years after that assessment began. The C-NLOPB is not prepared to take over response to a major offshore oil spill if an operator fails to respond as required. In a nutshell, when it comes to environmental protection, the C-NLOPB is failing us. The Conservative government is failing us.

If there were a major offshore oil spill tomorrow, the C-NLOPB does not know whether the offshore oil companies would have the equipment or the resources to deal with it. The board itself would not be prepared to pick up the slack. What are we doing? What is the Conservative government doing? It is not doing enough. The Conservatives know this to be true. They know this to be true beyond the shadow of a doubt. We know this to be true, as sure as Conservatives have put safety and the environment in the back seat, behind its corporate agenda and corporate profits.

How do we know this to be true? We know this to be true because the Conservatives have refused to speak throughout much of this debate. The Conservative silence is deafening. Do we hear the voices of objection? No, we do not.

● (1300)

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned the closure of the Kitsilano Coast Guard station. Certainly, on the west coast we have heard loud and clear that this station, which is in the busiest port in Canada, plays a critical role in marine safety. There have been numerous emergency and town hall meetings where people have come and expressly said to keep that station open. I was glad to hear my colleague say that station should be kept open. He also talked about the MCTS stations that are about to close. He suggested that if the government is serious about developing a world-class marine safety system, it should keep those stations open, as they play a vital role.

He mentioned the marine search and rescue centre in St. John's and that it should be reopened. He has pointed out these closures, which seem to fly in the face of establishing such a world-class marine safety system. I am wondering how the government can claim it is developing this system in the face of all of these closures. I am wondering if the hon. member could comment on that.

● (1305)

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly feel for British Columbia in terms of the closure of the Coast Guard station there. There has been the closure, as the hon. member pointed out, of the rescue sub-centre in St. John's despite objections from just about every quarter. The technicians who ran that centre in St. John's knew every nook and cranny of the Newfoundland and Labrador coast, as well as the dialect. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians speak a certain way, with character and a certain charm, but it is different from dialects and accents in other parts of the country.

On the one hand, the people in Newfoundland and Labrador can more than relate to the opposition to the closure of the Coast Guard station in Vancouver, but it is inexplicable how the Conservatives can explain the cuts on either coast. Of course, we are not hearing anything from the Conservatives today, so we will not be getting any answers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for pointing out all the contradictions in Bill C-3, which was introduced by the Conservatives. We see that they are not even participating in the debate today, even though this is a government bill designed to tell Canadians just how safe it is at present to use supertankers and to increase production.

Government Orders

We know that the number of supertankers has increased and even tripled between 2005 and 2010. It will triple again by 2016. However, environmental protection measures and everything to do with environmental and emergency services have been reduced or closed from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia. Even the Commissioner of the Environment has said that Canada does not have an effective emergency plan.

How can we tell Canadians that they can trust the federal Conservative government when this very bill contains all these discrepancies?

[English]

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member again pointed out, as has been pointed out numerous times today, that the Conservatives refuse to speak in this debate for the most part, but then again, even if they did speak, they are not in the habit of answering questions anyway.

In 2009, there was the crash of Cougar flight 491. It was an incredible tragedy, in which 17 people were killed. The number one recommendation from the Wells inquiry into that crash was for the creation of an independent safety regulator to regulate safety in the offshore, separate from the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board and the industry, an independent safety regulator.

One question I have for the Conservatives, if they were willing to speak today, if they were willing to answer questions today, is this: what of that recommendation for the independent safety regulator, the number one recommendation of the Wells inquiry? What of that recommendation?

● (1310)

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-3.

During the previous session, we called upon the government to broaden the scope of Bill C-57, the former incarnation of Bill C-3, by sending it to committee prior to second reading so that more comprehensive measures aimed at protecting Canada's coasts could be incorporated into it. Unfortunately, our request was turned down, and as several of my colleagues have mentioned, in addition to denying our request, today the Conservatives are not even speaking to this bill, explaining their position or answering our questions. It is truly deplorable.

The bill before us today does not go any further than Bill C-57, but we will nevertheless vote in favour of it at second reading, in the hopes that we will be able to convince the government to improve upon the marine safety provisions when it proceeds to clause-by-clause study in committee. The outcome of the efforts in committee will determine whether or not we will support Bill C-3 when it moves to third reading. Again, I hope that we will be able to truly debate the bill's provisions in committee, and I call upon the government to be open-minded and to work with the opposition to make this bill a better piece of legislation.

I will concede that Bill C-3 does contain a few positive provisions. Enhanced monitoring and piloting requirements are a step in the right direction. The implementation of the International

Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances, 2010, to which Canada is a signatory, is also a positive development. However, as I indicated earlier, Bill C-3 does not go far enough. It does not reverse the effects of last year's drastic budget cuts on oil tanker safety. The provisions in Bill C-3 aimed at improving safety will have a relatively minor impact as compared to the risks posed by, for example, the closure of B.C.'s oil spill response centre, the closure of the Coast Guard station in Kitsilano and the cuts to environmental emergency response programs. All of Canada, and not only B.C., is affected.

The government has decided to close the marine rescue centre in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is also planning to shutter the marine search and rescue centre in Quebec City. These rescue centres respond on average to 1,500 distress calls each year. Who will be there to rescue sailors from Newfoundland and Labrador and from Quebec when they encounter an emergency at sea?

In the fall of 2012, two large transport vessels ran aground on the west coast because of marine traffic conditions. Marine traffic is projected to increase significantly on the west coast. Add to that the fact that increasingly large tankers are being put into service. We have higher traffic volumes, larger vessels and Bill C-3, which does not go far enough. I am concerned by this state of affairs, as is our party.

As an MP and as a citizen, I have some serious questions as to why the government would not want to beef up the bill as the NDP is asking it to do. Upon closer review of Bill C-3, we are left with the impression that the government is trying to make up for its lack of leadership in the field of marine safety since taking office. If it really wants to show some leadership, it must avoid half-measures and put some teeth into its bill, because it still comes up short. We want to take part in the process.

If the true aim of Bill C-3 was to promote greater tanker traffic safety, the Conservative government could seize the opportunity to review the cuts announced in the latest budgets and reconsider eliminating marine safety programs. As I said, we have a number of suggestions and recommendations to make and we are prepared to work in committee to improve the bill.

● (1315)

The NDP is committed to ensuring that oil spills along our coastlines become a thing of the past and that our sailors stay safe.

In our view, a bill aimed at protecting Canada's seas should provide for the following: firstly, the cancellation of plans to reduce Coast Guard services and close stations, including the Coast Guard station in Kitsilano. Secondly, it should expand the capacity of petroleum boards to handle oil spills, as recommended by the Commissioner of the Environment. Thirdly, the bill should also require Canada's Coast Guard to work with its American counterparts to carry out a study on the risks associated with increased tanker traffic in Canadian waters.

Government Orders

As I said earlier, we have clear suggestions for improving the bill now before us. As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to put in place conditions that will prevent oil spills from occurring on the west coast and elsewhere in Canada.

Scott Vaughan, Canada's Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, has stated that Canada does not have the means to respond effectively to an accident involving a supertanker such as the *Suezmax*, which carries between one and two millions barrels of crude oil. Just imagine a disaster of that magnitude.

To be precise, Mr. Vaughan stated that the transport capacity of the *Suezmax* "significantly exceeds Transport Canada's spill-response thresholds". This kind of statement is truly alarming. What is the government waiting for? When will it take action?

A major spill off Canada's shores would not only do irreparable harm to the marine environment, but would also result in thousands of job losses. We need to do everything possible to ensure that this does not happen. I would like to hear our Conservative colleagues explain why it makes sense not to improve this bill so as to cancel the closures and cutbacks that are in the works.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we can see that more than just our coastlines are being threatened. While we debate this bill, two weeks ago the government lifted environmental protections for offshore exploration. What concerns me is the Conservatives' and Liberals' silence. I am having a hard time understanding their silence. Why are the Conservatives not rising to defend their own bill?

I want to put that question to my colleague and perhaps she can enlighten us.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Everyone on this side of the House is asking that same question. How can it be that the Conservatives, on the other side of the House, are introducing a bill and cannot explain the rationale behind it? That is unfortunate.

I think that as elected officials, it is our duty to represent Canadians and explain our decisions as well as the reasons for our decisions and for introducing a bill. What we are seeing is that the government introduces a bill. It then imposes time allocation. It does not collaborate in our committees and, in the end, we vote on a bill that most Canadians have not had a chance to understand. We did not hear from experts who could explain this bill to us.

What does that mean? I am not saying that this will happen, but it could lead to disasters. We have seen that over the past year and it is very unfortunate.

● (1320)

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague to tell me what she thinks about the findings of experts with regard to the St. Lawrence estuary. If there were an oil spill in the St. Lawrence estuary, there is currently no known emergency plan to help us prevent a major catastrophe.

Does my colleague think that this bill adds anything to existing legislation? What will it take to ensure better monitoring of the St.

Lawrence and prevent avoidable disasters? There have been 10,000 spills or boats that have leaked oil over the past 20 years. What plan has been put in place for the St. Lawrence? Is the Conservative government concerned about this situation?

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again thank my colleague for his question. That is why we need experts to appear before the committee and explain what is needed and how we can ensure that our estuary, our rivers, our waterways and our oceans, as well as Canadians, will be truly protected in the case of oil spills and other environmental disasters. That is the only way to help Canadians and to avoid going further into debt to help those affected by such disasters. The closures of the search and rescue centres in Quebec City and Newfoundland are certainly not going to help Canadians or our environment.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the remarks by the member for Hull—Aylmer, who is my MP when I live in Ottawa. She made a number of good points about the cutbacks to search and rescue.

Some of the things that have been happening on rail safety have been just unbelievable. Imagine that a train could be allowed to run with explosive material, with one engineer, and be unguarded at night. This kind of safety has been eroding over the years.

We will be sending the bill to committee. We think it needs to be discussed there. However, my real problem with the bill is that it is typical legislation from the government, which has no national strategy for aviation and marine safety. It is a piecemeal approach that has taken a little here and a little there. Is not the real problem with the bill that we really need some national leadership with a full-force strategy on safety as a whole?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I am pleased to hear that he lives in my riding, and I am sure that he loves the area as I do. We are all working extremely hard so that our environment, our jobs and our air quality are the best they can be.

I agree and I am asking the Conservative Party, the party that is currently in power, to review its approach to this bill so that we can really discuss it openly in committee with expert witnesses who can help us to work together in committee and ensure that we improve Bill C-3 so that it protects us. We are talking about improving the bill, but this is really about ensuring that Canadians are protected in matters pertaining to the environment and transportation.

Government Orders

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have some reservations about this bill. We have many questions to ask and a number of suggestions to make. We have done this in the past, and we are somewhat concerned about the silence of not only the Conservatives but also the Liberals and, what is more surprising, the Green Party. We are supporting this bill at second reading, but we believe it should be expanded. It must be broadened to take liability limits into account. We are worried that the current liability limits are not high enough.

We know that the New Democratic Party is the only party in the House that can protect marine safety for all Canadians. The NDP has already called for the protection of rescue centres in Canada a few times, but as a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I would especially like to point out that the Quebec City rescue centre is the only bilingual centre in the entire country. The government cannot claim that it is protecting marine safety on one hand, while closing rescue centres on the other. We could have a whole other debate on this, but I have several things to discuss in my 10 minutes and I would like to continue talking about other topics.

My riding is located between two major waterways, namely the St. Lawrence River and the Ottawa River. I can tell all members of the House that my constituents are currently very concerned about the possibility of a pipeline oil spill in the St. Lawrence River or even in the Ottawa River. They are aware that the national ship-source oil pollution fund, which was established in the 1970s, has not been adequately funded for a long time and has not been used since 1976. That was a long time ago. I would like to point out that, at that time, there was a Liberal minority government in power—until 1976—and that it governed in partnership with the NDP. We can therefore see that the Liberals were willing to protect the interests of Canadians, but as soon as their NDP partner was gone, they unfortunately left Canadians out in the cold.

We often hear the government side claim that oil transportation is 99.9% safe, but if that is indeed the case, why not increase liability limits? If it is so safe, then there is no risk in having penalties for companies, so why not increase liability?

Some other countries, like Norway, have no liability limits on spills. This policy reduces the risk of spills. I will briefly explain why. When a company is told that it will have to cover the total cost of a spill, the company will do everything it can to avoid a spill; it will try to make sure it never happens.

• (1325)

[*English*]

Instead, the government would rather pass the cleanup bill onto the taxpayers, which I find very unfortunate. Globally, we have seen major spills that have cost billions of dollars. It would not only be an environmental nightmare, it would also be an economic nightmare for citizens along the St. Lawrence to have to pay the costs of the cleanup.

Let me just point out that in 2012, the five largest oil companies made \$118 billion in profit alone. That \$118 billion would be enough to pay the cost of cleanup if there were a major spill. Unfortunately, the government is listening to its big oil lobbyists

instead. In past legislation it has attempted to remove every obstacle that the oil and transport sector wanted removed.

Leadership means not only helping our friends, but standing for principles that concern all Canadians, not just a certain sector of Canadians. I am sure Canadians would be absolutely disgusted, and I do not believe I am using too strong a word, to know that oil companies are writing amendments to Canadian environmental legislation. Any of our constituents would be disturbed by the fact that oil lobbyists actually send to ministers the amendments they would like to see. It is absolutely unacceptable that our independence has been challenged in this way by the lobbying sector.

Leadership means taking a principled stand to protect the right of not only this generation, not only the next generation, but for the right to a clean environment for the next seven or eight generations down the line. As leaders of our country, we should be considering the needs of eight generations down the line.

One of the fundamental support systems of this planet is water. If we do not do it properly now, if we sully our waters so the next generations will be unable to use them, then our support system for life on this planet will be threatened.

The NDP is committed to ensuring that oil spills never happen on our coast. The Conservatives have lost the trust of Canadians in this respect. They have not really shown to Canadians that they are capable of managing this file, and we would like to ensure that an oil spill never happens. However, if an oil spill did happen, we would want the government to ensure that the company that polluted would foot the bill, not the taxpayer. This is simple common sense. We are very worried.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

The Minister of Natural Resources said that he required oil tankers to have double hulls. Canadians are right to be concerned, because that standard was created by an international agreement in 1993. Wow. That standard has been in place for 20 years under an international agreement. Yet, according to the Minister of Natural Resources, the Conservatives are the ones who required tankers to have double hulls. I am sorry, but people know that this standard has been in place for 20 years.

As I said, what is most troubling is the utter silence from the Conservatives and the Liberals. I am also quite surprised that the Green Party has not risen to weigh in on this issue. That surprises me a little.

We have not heard anything from the Conservatives. We had a number of questions for them. I hope at least one person from the other parties will be able to answer my questions.

As we know, the bill is too limited in its scope. Why did the government reject our proposal to broaden the scope of the bill? Why is it unwilling to make any real, significant changes to protect our coastlines? If Bill C-3 is really supposed to promote safety, why did the government not take this opportunity to reverse its poor decisions to cut safety measures?

Government Orders

We wanted to ask a number of questions. The silence on the part of the three other parties is really unfortunate. The NDP are the only ones standing up to speak to this bill. It is the government's duty to defend its bill. Clearly, many members across the floor do not want to do so.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, Cons. Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the member made an allegation that is simply not true. Government relations representatives, or lobbyists, work in Ottawa on a whole range of issues, including environmental issues but also labour issues. I know the New Democrats often meet with GR members, and so they should, who would represent labour and would seek to rewrite labour legislation. That does not mean it is implemented; it means they are working on behalf of their clients and they are informing people in this place.

However, I am actually quite proud of Canada's record, both the record of the pipelines and the energy industry, and I am proud of Canada's record in terms of technology investment. I do not hear any discussion about that. Canada's record in terms of shipping is quite good and we are seeking to improve it. I see recommendations by companies on how they can improve that. I am quite proud to see an industry that is actually looking at things and asking how they can be more socially responsible and how they can improve.

I do not see any of that represented in the member's statements. What I do see are dangerous comments that could negatively impact the Canadian economy.

• (1335)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, the only thing that is negatively impacting the economy is the government. What is true and not true is hard to judge from that party and that member, when the Conservatives stand and say what is true and what is not true. Canadians have a hard time judging whether there is truth in what the government members say.

The member finds the allegation troubling, but it came from ATIP, an access to information request, so it is based in fact. Lobbyists may come and they may talk to us, but it does not mean we have to accept everything they ask us to do, hook, line and sinker.

In terms of technology investment, let us talk about innovation in Canada. For the past seven years, we have been falling, according to the World Economic Forum. In terms of our competitiveness, we have been falling every year under this government. Therefore, the Conservatives have a lot more work to do.

I am glad the Conservatives have put two members up to ask questions today. It is too bad they did not get up to give a speech defending their bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is most interesting in the sense that we have a very important industry, that being our aviation industry. Canada, unlike most other countries, is very dependent on having a healthy aviation industry, just because of the mass of land that encompasses our great nation. We also have a very important aerospace industry.

There are numerous stakeholders out there that need to be consulted whenever we bring forward legislation. I can understand and appreciate the importance of the issue of insurance in particular,

to ensure that everything is as much as possible kept above board. Things have been a bit of a challenge within the aviation industry, especially since the 9/11 situation.

My question for the member is this: to what degree do you believe the government has taken that holistic approach to dealing with the aviation industry, that goes just beyond the issue of insurance, but also public safety and even, to a certain degree, that we have had passenger first rights legislation or ideas being talked about? He might want to provide further comment, just in general.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the member, once again, I do not know how many times I have reminded members that they must direct their comments directly to the Chair rather than to their colleagues. I want to be specific. This includes saying "Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member "what are you going to do?" That is not acceptable. Members cannot do indirectly what they cannot do directly. I would remind all hon. members to please direct all of their comments directly to the Chair.

The hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, it would not have been a normal day if the member for Winnipeg North had not stood and asked at least a question. I feel like I have had a normal day in the House today, absent the silence of the other parties.

I would like to address the issue of public safety because this is the second question coming from the Liberal Party today. The first question touched on the member for Malpeque saying that he could not understand how a train could have one engineer in it and the spill could occur. That deregulation actually happened under the Liberal government. The New Democrats are the only ones standing up for these issues. The member mentioned the passenger bill of rights. That was an NDP private member's bill from my colleague from Laval.

Both parties have had chances to take our propositions into account and implement them. I know a Liberal government used many propositions in the past to bring in wonderful things like employment insurance, pensions, and public housing. The Liberals are great at listening to our ideas, and we hope they will listen to our ideas when we form a government in 2015.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating Bill C-3 and while some Conservative members asked questions, none actually spoke on this legislation. Yet, this is a government bill. It should be very important to the Conservatives, but not a single one rose to talk about safety and the investments made to ensure that there will be fewer spills and that tanker traffic will be safe.

We live in a country blessed with natural wealth. There is an abundance of natural resources. The development of these resources, including mining, rail, forest and marine resources, is largely responsible for our country's economic prosperity. We must secure this prosperity in the long term, and to do so we must protect our environment.

Government Orders

An offshore oil spill can have catastrophic consequences for decades, such as water pollution, dwindling fish stocks, harm to health and to the environment, and massive job losses.

Today more than ever, our wealth depends on how we manage our resources. That is the key to our development and this should be an inescapable fact. Bill C-3 seeks to amend five important acts dealing with the aviation, aeronautics and marine industries. Bill C-3 is a new version of Bill C-57. The NDP had asked that this bill be amended to ensure that it truly protects our environment. Unfortunately, as usual when it comes to environmental protection, the Conservatives rejected all our calls to improve former Bill C-57.

The most important part of the bill deals with marine safety and oil spills. It is also this aspect of the legislation that needs improvement. In fact, if we really want to protect Canada's coasts that part should be examined by experts. Part 4 of Bill C-3 amends the Marine Liability Act. It deals with the concept of liability in the event of an oil spill. Under the act, the owner of a ship is responsible for the costs and expenses incurred by the government following the spillage of dangerous products at sea.

Part 5 of Bill C-3 amends the Canada Shipping Act, 2001. It sets new rules to compel oil companies to notify the minister of their operations. These companies will have to submit a response plan to deal with a disaster or an accident. The NDP, a number of stakeholders and many citizens have been eagerly awaiting such a provision.

The bill is absolutely necessary, but it does not meet many of the challenges of oil development and transportation in Canada. It is a good step forward, but it is still quite limited. This legislation should include many other aspects of marine transportation.

The shipping of oil is risky business. As a number of my colleagues pointed out, tanker traffic tripled between 2005 and 2010, and it is expected to triple again by 2016. The increase in oil shipments leads to more spills, whether onshore or offshore. According to the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation, there have been close to 10,000 spills in the world since 1970. That is a huge number and it is very alarming.

I will refresh your memory. In April 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil platform spilled 678,000 tonnes of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. In March 2001, the Petrobras oil platform, in Brazil, spilled 300,000 tonnes of oil. In March 1989, the *Exxon Valdez* spilled 38,000 tonnes of oil off the coast of Alaska, not too far from us. Canada is not sheltered from these accidents. Burrard Inlet is the second most dangerous point to navigate in Vancouver. In March, the largest emergency response ship ran aground off the coast of Vancouver and took 11 hours to make the trip to Vancouver from Esquimalt. There are some problems, and we should carefully consider this issue in committee to make practical amendments and improvements that address current needs. With the increase in maritime traffic in the Arctic, the risk of accidents is even higher.

• (1345)

Canada's ability to combat pollution in a northern climate is more limited than in a southern one. Intense cold, distance and lack of on-site emergency equipment would make emergency operations much more complicated.

Premier of British Columbia, Christy Clark, recently said:

If a tanker were to spill oil off the coast of British Columbia today, the federal government would not have the resources to handle a large-scale disaster.

Last year, Scott Vaughan, the former commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, said that the liability limits and compensation programs could be inadequate if a spill were to happen.

The absolute liability limits have not been changed in 24 years. Updates have been needed for ages. Although the Conservative government plans on increasing petroleum resource development, it has not increased liability for these resources. For example, the Atlantic liability is \$30 million. However, the full cost of cleanup for the *Exxon Valdez* disaster was more than \$3 billion. That is a disproportionately big difference, and it is quite worrisome.

The U.S. Coast Guard seems to take the risk of accidents more seriously. The Minister of Natural Resources is studying the effects of increased tanker traffic on the west coast whereas Senator Maria Cantwell feels that a supertanker oil spill near our shores would threaten the thriving coastal economy and thousands of jobs.

It is therefore difficult to understand why the Canadian Conservative government is making cuts to marine safety. Why did the Conservatives shut down the Newfoundland and Labrador marine rescue centre? Why do they want to close the Quebec City marine rescue sub-centre? The sub-centre responds to almost 1,500 distress calls every year. Why close down the Kitsilano Coast Guard station in British Columbia? Why make cuts to marine communications and traffic services, including the terminals in Vancouver and St. John's?

No matter how much the Conservatives remind us that they want to improve marine safety, they are not able to rise in the House today to answer questions, to clarify the situation and to defend their views. No one on the Conservative side has stood up today. Yet these issues are vital to public health and safety, environmental protection and thousands of jobs.

Ever since the Speech from the Throne, they think they are the champions of job creation when they are actually jeopardizing thousands of jobs. That boggles the mind. It makes no sense at all.

The government should understand that, to respond to risks at sea, it must base its decisions on science and facts, and consult with experts, not censor them or cut their jobs.

Government Orders

Bill C-3 could be greatly improved if the government listened to what the experts and the opposition have to say. That seems a lot to ask, however, of a government that prefers to base its decisions on old neo-liberal theories like “government intervention is not required” and “industry will be self-regulating”. We can see what that way of thinking produces when we talk about rail safety or food safety. Many incidents occur, and people are affected. The Conservative theory does not work, and it leads to disasters like what occurred recently in Alberta.

The NDP would nevertheless have a few suggestions to make to the government, if it was prepared to listen. We suggest that it cancel the cuts to marine safety, strengthen the capacity of petroleum boards so that they can see about preventing oil spills, and raise the limit for cleanup after a spill. The limit is currently set at 10,000 tonnes, which is not really enough, given the increase in the size of tankers and in the traffic.

We also suggest that it apply the polluter-pay principle. That is what the government said it would do in the Speech from the Throne. We are still waiting for the government to put the principle into practice.

It should also bolster the Ship-source Oil Pollution Fund. This currently stands at \$400 million, but the damage from a single spill like the Exxon Valdez spill, for example, would run into billions of dollars. The government should therefore be more realistic, and a little more responsible.

The NDP would also like very much to hear from expert witnesses on part 2 of the bill. Under clause 19, the military is given investigative powers formerly assigned to the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, which issued public reports. That will no longer be the case.

● (1350)

There is some progress, therefore, in this bill, but much more work has to be done to achieve real improvement. We have to bring in more resources and arrange for experts to be consulted, so that safety is improved in practical ways in oil projects.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech.

She raised a very interesting point. She talked about how, unfortunately, because of global warming, there will be more and more commercial ships in the Arctic.

I would like to hear my colleague's opinion on this bill, specifically about the provisions this bill does or does not contain with respect to these newly navigable waters.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague said, new navigable passages are opening up because of melting Arctic ice. Experts, first nations and individuals are telling us that they want more oversight, more investigators and more regulations to ensure safety, environmental protection and public safety. More tanker traffic means a greater risk of spills.

Last year, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development told us that we were not at all prepared to deal with spills in estuaries and oceans, and even less so in the Arctic, because there have not been any studies detailed enough to tell us about the

potential risks. We also do not have any studies that clearly prove existing plans will work. There are not even any emergency response plans.

The government needs to restore funding. Funding has not gone up in 24 years. Everything is out of date, and the government cannot even be bothered to answer questions, to respond to our concerns about this. We are still waiting for the government to do that, and we hope that will extend to other sectors too.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, often, when we talk about marine or air safety, we also have to consider people's perceptions.

I know that the hon. member was our deputy critic for the environment. Therefore I would like her to tell us how the people she spoke with perceive the government's ability to ensure the safety of Canadians when it comes to the environment.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for her question.

In fact, people currently have a very negative perception of the government's ability to establish credibility on environmental safety. Indeed, the Conservatives have gutted all environmental protections in the last budget implementation bills. Also, in Bill C-45, all protections for navigable waters were removed, giving completely free rein to pipeline projects. This is on top of the Conservatives' failure to implement or even consider the recommendations of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

Here we have another fact. It has been mentioned that pipelines and tankers would transport oil and diluted bitumen, but there have not been nearly enough studies about this to know how the government would respond in case of a spill.

Therefore, when the Conservatives make cuts to science and cuts to research and, on top of that, ensure that scientists are muzzled, they lose all credibility to speak about environmental protection, scientific data and facts. It is therefore difficult to trust the Conservatives when they talk about these issues, since they remove all the factual and scientific information that could reassure us.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-3, which has a rather long name, An Act to enact the Aviation Industry Indemnity Act, to amend the Aeronautics Act, the Canada Marine Act, the Marine Liability Act and the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. In short, the bill amends at least five acts and probably several others. This is an omnibus bill.

Statements by Members

How many pages are in this bill? I am surprised that the government would introduce a bill this big and not rise to speak to it. That is the first thing I noticed. Is it really to the government's advantage to defend what it is proposing? Is it to its advantage to do things the right way and inform the public of what is in the bill it introduced in the House?

We have presented our position. We will support this bill at second reading, but we have some concerns. We hope it will be carefully studied in committee. Security and economic development should go hand in hand, especially when it comes to these issues.

The St. Lawrence River is not far from my home. Neither is a refinery serviced by ships. In addition, this same river is a source of drinking water for many communities in my province. Clearly, safety is just as important as economic activity. Heaven knows that economic activity in marine transportation is important.

That is why there are a lot of pilots on the St. Lawrence River. To be able to navigate, every ship must have a specialized pilot on board who knows the river very well. That is critical for safety. The same goes for the west coast. The local conditions are unique: the currents, the winds, the tides and the channel.

Earlier, we talked about the *Exxon Valdez*. We basically want to avoid a spill. In an ideal world, we would want ships to carry their goods safely, with no environmental damage, so that everyone can have a good night's sleep. However, we are not there yet. As several members pointed out, the bill is a step in the right direction, but there is still a lot of work to be done, particularly in terms of safety.

My colleague who spoke before me mentioned the importance of setting up a committee to take a serious look at this issue with the help of experts and people in the industry who might be affected by these measures. Hearing from Canadians is of paramount importance to ensure the bill is socially and economically acceptable. There must be no voluntary or involuntary conflict between economic development and public acceptability of projects and risk management. I deplore the fact that there are often conflicts.

At the heart of this debate lies the need for sound risk management in order to avoid any harm. Our party has based its interventions on this type of management.

In closing, we must take a holistic approach to safety. Quebec City is about to lose its marine rescue sub-centre. It is ironic that, on the one hand, the government introduces a bill that supports safety requirements and, on the other hand, it reduces them. It is as if there is no comprehensive vision for safety. I hope this perspective will be brought forward in committee.

• (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for government orders has now expired. The hon. member for Louis-Hébert will have five minutes to continue his speech.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

HONG KONG

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): #####Mr. Speaker, this morning I had the pleasure of attending a breakfast hosted by the Hong Kong Parliamentary Friendship Group. This event is another reminder of the importance of Canada's increasing economic ties with Asia. Canada's bilateral relations with Hong Kong reflect our long-standing and comprehensive political, commercial, and people-to-people relationship. In addition to deep-rooted historical ties, Canada and Hong Kong share common values, among them respect for the rule of law, human rights, and individual freedom.

It is important to note that Canada and Hong Kong share in a great friendship along with close business relations. Our continued dialogue will lead to the further enhancement of our bilateral trade agreement. Canadian enterprises continue to take advantage of the uniqueness of Hong Kong, with an understanding of the opportunities that are there to tap into as our gateway to China and the emerging markets beyond China. These fast-growing markets in mainland China and other parts of Asia offer tremendous opportunities to Canadian businesses.

With the implementation of the double-taxation avoidance agreement between Hong Kong and Canada, there will be increased incentives for greater trade and investment between the two countries. It is no wonder that the World Bank has recognized Hong Kong as the second-easiest place to do business. I know that we will continue to work together to advance our mutual interests. This is good news for Canada.

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HOPE BLOOMS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize a very special group of young people who have made Halifax proud. In 2008, Hope Blooms was founded by Jessie Jollymore to engage youth in a community project. Six years later, the group has grown to 43 kids who have turned an abandoned lot in Halifax's north end into a thriving community garden and a social entrepreneurship business making delicious salad dressings they sell at the farmers' market.

Members may have seen them when they appeared on *Dragon's Den* recently. They were awarded a \$40,000 investment to expand their business and build an organically heated greenhouse so that they can work year round. In adversity, these kids only saw opportunity, and they have shown all of us that when we change the way we look at things, the things we look at change.

Hope Blooms has inspired me with their ideas, their enthusiasm, and their hard work, and they made the dragons cry. They have truly succeeded in making hope bloom in Halifax. Congratulations, Hope Blooms.

*Statements by Members***ORDER OF CANADA**

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to commend and congratulate two residents of my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville on their appointment to the Order of Canada.

William Breukelman is a pioneer in imaging and the co-founder of IMAX and other pioneering imaging companies. Under his leadership as chairman of IMAX, the corporation grew into a global entertainment company, with the production and distribution of over 100 films and 100 theatres in 18 countries.

Joe Macerollo is a world-renowned accordion player and a founding member of the Mississauga Arts Council. Macerollo is known for being a pioneer of contemporary music and for bringing the classical accordion into Canadian concert halls. In addition to performing live, on radio, and on TV, Macerollo has been active in arts communities throughout Canada since 1981.

As the member of Parliament for Mississauga—East Cooksville, and on behalf of my constituents, it is with great pleasure that I congratulate these gentlemen for their magnificent achievements and their appointment to the Order of Canada.

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NORTHUMBERLAND FERRIES LIMITED

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Northumberland ferry service between Wood Islands in my riding and Caribou, Nova Scotia, is a critical economic and transportation link for Prince Edward Island. Each year, the ferry takes nearly half a million passengers and about 200,000 vehicles between the island and Nova Scotia. The economic impact is worth about \$27 million to the province of Prince Edward Island.

The survival of this service relies on a contract with the federal government, and the current contract expires at the end of March. The last time the contract was up for renewal, the government nearly ended the service before signing a one-year deal and then a three-year deal. I call on the government this time to do the right thing and put a long-term deal in place to secure the future of this critical transportation link for the thousands of people who travel between Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia.

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MURRAY CARDIFF

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Murray Cardiff, a long-time resident of Huron County, passed away on October 31, 2013. Murray served the riding as the member of Parliament for Huron—Bruce from 1980 to 1993. During his time in Ottawa, Murray was parliamentary secretary to the solicitor general, parliamentary secretary to the minister of agriculture, and parliamentary secretary to the president of the Privy Council.

Murray was a pillar in his community and always encouraged those around him to get involved with their local government. He was an inspiration as a farmer, dedicated politician, husband, father, and grandfather. Murray never shied away from a meeting in his Brussels office and was active in his community well after his time on Parliament Hill. He was a charter member of the Brussels Optimist Club and a member of the Brussels Legion.

Murray Cardiff was a shining example of how a member of Parliament should represent their constituents: hard-working, dedicated, and relentless.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to Murray's wife Betty, their children, and their extended family. Murray will be missed, but he will not be forgotten,

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● (1405)

ROYAL WESTMINSTER REGIMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour the 150th anniversary of the Royal Westminster Regiment and to thank the men and women of the regiment for their significant contribution to peacekeeping and disaster relief, and in defence of Canada.

The Royal Westminster Regiment served in the Boer War, in both world wars, with the UN and NATO in Korea, Bosnia, Croatia, Cyprus, the Golan Heights, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. It has also been on the front lines in disaster relief, including the Okanagan wildfires, Fraser River floods, and the 1898 Great Fire.

Through it all, the Royal Westminster Regiment has been a role model for courage, dedication, and sacrifice. Many members of the regiment have given their lives for Canada and for world peace.

A few years ago, I attended the funeral of Master Corporal Colin Bason, who was killed in action in Afghanistan. Today we pay tribute to Master Corporal Bason and all of the other soldiers and personnel of the Royal Westminster Regiment who have served this country with honour for 150 years.

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155TH ANNIVERSARY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is Douglas Day, an important anniversary day for the province of British Columbia because 155 years ago, at the Fort Langley trading post, Governor James Douglas read the royal proclamation and British Columbia was born.

Last Saturday, people gathered at the Fort Langley National Historic Site to commemorate this important historic event. The family-fun celebration featured the Guyanese heritage of Sir James Douglas with the sights and sounds of the Caribbean. It also showcased a re-enactment of the royal proclamation, an exciting parade, flag raising and much more.

I want to thank Bays Blackhall, Parks Canada, the Guyanese Canadian Cultural Association and the Fort Langley Legacy Foundation for their work in helping us put on this incredible celebration.

I hope the House will join me in wishing British Columbia a happy 155th birthday.

*Statements by Members***GOVERNOR GENERAL'S HISTORY AWARD**

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Boomtown Trail Community Initiatives Society, which has been awarded the 2013 Governor General's History Award for community programming for its Bringing History and Culture to Life project.

The award aims to recognize Canada's top honours in the field of history and heritage. This award highlights the very best in Canadian achievements to ensure our national past has a vibrant presence in our society today.

The Bringing History and Culture to Life project is based on colourful characters from the past with entertaining and important stories to tell. The characters are portrayed by dedicated volunteers who take great pride in sharing their characters' experiences and legacies, important characters such as Gabriel Dumont, James Gadsby, and Irene Parlby, portrayed by Christie Mason. In 1921, Irene Parlby was elected as the provincial MLA for the riding of Lacombe, Alberta, holding the seat for 14 years. She was the first woman cabinet minister in Alberta and a member of the Famous Five, who were instrumental in the court case that established women were "qualified persons" in the meaning of the Constitution.

Congratulations to Ken Duncan and all the volunteers at the Boomtown Trail Community Initiatives Society for their hard work in showcasing the historical breadth of Alberta.

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[Translation]

FRANCIS AUDET

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise today to recognize the work of Francis Audet, a true artist from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

An engineer by training, this extremely talented amateur photographer has captured magnificent images of Lac-Saint-Charles and other places through the lens of his camera. His photos, which have appeared in the prestigious *National Geographic* and the *National Post*, have helped the entire world discover the splendours of this area of Quebec.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Audet on the launch of his book, *Le lac Saint-Charles, perle de Québec*, which has photos of the lake taken in all four seasons, as well as the stories of local residents and historical texts that underscore the role of the lake in the region's economic development. This book is a true gem to flip through and to read.

The people of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles are proud to acknowledge the work of this talented citizen and wish him a brilliant career as an artist.

● (1410)

[English]

FOOD LABELLING

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to rise to recognize the Canadian Beverage Association, whose members directly employ almost 20,000 people here in Canada.

Today the Canadian Beverage Association will share the steps it is taking to increase nutritional knowledge and to make nutritional information easier to understand through its Clear on Calories initiative. I want to commend it for the steps it is taking.

Our government has always supported the food and beverage sector. For example, we provided support to the industry through the growing forward framework and have launched the food labelling modernization initiative, which focuses on regulations and policies related to labelling requirements.

This industry is a pivotal part of our local and national economies. I know all members in the House of Commons will join me in acknowledging this important industry.

* * *

CANCER AWARENESS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this past August 15 was a day our family will never forget, for that day my lovely wife Barb was found to have cancer.

A few short or long weeks later, depending on how one looks at it, after a short regime of radiation, she faced her surgery. Then came 13 bumpy days in hospital. Barbara returned home to several weeks of home care, and I was nurse number one. Then on November 11 we got the good news. The surgeon says they got all of the cancer, which brings me to the point of my statement today.

I want everyone here today to consider the situation. People have to be on their guard. Like a tactician, we have to know the enemy before the battle. Learn the symptoms of cancer. Get those colonoscopies, mammograms, and PAP smears. Gentlemen, after the PSA test when the doctor says, "Assume the position", when they are finished, be sure to thank them because they may well be saving a life.

As for all of the people in this country and around the world living with cancer, may God bless them and keep them safe.

* * *

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to Typhoon Haiyan, our government has deployed hundreds of members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

We have deployed planes, helicopters, medical help, engineers and water purification systems.

Our aircraft will continue to deliver supplies and assistance as quickly as possible. Our helicopters will allow members of the Canadian Armed Forces and our partners to reach remote locations to deliver assistance. Our engineers will open roads. Our water systems will be critical in preventing the spread of illness amongst those affected by the typhoon.

Just this afternoon another water purification unit and another helicopter are scheduled to leave Trenton. These assets will be instrumental in providing much needed relief.

On behalf of all hon. members and all Canadians, I would like to extend my gratitude to the hard work of our men and women in uniform. Our thoughts and condolences go out to all those who have been affected by Typhoon Haiyan and this terrible tragedy.

* * *

POLITICAL DONATIONS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives would love to have us forget that Rob Ford, the Prime Minister's fishing buddy, is one of them.

For instance, until a few days ago one could go to their website and download a video of Rob Ford introducing the Prime Minister at a campaign rally in Brampton. Now that has somehow vanished.

What has not vanished is the official record that shows Rob Ford to be a generous Conservative donor. He has given thousands of dollars over the years, including to Conservative members from Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Don Valley East, the government House leader, and the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Of course, cronyism is reciprocal. Numerous Conservatives have given generously to get Rob Ford elected, including the Minister of Labour, the Minister of Natural Resources, the Minister of State for Sport, and the Conservative member for Willowdale, just to name a few.

The Ford nation is alive and well, and living across the aisle. I am wondering if they are going to support him in his attempt to be the new Conservative leader.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the Liberal leader shows that he is out of touch with Canadians on crime.

Yesterday, he shockingly announced that he is opposed to mandatory minimum sentences for child molesters. Canadians are demanding that he explain his position to families of victims who must live every day with the consequences of these horrific crimes.

On the other hand, not only does our government continue to support mandatory prison sentences for child sex offenders, we announced in our Speech from the Throne that we will soon introduce legislation to ensure that multiple crimes bring multiple consecutive sentences.

This legislation will better protect children from a range of crimes, including child pornography, while ensuring that convicted criminals receive tougher sentences, as they should.

Oral Questions

The real question is this: when will the Liberal leader start putting the rights of victims, including our children, ahead of the rights of sexual predators?

* * *

● (1415)

CITY OF TORONTO

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, representing a riding in my city of Toronto is an honour.

Toronto is a unique and wonderful city, with people working together every day to make life better for themselves, their kids and each other. It has challenges too. Gridlock, housing and youth unemployment stand out as pressing issues. However, tackling these issues is delayed while the Prime Minister's fishing buddy hijacks the public discourse with his sideshow.

Two weeks and all the Prime Minister's Office has to say is that it is troubling. Well, it is far more than troubling. Mayor Ford has broken the public trust and made my city an international laughingstock.

Toronto deserves better. It deserves a mayor who treats the city and its citizens with respect. It is time for the so-called tough on crime Conservatives to stand up for Toronto and tell their friend, the mayor, that it is time to go.

* * *

TELEVISION CHANNELS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Bell Media's president, Kevin Crull, criticized our government's initiative on unbundling. On the other hand, my constituents in the great riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke have been vocal about having more choice with television packages than what is currently being offered by providers.

Our government believes that Canadian families should be able to choose the combination of television channels they want. We have committed to requiring channels to be unbundled while protecting Canadian jobs.

Canadians deserve an à la carte, pick-and-pay, unbundled selection of channels, and that is what our government will deliver. While companies look out for their bottom lines, our government is looking out for everyday Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 12 days ago, Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines, creating one of the greatest humanitarian crises in the world's history.

Oral Questions

Would the Prime Minister please update the House on this situation and Canada's plans to help?

[Translation]

Would the Prime Minister tell the House what Canada is doing to help the Filipino people during this crisis?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question.

[English]

Obviously, this is a massive humanitarian crisis. I am proud to say that the Government of Canada has been there. Obviously, we are supporting this crisis financially. We provided a matching fund that we encourage our citizens to donate to. I know, particularly, our Filipino Canadian friends across the country are raising money and sending their support. We are providing some flexibility in immigration.

As members know, there are now hundreds of members of the Canadian Armed Forces and other Canadian officials who are present on the ground. Obviously, we are very proud of the work they are doing to assist.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister regret his office's involvement in the attempts to cover up the Senate expense scandal?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand and I reject the premise of that question.

When I was made aware of the situation, I took immediate action. Clearly, Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy were held accountable for their actions.

• (1420)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, can the Prime Minister tell us if anyone in his office has been questioned by the RCMP about Senate expenses? Who in his office has been questioned?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy are under investigation. Our office will co-operate fully with the authorities.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to Mike Duffy's lawyer, Janice Payne, on February 20, the Prime Minister's Office offered up Chris Woodcock and Patrick Rogers to help him craft lines in the story. Mike Duffy was given aid by two people in the Prime Minister's Office.

Would the Prime Minister confirm that, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this matter is the responsibility of Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy. Mr. Duffy knew what the truth was. Mr. Duffy chose to say something else to the public. For that reason, Mr. Wright and Mr.

Duffy have been held accountable. In fact, I took action on this matter some six months ago.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question is clear and the Prime Minister is not answering.

Did Chris Woodcock, Patrick Rogers, or Stephen Lecce ever tell Mike Duffy to say that he had repaid his expenses thanks to a loan that he would have obtained from the Royal Bank, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, in terms of my office, the responsibility for this was with Mr. Wright, the chief of staff. He has taken that responsibility and been very clear. On that matter, he has been held accountable. Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy have been sanctioned appropriately and, on my part, I did that some six months ago.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all parliamentarians are united in expressing our sympathy to the people of the Philippines in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan.

Liberals wish to offer our full support for the \$20 million in aid that the government has provided, in addition to matching private donations.

Given lessons we all learned from the tragedy in Haiti, would the government consider two other measures? Would it extend the deadline for matching funds until the end of the calendar year, and would it grant visa extensions for workers, students and temporary workers from the typhoon area?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the support of the Liberal Party for this matter. I think it is a matter in which all Canadians are united. This is a humanitarian tragedy of immense dimensions that deeply touches Canadians across the country, and I can, of course, assure the hon. member that as we move forward we will apply the appropriate flexibility on all of these matters.

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41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last spring Justice Mosley characterized Conservative judicial tactics as "trench warfare" to delay the voter suppression investigation. We have now learned that the PM's deputy chief of staff, Jenni Byrne, now running the campaign in Brandon, has engaged in this obstructionism, directing at least one witness to needlessly delay meeting with investigators for months.

Can the Prime Minister inform the House what he knows, this time, about his own office's involvement in hindering, yet again, a serious investigation?

*Oral Questions***ETHICS**

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Of course, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The robocalls that took place in Guelph are completely unacceptable. I gather Liberal robocalls have already been sanctioned. Any other unacceptable robocalls are just that. The party is assisting in making sure those responsible are held accountable, and I can assure the House that if the Liberal Party were just as co-operative on trying to find that \$40 million, it might have found it by now.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will take no lessons on accountability from a man whose fishing buddy is Rob Ford.

[*Translation*]

Canadians are worried that the Prime Minister is paying little attention to the integrity of the electoral process.

Why does the Prime Minister, time after time, put the interests of his party ahead of the interests of Canadians? Why does he consistently show an obvious lack of respect for the investigators who work to support the democratic process?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that statement is completely untrue.

[*English*]

The hon. member could take lessons on accountability on a whole bunch of things. For instance, I know he opposes any kind of mandatory prison sentences for those who commit violent crime in this country. He should believe in some accountability on that. Of course, when it comes to terrorism, we saw his first reaction to terrorists: to make excuses for them, that it is all social exclusion. It is time the Liberal Party learned that our justice system is based on accountability.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just said that in the robocalls case he would like to ensure that those responsible are held accountable. If that is the case, why did the Prime Minister hire someone as his deputy chief of staff whose previous job was covering up the voter suppression scandal?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, that is completely false. As I have already said, inappropriate Liberal robocalls in that particular election have already been sanctioned. We have been very clear. We do not accept what took place in Guelph, and we expect those who are responsible to be held accountable. We have been assisting authorities with that.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Actually, Mr. Speaker, new emails show that former director of political operations for the Conservative Party, Jenni Byrne, instructed Conservative Party campaign staff not to cooperate with the RCMP in its investigation of illegal voter suppression calls. Why did he hire her?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party has been cooperating fully with Elections Canada investigators, has given them all and any information requested and will continue to do so, because what occurred in Guelph is not acceptable to this party, and we will ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, why has he put her in charge of trying to cover up the Senate scandal? Is it the same job and the same Jenni Byrne, just a different scandal?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition makes allegations against somebody who has not done anything. We know in the case of the particular Senate issue, Mr. Wright and Mr. Duffy are responsible and are being held accountable, but once again, that tactic reminds me, whenever I look at the NDP, of the old saying: “when you throw mud, you lose ground”.

* * *

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Actually, Mr. Speaker, it is Conservative staffers who claim that Michael Sona confessed his role in the voter suppression scandal to them just days before the election, but travel records show that Michael Sona was, in fact, on a beach in Aruba at precisely the moment that he supposedly confessed to his Conservative Party friends.

Did anyone in the Prime Minister's Office or the Conservative Party direct these staffers to testify against Michael Sona? The question is clear. Let us hear an answer.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the authorities have laid charges in this particular case. The leader of the NDP appears to want to act as the defence attorney.

Our position is that those who are responsible should be held accountable, and we have been assisting Elections Canada with any and all information.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Michael Sona was on the beach in flip-flops precisely at the moment the Conservatives claimed he was going to confess his role. So, which of the two stories is true?

As usual, we have the Prime Minister's version of events and then we have the truth. Would he finally explain himself?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the authorities have laid charges in this particular case. The case is before the courts. It appears that the leader of the NDP wants to act as the defence attorney, but our position is that those actions were unacceptable. Those who are responsible should be held accountable. We will continue to assist Elections Canada with its investigation.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, responsibility is precisely the issue here, but since this case involves the Prime Minister's Office, we are talking about the Prime Minister's responsibility.

Did anyone in the Conservative Party tell their employees to testify against Michael Sona or not?

Oral Questions

•(1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party has been assisting Elections Canada with its investigation.

[English]

It is our responsibility. We have been very clear. The actions that occurred in Guelph are unacceptable. Any and all information that we have has been given to Elections Canada, and we will continue to work with them, notwithstanding the efforts of the leader of the NDP to apparently clear certain individuals.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on November 7, the Prime Minister claimed that his office “is not being investigated by the RCMP”. Literally one minute later he said, “I can assure the House that the Prime Minister's Office has, at all times and in all manner, provided all and any information that the RCMP is requesting”, a little bit like we just heard now.

Which is it? Is the Prime Minister's Office being investigated, or is the Prime Minister's Office not being investigated? Which is it? Both cannot be true.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will explain it again to the leader of the NDP. To my knowledge, the Prime Minister's Office is not being investigated. The RCMP has not said any such thing. What we have said is that we continue to work with the RCMP and provide it with any and all information required.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Now there is a classic, Mr. Speaker: “to my knowledge”. That is a new one. It is in the top 10 of weasel words.

On June 5, the Prime Minister said that no one in his office knew about Nigel Wright's—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. The Leader of the Opposition has the floor. I would encourage him, as I mentioned a little while ago, that maybe staying away from animal references might help.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): I am just such a puppy dog on this, Mr. Speaker.

On June 5, the Prime Minister said that no one in his office knew about Nigel Wright's \$90,000 payoff to Mike Duffy. Then on October 24, he said that a few people knew. On November 5, the Prime Minister changed his story yet again and said:

...Mr. Wright has acknowledged that these were his actions, that he took them himself using his own resources, and he executed them.

Which of those three statements is true?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me just address the preamble of that question. When I say I have no knowledge that the RCMP is investigating my office, what is important is that the leader of the NDP has no knowledge to that effect either.

Nevertheless, he gets up and makes the allegation, which is why, as Canadians look at him and see him throwing mud, he is losing ground.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there really is something wrong when he thinks that it is throwing mud when all we are doing is asking the Prime Minister to tell the truth.

[Translation]

How many documents did the Prime Minister's Office provide to the RCMP? This is a clear, specific question.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are providing the RCMP with any assistance they ask for.

[English]

Once again, I have been very clear on this matter. The facts of this have been known since May. I acted as soon as I knew those facts.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a government that now pretends it always thought the Wright-Duffy deal was distasteful, it has promoted a lot of PMO staffers for helping to cover it up. They have all been conveniently moved away from the Prime Minister.

If the Conservatives care about ethics, why are these people still on the public payroll? Did the Minister of State for Finance, the heritage minister or the natural resources minister know about their staffers' misdeeds before they were told to hire them? Will just one of those ministers stand and answer the question?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what else needs to be said. Here yet again the Liberals go defending these three senators and disgraced former Liberal Senator Mac Harb, who defrauded Canadian taxpayers of thousands of dollars. They stood in the way of the Senate seeking accountability for them. They stand every day in the House looking to defend the status quo in the Senate. I guess that is the Liberals' position, always entitled to their entitlements.

On this side of the House, we will stand up for Canadian taxpayers day in and day out, even if that means challenging the status quo.

•(1435)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, documents tabled in Parliament show the paper trail between the Prime Minister's Office and Mike Duffy stretches back to last December. In February, the PMO had a detailed email that laid out an elaborate cover-up scheme, including payment of hush money. Lawyers negotiated agreements. Tens of thousands of dollars changed hands. Audit work was disrupted. A communications plan scripted Mike Duffy to lie.

Does the Prime Minister still claim there has never been a shred of paper anywhere in his government about this mess?

Oral Questions

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, even a few minutes ago, we are assisting as best we can with anything that the RCMP has asked.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, access to information requests to get the government's paper trail were submitted on June 7. On June 28, it claimed there was none. However, Duffy says that the email chains are massive. He tabled some of them. The police say that they got hundreds of pages of emails from Nigel Wright.

In the news conference last May from Peru, the Prime Minister said that Wright was acting in his official capacity as chief of staff, so that paperwork belongs to the Government of Canada.

How did it get stolen? What other evidence has been removed or destroyed?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. This is coming from a member who was in a government that went to the Supreme Court of Canada to protect the Access to Information Act and stop minister's offices from being subject to that act

At the same time, it is quite clear that Nigel Wright has accepted full and sole responsibility for this. He is prepared to accept the consequences of that.

It is also very clear that the Liberals will do anything to protect the status quo in the Senate. They have proved that by defending these three disgraced senators and former disgraced Liberal Senator Mac Harb. They will go to the wall every day for disgraced senators but not for taxpayers. That is why they are over there.

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GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives once talked about transparency and accountability with a passion. They were going to fix the mess the Liberals created and left behind.

Instead, the Conservatives have become part of the problem. They will not even protect the brave employees who blow the whistle on Conservative corruption and mismanagement. They use loopholes to avoid being accountable when they break conflict of interest rules.

Will the minister actually take action and support our proposals to reform and review the Conflict of Interest Act?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House are proud of the legislation that we put forward right at the start of this government to ensure that there was more accountability for activity within government and the activity of those who were in government who then went outside of government. We are proud of that legislation. We believe it has done a great job to change the mentality in this place.

If the hon. member has some suggestions, as we are waiting for the reports from various commissioners on some changes that could be improvements, we would be happy to have his suggestions as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservative ministers and members are in cabinet one day, and the next, they are on the other side of the table pocketing huge paycheques as lobbyists. Any Canadian will tell you that this is clearly a conflict of interest, but because of a loophole in the legal system, it is perfectly legal. With people like Mike Duffy and Rob Ford out there, we need real reform. We have put forward five solutions. Will the minister implement them?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, our record is very clear. With respect to accountability to the House and in this city, we will make positive changes. We can also talk about changes that might be made in the future.

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● (1440)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was great having whistle-blowers to expose the secrets of the Liberal sponsorship scandal, but when the Conservatives are the target, suddenly they are not too happy about it. Instead of promoting transparency and protecting whistle-blowers like Sylvie Therrien, the Conservatives are punishing them. It is unacceptable.

The Access to Information Act has become completely ineffective. Instead of acting like Liberals, the Conservatives should go back to their roots, give the commissioner greater powers and ensure that the legislation applies to the scammers in the Senate. When will this government really be transparent?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our record is also clear regarding access to information. We are providing more responses to access to information requests. Last year, for example, there were 55,000 responses to information requests. Our record is clear. There may be some changes in the future. If the commissioner and the opposition propose any positive changes, we would be happy to discuss them.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2006, the Prime Minister promised Canadians that he would clean up the culture of corruption in Ottawa. Fast forward to today and it is clear that he has lost his ethical way.

Let us look at access to information. It is a key tool for exposing cronyism, waste, and government corruption. However, under the Conservative government, the complaints are skyrocketing, the documents are being redacted until they look like Swiss cheese, and the Prime Minister is lording over the most opaque and secretive government in memory.

Rather than slip further down the ethical scale, will the Conservatives finally agree to reform the Access to Information Act?

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we would be happy to put on the record some of the actual statistics. Last year, our government processed nearly 54,000 access to information requests, a 27% increase over the previous year. We also released a record number of materials, over six million pages.

Our record is clear when it comes to transparency. Of course, we are waiting for the commissioner's report on other changes that she would suggest. If the opposition has other positive changes, we would consider those as well.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, Heinz announced that it is closing its plant in Leamington, Ontario, beginning in June, 2014, leaving many of my constituents looking for work in my riding of Chatham-Kent—Essex. When I learned of the decision, I contacted federal departments to ensure that my constituents would receive all of the help available to them.

Could the Minister of Employment update the House on what the government is doing to ensure that those affected are aware of and accessing the government programs and services available and to help connect these individuals with available jobs in my riding?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Chatham-Kent—Essex. I know we all feel for those folks in Leamington who have been affected by these layoffs, as well as the area farmers.

I can assure the member that my ministry is doing everything it can to reach out and provide information sessions, to connect people to available jobs, and to make available the job bank, job alert, and job match features to ensure that those who qualify are eligible to receive employment insurance promptly to provide the full suite of training programs. We will do everything we can to help those who are facing some tough times down in Leamington. We wish them well.

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[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a new report on greenhouse gas emissions puts Canada at the bottom of the list, ahead of only Iran, Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia. The report indicates that the Conservatives have no plan to implement greenhouse gas reduction policies. While Canadians are making changes because they are concerned about climate change, the Conservatives do not want to make major polluters pay. Why?

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address this question.

The facts are that our government is committed to protecting the environment. That is why our Conservative government announced that we would be unveiling a new national conservation plan.

Since we formed government, the facts are that we have created two national marine conservation areas, three marine protected areas, three national wildlife areas, two national parks, and one historic site. The total area of lands that we have protected is an area that is twice the size of Vancouver Island. Our record speaks for itself.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is rhetoric, and rhetoric is not going to get the job done when it comes to climate change.

While we are talking numbers, Canada is now rated 55th out of 58 countries. The Conservatives have failed to address climate change in any real, meaningful way. They have failed to make the polluters pay for the pollution they create.

People are gathered from around the world in Warsaw right now to develop a post-2020 climate change plan. Will the government work with the international community to develop a real plan?

• (1445)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say we will, absolutely. Our government has taken a leadership role in international climate change efforts. We have been clear that any international agreement must be fair and effective and include commitments from all major emitters.

Meanwhile, we have taken real action domestically and we are seeing results. Thanks to our actions, carbon emissions will go down close to 130 megatonnes from what they would have been under the Liberals. We have done it all without a \$20-billion carbon tax that the NDP would tax on everyone.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, four years after a helicopter crashed off the coast of Newfoundland killing 17 people, Conservatives are refusing to take action to better protect offshore oil workers. New federal safety regulations do not include the Transportation Safety Board's recommendation that an aircraft should be able to operate for 30 minutes after complete loss of oil, a requirement that would have prevented this tragedy.

Why will the Conservatives not agree to implement this important recommendation?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we always continue to work to have safe industry in the air, maritime, and rail. We will continue to work very hard with the Transportation Safety Board and we continue to work to have safer air travel for travellers and workers.

Oral Questions

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, new Canadian Forces helicopters from Sikorsky, the same manufacturer of the chopper that crashed in 2009, are required to have a 30-minute run dry capability, just like all other class A helicopters.

Why do offshore workers not deserve the same protection? It is the government's responsibility to ensure the safety of Canadians. Why is protecting offshore oil workers not a priority for the Conservative government?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to strengthening aviation safety for all Canadians. Transport Canada reviewed the Transportation Safety Board report and our government has taken action to address the recommendations.

Transport Canada worked with the industry to develop these new regulations, which will improve the safety of offshore helicopter operations for both passengers and crew.

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41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party continually breaks Canada's election laws, from the in-and-out money laundering scheme to the fraudulent phone calls in the last general election. Spending limits seem to have no meaning to the Conservatives, from Peter Penashue to the current members of the Conservative caucus. Even the minister from Saint Boniface admits to overspending in her last election.

When are we finally going to see the legislation that will clamp down on the constant electoral abuse by the Conservative Party? The Conservative government promised. When are we going to see it?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform has already answered that. We are working very diligently to bring forward some reforms which will be in place for the next election.

However, when the member talks about those people who are breaking the law, let us talk about the members who surround him: the member for Guelph, fined \$4,900 for sending out a robocall; the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, a \$2,500 fine for a robocall; the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville violated the Canada Elections Act by failing to repay loans for his 2000 leadership campaign; the member for Vancouver Centre violated the Canada Elections Act; former Liberal MPs, Dryden and Volpe, violated the Canada Elections Act.

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[*Translation*]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last budget, the Prime Minister made training for workers his priority. However, this is turning into a fiasco. The government is taking away a transfer to the provinces and asking them to fund a new program that it concocted. Every provincial

premier has criticized this bad federal initiative undertaken at the expense of workers and the Canadian economy.

Will the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs finally get down to work? Will he make his colleagues work with the provinces and not against them?

● (1450)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposite holds true. A week ago, I had a very good meeting with provincial ministers concerning the labour market. We agreed to continue our discussions on the Canada job grant. It is an effort in good faith to ensure that there will be jobs for Canadians who receive training and to increase private sector investment in worker training. That makes good sense and I look forward to working closely with the provinces to that end.

* * *

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives are making a mess of EI. Even a right-wing report released yesterday accused the Conservatives of using EI as a cash cow.

Just like the Liberals before them, the Conservatives simply do not get it: EI belongs to the people who paid for it. Now people are waiting longer, fewer than ever qualify, and those who do are being forced into lower-paying jobs.

When will the Conservatives stop attacking EI and start helping unemployed Canadians get back on their feet?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in point of fact, the same rules of eligibility exist for employment insurance.

If there is an attack on the unemployed, it comes from the NDP, who want to massively increase EI premiums and CPP premiums. They want to add taxes on jobs. When we increase taxes on jobs, guess what? There are fewer jobs. The NDP's policy on EI is a job-destruction policy.

We are continuing to reduce EI premiums. We are continuing to create jobs. Over 1.1 million net new jobs were created in the last four years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in reality, more and more Canadians are paying for the employment insurance program without being able to benefit from it at all.

Oral Questions

Even though the program is paid for by employees and employers, the Conservatives use it for everyday expenses. According to the most recent Statistics Canada data, there are six unemployed Canadians for every vacant position. Furthermore, the government brags about creating jobs and at the same time harasses seasonal workers and empties out the regions.

When will we have an accessible employment insurance system that takes into account the realities of the labour market?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, employment insurance continues to be available to Canadians who need it.

The NDP's plan would increase taxes on jobs. For example, the NDP wants an \$8 billion increase in benefits, which represents an increase of 65¢, or 40%, in employment insurance contributions. I know that the NDP has never created jobs and it does not understand job creation. By increasing taxes on jobs, it will kill jobs.

This government is creating jobs for Canadians.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to protecting children, our government's record is unequivocal. We have already passed mandatory prison sentences for child sexual offences, including aggravated sexual assault and Internet luring. Unbelievably, yesterday, when the Liberal leader was asked whether he would repeal these tougher sentences, he said, "No, I wouldn't rule out repealing mandatory minimums for anyone."

While the Liberals waffle, can the Minister of Justice explain how our government will strengthen sentencing for child sexual offenders?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while sexual assault against children in Canada is actually on the rise, hearing that the Liberal leader is talking about repealing mandatory sentences for sexual predators is, frankly, appalling.

Both Liberal and Conservative governments have passed mandatory prison sentences. This includes an omnibus crime bill that was introduced in 1968 by—wait for it—the then justice minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

Our government will soon introduce legislation to ensure multiple child sex offenders serve consecutive sentences. I hope that the Liberal Party and all parties present will support this important protection for Canadian children.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Employment has alluded to what he might be doing for the plant workers in Leamington.

Is the government going to do anything for the farmers who have invested over \$1,500 for every acre of tomatoes and have no market for their tomatoes next year?

• (1455)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things. Of course we have a full suite of business risk management programs for farmers such as that.

We continue, with the Minister of International Trade and the Prime Minister, tracking down these great trade opportunities around the world. We continue to work on behalf of farmers in both those events.

I know the member from Chatham has had farm round tables talking about other alternatives for those farmers, and I have attended some of them down in his area. They trust this government to have their best interests at heart.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, drug shortages are a public health issue.

In recent years, those shortages have had a significant impact on the health of Canadians, the practices of health care professionals and system costs.

The NDP wants pharmaceutical companies to be required to report any disruption in the drug supply.

Will the government support our bill, which is designed to protect the health and safety of Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can reassure the member that I recently announced a pan-Canadian strategy that is working with all of the provinces and territories and the drug companies to manage and prevent shortages and reduce their impact.

Part of that is also advance notices for shortages, including offering information on alternative treatments to physicians so that they can best take care of their patients.

I can reassure the member that I have also given the industry a very clear message that if this voluntary approach does not work, we will move to a mandatory approach.

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CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was concerned today to read that the president of Bell Media had delivered a speech warning Canadians about television unbundling.

With television bundling, cable giants force their customers to pay for channels they do not want to watch in order to access channels they do want to watch.

Bell Canada refuses to move powerful cellular antennae just 13 metres from a child's bedroom in Oakville, and now Bell is fighting consumer choice on cable TV.

Will the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister update the House on whether the government will continue implementing its throne speech commitments to defend consumers?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that Canadian families work very hard every single day, and they play by the rules. We know that every dollar counts for Canadian families. At the same time, we understand that companies are going to watch out for their bottom line.

It is our responsibility to look out for the bottom line of Canadian families. We believe that unbundling is a positive step to helping Canadian families. That is why last week the government directed the CRTC, under section 15 of the Broadcasting Act, to report back on options to fulfill this commitment by April 30, 2014.

Canadians deserve an à la carte option for their cable TV packages.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, housing markets across this country are facing different realities. Some are overheating and the minister must step in to calm things down. However, that is not the case everywhere.

The Government of Quebec is concerned about how the stricter incoming mortgage rules are going to affect the Quebec economy.

We understand the consequences of excessive household debt. However, before intervening, will the Minister of Finance take into account Quebec's concerns and consider mitigation measures for regions where the housing market is not overheating?

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we constantly monitor the housing market to ensure its ongoing stability.

That is why we took prudent action to strengthen the housing market by reducing the maximum mortgage period to 25 years on government-insured mortgages, lowering the maximum amount lenders can provide when refinancing mortgages to 80%, withdrawing taxpayer backing on home equity lines of credit provided by lenders, and reducing risk for taxpayers by limiting the use of portfolio insurance.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the Citizens Climate Lobby is on the Hill this week calling on MPs to put a price on carbon pollution, specifically a carbon fee and dividend system.

Oral Questions

Fee and dividend is far more effective than cap and trade. It is a revenue neutral fee that punishes pollution, puts money into taxpayers' pockets, and creates jobs.

Will the Conservatives protect the environment and taxpayers by supporting carbon fee and dividend?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking action to address climate change. We have introduced new emissions regulations for vehicles and we were the first major coal user to ban construction of traditional coal-fired plants.

Our actions speak for themselves. They are working. Carbon emissions will go down close to 130 megatonnes from what they would have been under the Liberals. Again, we are doing all this without a carbon tax, a tax that would raise the price of everything for Canadian families. We are not going there.

* * *

● (1500)

[Translation]

ETHICS

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every time we ask the Conservatives about the involvement of the Prime Minister's Office in the Senate expense scandal, they seem to immediately forget the question and resort to the same meaningless lines.

We want to know which documents were handed over to the RCMP. We want to know which version of the story—because there are several—is accurate. We never get an answer. Here is another question.

Did Nigel Wright contact the Prime Minister's Office after he was contacted by the RCMP? Canadians deserve an answer.

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, Nigel Wright has accepted sole and full responsibility. What is very clear is that had the Prime Minister known about this scheme, he would in no way have allowed it to happen. Of course, we are continuing to assist the authorities in this investigation.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the Governor General's History Awards: Catherine MacDonald, Matt Henderson, Neil Orford, Romy Cooper, Graeme Cotton, Lucie Jean-Mercier, Rachel Collishaw, Roy Mills, William C. Wicken, René Binette, Maria Luisa Romano, Ken Duncan, Ray Reckseidler, Julie Dumont, and Catherine Perron.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

*Government Orders***BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-2 gives communities real and meaningful input on decisions on drug injection facilities that can have a serious impact on those communities. In my November 7 Thursday statement, I had hoped that after hearing from their constituents last week, the New Democrats would end their filibuster of the bill, but that did not happen.

It is important that this key bill make progress this fall. Therefore, we will continue debating that bill on Thursday. That means that Tuesday, November 26, will now be the fourth allotted day.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

OFFSHORE HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

The House resumed from October 31 consideration of the motion that Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to stand and speak for a few moments on Bill C-5, an act to amend the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and other acts and to provide for certain other measures. This is a piece of legislation that exists as a result of negotiations that have been going on for literally 12 years between the federal government, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia. It mirrors legislation that has already been passed in both of those provincial legislatures, so we will not be amending it here. If we were to do so, it would mean that they would have to go back to the drawing board.

Bill C-5 is an attempt to strengthen offshore health and safety practices in the oil and gas industry, which have been separated and left to regulation. That is a problem that I have certainly seen with other legislation. In my former jurisdiction of Nova Scotia, the government for 20 years did the same thing with the Trade Union Act, on the one hand, and with health and safety legislation on the other. What we found out, certainly in the case of health and safety legislation, was that it was not good enough to do it all by regulation. We had to make sure that the rules of the road, the principles, were properly articulated. The regulations would be there to make sure that those principles were carried forward.

It is good to see that the three governments involved here see that this is important to have done. Therefore, we will be supporting the bill at second reading.

The bill would put the practice into legislation based on three basic principles. Number one is that offshore occupational health and safety laws must provide workers with protection that is at least as good as what exists for onshore workers. This is a situation that has existed for far too many years and is finally being addressed here. Number two is the protection of employee rights; that is, to know, to

participate, to refuse, and to be protected from reprisal will be covered in the bill. Number three is support for an occupational health and safety culture that recognizes the shared responsibility in the workplace.

We support this legislation. We think it is a step in the right direction for offshore safety, but more work still needs to be done. We hope that the federal government continues to work with the provinces to strengthen offshore safety regulations and that an independent stand-alone safety regulator is created for the future. That last point is something that came out of the Wells commission that recommended that a stand-alone regulator be put in place. It was something that was not agreed to by the parties and therefore does not exist. We think it is very important. I am going to speak a little more about that here this afternoon.

As usual, a bill like this comes to the floor of the legislature as a result of hard lessons, and in this case, lessons learned from years of offshore tragedies.

It has been more than 30 years since Canada's worse offshore disaster. In 1982, 84 people were killed when the drill rig *Ocean Ranger* sank off Newfoundland. A royal commission was subsequently convened in 1984, and that commission criticized the industry for poor safety training and equipment and lax inspections.

I want to take a moment to read a section from a book that was written by a good friend of mine, someone who lost her brother in that disaster back in 1982.

● (1505)

Susan Dodd wrote an exceptional piece of work called *The Ocean Ranger, Remaking the Promise of Oil*, which not only talks about that disaster, what led to it, what resulted from it, and the devastation it caused to the families involved but very much documents the problems that resulted as a consequence of legislators not paying attention. It was a result, frankly, of the power of the oil and gas sector to basically have its way and go about its business and of governments saying, "Thank you very much. We'll take some royalty revenue from you, but we'll try not to get in your way".

I want to read, if I may, a passage from the book, which I think underlines why it is so important that we not only pay attention to the bill but that we also think about the role we play here as legislators to ensure that we do everything in our power to provide the laws, the regulations, the rules of the road, and the protections that would ensure that people living and working in this country and for this country are safe.

Let me quote:

The shock of the *Ocean Ranger* disaster was not that oil production was dangerous, but rather the realization that governments had betrayed people's faith. People trusted governments to use reasonable regulation to mitigate the risks of oil jobs. That trust was misplaced. There were no provincial safety regulations in the Newfoundland offshore when my brother and his eighty-three co-workers died... Time and again, publics trust governments to ensure that companies operate with reasonable prudence. Time and again we are shocked by a new disaster caused by corporate negligence. We say we will "never forget."

We do it all the time in this House.

Then we forget. And then it happens again.

Government Orders

The author goes on to talk about the fact that the most recent example is 2010, when the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster killed 11 workers and injured 17 more, resulting in the worst U.S. marine oil spill in history.

It is a fascinating book. I urge all members, or anyone interested, to take a look at it. Again, it is *The Ocean Ranger, Remaking the Promise of Oil*, and the author is Susan Dodd.

It is particularly important for those of us living on the coast, and in my case, living on the east coast. We know that Shell has invested over \$1 billion to further explore an oil field off our coast. BP, in another area offshore, is further investing nearly \$1 billion in exploring a similar development.

In other words, we cannot pretend that it is not coming again, that we are not going to be out there again. There are rigs out there off Newfoundland. We know that there are drilling rigs and exploratory rigs out there. There is equipment moving around our coast. We need to make sure that the people working in our offshore and the people servicing the offshore are provided with the necessary protections to ensure that these kinds of disasters do not happen again. It is important that we do that now.

I should say, of course, that a more recent review of offshore safety came in 2009, after the crash of Cougar Flight 91, which killed 17 people. The Wells inquiry into the Cougar crash made a number of recommendations, most notably the creation of an autonomous and dedicated safety regulator, which is not included.

● (1510)

My colleague, the member for St. John's East, raised a question in the House today about a recommendation that has gone before transport to ensure that airplanes and helicopters are able to operate an hour after they no longer have any oil or have run dry. It is an important safety measure that would have ensured that the disaster I referred to, Cougar Flight 91, did not happen. We continue to ask the government questions about why it is that it is unwilling to introduce that particular requirement for the offshore.

While I am disappointed, as others on this side have said, that this bill does not call for an independent safety regulator, I believe that it is a step in the right direction.

Again, it implements many of the principles of occupational health and safety. As I have said, offshore occupational health and safety laws must provide workers with protections that are at least as good as those that exist for onshore workers. The protection of employee rights to know, to participate, to refuse, and to be protected from reprisal needs to be included.

That is an issue that has been raised in this session of the House in relation to Bill C-4, the omnibus budget bill. In there are changes that lessen the responsibilities of health and safety inspectors. We are concerned about the implications those changes would have on Bill C-5. As I said, this bill talks about setting up a balance between health and safety protections onshore and offshore and about providing clear protection of the rights of employees to know, to participate, to refuse, and to be protected from reprisal. We are concerned that the omnibus budget bill, in fact, lessens those rights in federal jurisdictions and therefore may have some implications here. I understand that in a recent briefing on this bill, we were

unable to get answers to those particular questions, but we will continue to ask.

Finally is support for an occupational health and safety culture that recognizes the shared responsibilities in the workplace.

As I have suggested to members, we will continue to see further exploration, further development of natural resources, off our coasts. We need to make sure that we provide the environmental protections necessary, if we are going to go forward, to ensure that no problems exist and that no problems are created that endanger our natural resources, coastlines, industries, fisheries, environment, marine life, or oceans. It is an issue that has come up on the east coast and in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.

We know that the issue of the development of the Old Harry site is a controversial one. It is controversial for reasons like this. We must make sure that we have protections in place for the people who work on any particular drill site and that the environmental protections are in place before any company is allowed to proceed with any development.

● (1515)

In the Gulf, as we have heard in this House, if there is an oil spill, God forbid, it takes upward of a year for the Gulf of St. Lawrence to empty and the water to cycle around. It would be absolutely devastating to Quebec, New Brunswick, the Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and, of course, to the waters that flow into and out of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It is important that we pay attention to how we are moving forward and ensure that all of our laws are properly constructed to cover any potential problems that may exist.

This is a situation where laws are just now catching up with a disaster that happened 30 years ago, in which 84 people lost their lives. We have to be able to respond more quickly. We have to make sure we can look forward and learn from what is happening in other jurisdictions. Let us not wait until the worst case scenario actually presents itself, and let us bring legislation forward to prevent the kinds of disasters we have talked about, which happened in the past and are happening in other jurisdictions.

That is why we need to move forward and work closely with the provinces, in this case Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. On another offshore related issue, the Province of Nova Scotia has extended a moratorium against oil and natural gas development in Georges Bank. That area was determined to be extraordinarily vulnerable, a very sensitive ecosystem, very much a nursery for the fishery throughout the east coast. It has been determined in the past by both the federal and provincial governments working together that we needed to prevent any industrial development in that area of the ocean.

As well, the Province of Nova Scotia has passed legislation to make sure that will not happen, but the federal government, this time, has failed to work with the Province of Nova Scotia. We will continue to push the government on that question. The moratorium must be extended to protect the industry that now exists, the fishery, to protect the ecosystem, to protect our oceans and to protect our environment throughout the east coast.

Government Orders

Again, that is another part of the legislative framework that needs to be put in place to ensure that, as developments continue to move forward, we have the protections in place to ensure that damage is not done to what already exists and what might exist well into the future.

Both BP and Shell Oil are set to conduct new deepwater oil exploration off Nova Scotia for the first time since 2005. We believe that our workers deserve nothing less than to feel safe not only in their workplaces but, in the case of the offshore industry, in transit to the workplace as well.

I hope the government will continue to work with the provinces involved to make sure that offshore safety regulations are strengthened and that we can avoid offshore tragedies like Cougar flight 91, the BP spill in the Gulf, and the *Ocean Ranger* disaster.

It was a pleasure to participate in this debate. I look forward to any questions.

● (1520)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague with his understanding of the issue, particularly, coming from the Maritimes where so many people are involved in the offshore industry.

Where I live in northern Ontario, we have people who are on flying crews and in isolated communities. They are away from home for a long time. However, when we look at the offshore industry in particular, we see there have been a number of disturbing accidents and problems in the past. Certainly, the whole country still remembers what happened with the *Ocean Ranger* disaster and the lack of safety protocols that left so many men exposed and damaged so many families. We see the loss of the helicopter that went down recently off Newfoundland. There were the same questions and same issues of safety.

Now we see the issues across the country, with respect to various pipeline proposals, where pipelines have blown out because the proper safety systems were not in place, causing either loss of life or heavy damage to the environment.

Given the sensitivities in the maritime culture in terms of fisheries, habitat and danger to people out on the ocean, I would ask my hon. colleague this question: what does he think we need to do specifically in terms of safety issues and making sure there are clear rules in place?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague. The issues around health and safety in the workplace and otherwise are very important to that member. He does great work in his constituency on behalf of working people. He is right that safety is a big deal in the maritime environment. Fishing is one of the most dangerous businesses there is. Back in the late winter, five fishermen died in Nova Scotia when their vessel went down in a storm in the southwest just off the Liverpool area. They were out fishing for halibut. It is a dangerous industry.

We need to do more. I have talked with my friends and people within the industry about what we can do to make sure the people who toil in that industry are safer. It is a collaboration that needs to happen. Government needs to take some leadership on this issue to make sure there are rules and they are enforced. It is all well and

good to establish the greatest workplace rules, but if we do not enforce them and hold people accountable then they will end up not doing their job.

We have only gone part way. That is why in this case we had hoped the government would also move forward with an independent regulator who people could deal with and speak to and who would help implement good safety and health laws on the offshore.

● (1525)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and the points he raised. I am on the heels of the member for Timmins—James Bay, who asked a question. He represents my hometown and knows full well that while growing up, if we felt an earth tremor, we looked at the clock to see who was on shift, because it might have been our dad, uncle, or brother who was working in the mines. We know full well that we need safety in the workplace.

I am sure my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour remembers when Shawn Hatcher died in 1999. He was crushed by a door on the *Nordic Apollo*. My colleague would remember that, because he was the provincial leader at that time. There were no charges laid.

I look to where we need to go. We do need an independent safety agency. Our colleague in Newfoundland, Lana Payne, who is the president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, has said point blank that while this bill is a positive step forward, we need an independent safety agency. We need to have a body that oversees what is going on when it comes to the safety of our workers offshore.

I would say to my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour that it is not in this bill. What is the problem? What is the holdup here? Why is it that the federal government will not move forward on creating an independent safety agency?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, yes, I do remember that tragic incident in 1999. As the member said, no one was charged.

I was there in the legislature in 1992 when 26 miners died as a result of the explosion underground in the Westray tragedy. I was the labour critic in the NDP caucus in those days, and I sat down literally hours after that disaster with families in Stellarton and heard the stories and felt the grief. I sat through days, weeks, months, and years of investigations, of reviews, of debate, and we never did, as far as I was concerned, the legislation that we require to properly hold officials accountable for enforcing health and safety laws. There are the three Rs, in terms of the responsibility that both the employer and the employees have to have, but we were never able to hold the proper authorities accountable in that case.

It was the same thing in the case of the *Nordic Apollo*.

We have always said that government should have a dedicated prosecutor for health and safety. We need to make sure the legislation holds people accountable so that they will be charged.

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There was a Westray bill that passed in the House, which dealt with corporate responsibility. It was sponsored by my friend and colleague, the former leader of the NDP in the House, Alexa McDonough, and that is a start; but still nobody has been charged under that legislation. It takes commitment by government to make sure people are held accountable.

• (1530)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for his remarks. As a former miner myself, I was in the Brunswick mine in 1976 when six people were killed underground in 18 months. That is why we passed legislation on the right to refuse work.

I remember the Westray act, which—as the hon. member said just now—was designed to help the loved ones of the people who worked there. In Bill C-4, we see that the government wants to change the definition of unsafe work. It says that people are refusing too much work.

Is Parliament able to take the responsibility for passing a bill that actually does not make responsible people responsible? It is irresponsible on the part of the government to introduce bills that will encourage companies to adopt unsafe work practices. That is what will happen, just as it happened at the Westray mine, at the Brunswick mine, and at many other places of work. With the Conservative government, we are moving backwards.

Does the hon. member agree with me?

[English]

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. I raised the concern in my speech that the changes to the definitions in Bill C-4 would weaken the rights that have been provided to offshore workers: the right to refuse and the right to work safely. That is a concern.

As the member said, we need to make sure that people are held accountable and that we have safe and healthy workplaces. That is what this legislation is all about, to make sure we never have an *Ocean Ranger* again, to make sure we never have a Cougar flight 491 again in the offshore, to make sure we never have a disaster the scale of the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster in the gulf.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am the hon. member for Halifax. In the riding of Halifax, we have a deep connection with the Atlantic Ocean. For some, it is just during the summer months for recreation and having some fun on the beach. For others, particularly those who work on the water, that connection to the Atlantic Ocean is year round.

Of course, we all know that the ocean provides many benefits for our communities. We also think of the ocean as being this beautiful thing. We stand and look off into the distance at the horizon and it is breathtaking. However, our relationship to the ocean at home is interesting. If one goes to any of the small fishing communities in Nova Scotia, one would see a house on a bluff overlooking the ocean, but if we look closely, we see that very often the side of the house that faces the ocean does not have a window. If it does, it just has a small window over the sink.

When tourists see this, they wonder why they do not have wraparound windows on that side of the house and a deck overlooking the ocean. Why are all these houses built without windows facing the ocean? I have had it explained to me a couple of ways, both of which are compelling and really touch one's heart.

Some people have said, “Why would you want a view of the factory you work at?” Spending 10 to 12 hours at work every day just to come home and look at the factory is not something one would want to do. Fair enough, it is where they work.

Other folks have explained it to me as, “Why would you have your home facing the source of so much anxiety and possible pain?” Their family members go out to fish in the morning and they wait to see if they will come back, wait to see if the weather will change. They just wait, and that constant reminder of having the windows facing the ocean can bring a lot of heartache sometimes.

This is not just in Nova Scotia. I am sure it is the same in New Brunswick and I know it is the same in Newfoundland. It is a difficult tension that we have with the ocean. My colleague for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour was talking about *The Ocean Ranger* and he encouraged members of the House to pick that book up. It was written by Susan Dodd and published by Fernwood Publishing, a Nova Scotian publisher. I agree with the member, people really should pick up this book; it is fantastic.

Susan Dodd wrote the book when her brother was killed in the *Ocean Ranger* disaster. The *Ocean Ranger* sank off the coast of Newfoundland, and it lost a crew of 84 men. It was called the worst sea disaster in Canada since the Second World War, but at the same time, people talked about it as if it was just a situation with a bad storm. It sort of faded into our memories. The media talked about it like extreme weather, and it was on the weather pages, frankly.

Susan Dodd worked to take that history out of the weather section. She compiled it and really pieced it together. She maps out the socio-political processes of the aftermath. She maps out where the money and power are, where the hopes for the future are, and really brings it to a fuller picture of lessons learned by a heroic industry advancing technology in the face of a pretty brutal environment.

I will read a review of the book because I think it bears on what we are talking about today. The review is from Eric Tucker, Osgoode Hall Law School, York University:

This is an extraordinary book. Much more than a personal narrative about the impact of an industrial disaster on a family, Dodd explores memory of industrial disasters as a complex and multi-layered project. Her reading of government reports, lawsuits and monetary settlements, songs and novels illuminate the different ways the past is commemorated and reconstructed and the implications for moving forward. Dodd's discussion of personal injury litigation and the role of monetary compensation, or 'blood money', should be mandatory reading for all first-year law students.

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• (1535)

I thought it was appropriate to read because it was the “mandatory reading for first-year law students”. We are not first-year law students here, but we are talking about law. That is what we are talking about right now. We are debating a bill that may or may not, depending on votes, become law. I suspect it will become law. It is important for us to have the bigger picture in mind when we are talking about law, and the bigger picture does include the overall health and safety of workers.

There actually are fishing villages in the riding of Halifax, which I represent. In one of these fishing villages, Sambro, every year we go out for a blessing of the fleet. It is quite magical. We go out onto the water and Reverend Keltie from St. James United Church comes and we have a wreath and flowers, and she blesses the fleet. She blesses the recreational boats, the fishing boats, the Coast Guard boats, and she blesses the people who will be working at sea, and we pay tribute to the lives lost at sea. That is the reality of our communities.

That harsh reality is something we want to avoid. We want to avoid certain incidents, like the incident in 1999. When I asked my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour a question, I talked about the *Nordic Apollo* when Shawn Hatcher died. We want to avoid that situation where, at the end of it, no one is apparently responsible. There were no charges laid. How does this happen? There is nothing for us to do because the Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board and Newfoundland Offshore Petroleum Board are not safety agencies. We have a terrible tragedy such as the *Nordic Apollo* and it was not only not prevented, but there were no consequences, no recrimination.

When looking at a bill like Bill C-5, we need to think about prevention and we also need to think about consequences. I do not think that health and safety hazards should be business as usual. We have to work proactively to formally legislate and enforce safety and health standards. That is why we are here, to legislate. That is what this place is all about.

That is why the NDP does support the bill as a step forward for tackling safety for offshore workers, but we need to continue to work beyond it. The bill is quite timely, since we are seeing a situation off the shores of Nova Scotia where there is new exploration by Shell and BP for the first time since the 2010 BP oil spill off the Gulf coast. These are important things to keep in mind as well. However, what we can do is ensure that greater efforts are made to recognize these kinds of dangers and to also prevent future injuries and deaths in the workplace.

What do I like about Bill C-5? I like the fact that it would fill in a gap in legislation that has existed for decades, since 1992 when amendments to the Atlantic accord first separated out health from safety issues. It would create a framework that spells out the individual and shared roles and responsibilities of the federal government, the provincial government, regulators, employers, operators, suppliers, and employees.

I also like the fact that it would provide employees with the right to refuse to perform an activity that they have reasonable cause to believe is unsafe. We need to rely on employees' judgment. If they are uncomfortable performing that task, they should have the right to

refuse it. An employee, in reporting an unsafe condition, should be able to do so without fear of reprisal.

I also like the fact that Bill C-5 would provide these regulatory boards and the operator the authority to disclose relevant occupational health and safety information to the public. Finally, the bill would support a culture of occupational health and safety, and it would recognize shared responsibilities in the workplace.

• (1540)

These are some of the aspects that I do like, not just for their content or what they do but because they really represent a victory for the labour movement and for the NDP, if I can be so bold. Both the labour movement and the NDP have been advocating for a legislated offshore safety regime for years. Bravo, but—and we knew there had to be a but—though there are many aspects of Bill C-5 that are constructive and push forward workers' health and safety, I have to stress that this really is only the beginning. It is really just the tip of the iceberg. There is a lot of room for improvement, and the NDP is committed to working with the provinces. If New Democrats were in government, we would open up that conversation with provinces to put forward measures that would further strengthen and improve the safety regime for offshore workers in Newfoundland and Labrador as well as Nova Scotia.

Speaking of Nova Scotia, I would like to give a big shout out to the former NDP Nova Scotia government that put a lot of work into this issue. It made the safety issues a priority. It worked to protect offshore workers equally with the work that onshore workers do. In fact, the labour movement in both Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia work closely with their respective provincial governments. We should all be really proud of their achievements in collaboration with these governments to establish a protective regime for offshore workers in the oil and gas industry.

You probably know, Mr. Speaker, that this is mirror legislation that will be passing through the provinces as well. There was a situation in the spring where there was mirror legislation with Nova Scotia and the federal government around the Sable Island bill, creating Sable Island National Park. It can be a pretty hostile environment here. It can be pretty partisan here, but a bill like Bill C-5 or the Sable Island National Park bill are examples of what we can do when we work together, when the federal government works collaboratively with the provinces. Very often, provinces know what they need on the ground, but it is only the federal government that can enact the legislation. I will give credit where credit is due and say that the consultation process around Sable Island was exceptional. I really think that Parks Canada did a great job of making sure that Nova Scotians and the people in Halifax had their voices heard.

We have a situation where the federal government has been working with the provinces. The Nova Scotia NDP passed Bill C-5's mirror legislation in the legislature in May of this year. It has also said that the provincial legislation was a good start, but it went back to the Wells report. We have heard a lot today about the Wells report, specifically recommendation 29. I will quote Charlie Parker, who was the energy minister. He stated:

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Industry and offshore employees need consistent regulations when it comes to health and safety on the job, especially since we're dealing with an industry that overlaps federal jurisdiction and two provinces.

That is a good point. This is why we have mirror legislation and this is why the provinces and the federal government need to work together.

Former energy minister Charlie Parker also said:

The proposed amendments will provide clear authority on issues of occupational health and safety, and better protect people involved in offshore oil and gas.

This legislation complements the work already underway to promote workplace safety in every industry across the province to ensure all workers, whether on land or sea, return home safe at the end of the day.

That is the point, is it not? It goes to show that this is an important improvement to the offshore occupational health and safety regime that the NDP has called for in all the relevant jurisdictions, not just at the federal level.

I want to talk about this idea of the stand-alone safety regulator, because I think that is the big piece that is missing in Bill C-5. We heard my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour talk about the Westray bill. He talked about the need for a dedicated prosecutor in situations like that. He talked about the Westray bill and the fact that while it was a huge victory that this bill passed, no one has been charged. We can sometimes create something, but unless it is actually going to be effective, it is all for naught. We need to create an independent stand-alone safety regulator but also to ensure that it is effective.

● (1545)

This is the big omission that really stands out for me in Bill C-5. When Justice Wells was making his recommendations on safety, he included that recommendation for an independent stand-alone safety regulator to be established. On this point, in the Wells report, he said:

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

That is the key thing, that it should be their only regulator task. This should not be the job of the C-NLOPB or the CNSOPB. It should be the job of an independent safety regulator.

Justice Wells included an important warning on why independence was a necessary condition for the regulator. He said that the problem was that without independence, we risked the development of a culture of regulatory capture. This is when relationships are fostered between the safety regulator and the organization, subject to the safety regulations, that ultimately lead to a bit of the bending of the rules, a bit of lack of compliance. We need to ensure we do not get into that regulatory capture culture.

I want to be clear that he did not actually find this culture existed already, but that we had to be vigilant against it when we were dealing with human health and safety.

Justice Wells also recommended some alternative options if it was not possible to establish a safety regulator. He recommended that the government create a separate autonomous safety division of the CNLOPB with a separate budget, separate leadership and an organizational structure designed to deal only with safety matters.

He recommended that the government establish an advisory board composed of mature and experienced persons fully representative of the community and who were unconnected with the oil industry.

Finally, he recommended that the government ensure that the safety division would have the mandate and ability to engage, either on staff or as consultants, expert advisers to assist it in its regulatory tasks.

Those are three very reasonable recommendations, that it be separate, that the people who are on it be experienced and not have links to the oil industry and that they have the ability to hire experts. It makes very good sense, yet in Bill C-5 we do not actually see any evidence of that.

The bill does not include even one of those alternatives. It is silent on this front, whether it is the independent safety regulator or one of the alternatives. It is not only puzzling, it is very concerning.

The NDP, although we support this legislation for the improvements it makes, is very concerned that Justice Wells has been ignored on this point and we will continue to push for that independent, stand-alone safety regulator.

I will move to the length of time that it took to take action on this. Obviously there are clear reasons why the bill was necessary, and it is only fair that offshore workers have sufficient health and safety standards. This is why the provinces took action themselves on this file. In fact, the NDP government in Nova Scotia, under Darrell Dexter, was a leader on this file, and he did great work. As members heard, we did pass mirror legislation this May.

The provinces needed the federal government to take action as well, because this is a joint initiative. The lack of federal action has actually rendered the provincial action pointless. It takes two to tango. The provinces were pulling up their end of the deal and the feds were nowhere to be found.

There has been a 14-year delay for federal action. I will be fair and say the Conservatives are only responsible for the last eight years, but the Liberals were of course responsible for the six years before that. We need the feds to actually work with provinces. As I said earlier, provinces know what we need on the ground, they know what our communities need and they have good ideas.

Sometimes it does fall to the federal jurisdiction to actually legislate, and I do not understand why we have seen such a delay. I rarely understand government priorities, so I do not know why I am particularly puzzled by that one.

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• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on the hon. member's speech, which I found very interesting. I know that this matter is important to her.

In maritime regions, the health and safety of workers is not just an issue at sea, it is a major issue all the time and no party takes it more seriously than the NDP. Absolutely, we want to see improvement.

We are very pleased today to see the government introducing this bill to improve workers' health and safety. We have been waiting for 14 years for a bill to be tabled and debated in the House so that we can enshrine the rights of workers in complete harmony with provincial legislation.

The fact is that we have taken an enormous amount of time before working with the provinces. Is collaboration, or the lack of collaboration, a major issue? It seems to me that all is not well here. Can we use examples other than this bill to point out times when the Conservative government seems to be forgetting the fact that collaborating with workers and with the provinces is important in promoting the rights, the health and the safety of workers all across Canada?

• (1555)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. Our constituencies share the same sea. The constituencies may be in two different provinces, but the Atlantic brings them together.

In terms of collaboration, it is interesting to note that the Conservative government really is the crime-and-punishment party in the House. The government does not consult people on the ground at all.

[*English*]

For example, on Bill C-2, safe injection sites, I do not recall any collaboration or any consultation happening with the people who were on the front lines who would actually understand how this kind of legislation would play out.

In the last session of Parliament, we saw more crime and punishment legislation that purported to be standing up for victims, but with no consultations with groups that represented victims and offenders and with groups that worked to try to achieve justice in our communities. It is the heavy hammer of the law. Conservatives are not being collaborative.

It did take 14 years for this bill to come forward, but as I said, the ideas and the solutions were there. When we collaborate, we are stronger because we can take those ideas, those solutions that other people may have, and work on them together. However, the government refuses to do that kind of collaboration.

In the last budget bill, Bill C-38, in spring 2012, we actually tried to make amendments correcting spelling. It is not that hard to admit that maybe something was spelled wrong and accept an amendment. We are all better for it when we collaborate. Conservatives do not have exclusive jurisdiction on good ideas. In fact, it would be the

opposite. Let us correct the spelling, but that is not their *modus operandi*. They do not want to work with people.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her speech.

She stressed how much leadership Nova Scotia has provided in this area and the degree to which the province has had to wait for the federal government before seeing any action.

As she mentioned yesterday, when we were debating Bill C-2, in Quebec, we have seen experts, groups and provincial institutions conducting studies and pilot projects like InSite. They are afraid that, because of the federal legislation on the table, their 10 years of research and effort will be completely sabotaged by Bill C-2. It is an interesting parallel.

In her speech, the hon. member spoke about recommendation 29, which is not addressed at all in Bill C-5. However, in his report, the Hon. Robert Wells wrote that, in his view, it was the most important recommendation.

Do we know why the Conservatives are tabling a bill today that does not address recommendation 29, which seemed to be so important? If we do not know, we have a serious problem, because it is something we ought to be able to understand.

[*English*]

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I like the addition of "and if she doesn't know why". It was probably picked up from my expression, and I don't know why.

To come back to Quebec, I had the honour of serving as deputy justice critic. You were a justice critic, Mr. Speaker. While I was deputy justice critic sitting on the justice committee, the testimony on justice issues coming out of Quebec was incredible. The crime prevention strategies and the offender rehabilitation were outstanding, but time and time again, the evidence that was brought forward was ignored. The member is right that the expertise is on the ground. We need to seize it and bring it here to the House and base our legislation on real evidence.

As for recommendation 29 and why, here is my best guess. We do have a pretty ideological Conservative government, and Conservatives traditionally believe in small government. I think it is a government that actually hates itself and refuses to make itself, as it perceives it to be, bigger, even when it is doing something that will save lives, such as having an independent safety regulator.

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That is what government is there for. Government is not just there to support us and make our communities stronger. It is also there to protect us. If people are dying on the offshore, then we have a role that needs to be filled by government. However, the Conservatives are so self-loathing that they could not possibly imagine creating something that would help save lives because they believe it is all red tape. I do not think people's lives are about red tape. I do not think that keeping people alive is about red tape. It is about justice.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to follow the excellent speeches of the hon. member for Halifax.

I do not come from the Maritimes. I come from the interior of Quebec, by the Rivière des Mille Îles and the Rivière des Prairies. A lot of recreational boaters leave from our area and head off to spend the summer in the Îles de la Madeleine, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia before coming back. That is our link with the Atlantic.

I feel that this is an important bill and I just wanted to make one comment. We have to protect the health and safety of our workers all across the country, on the water, down the mines, or anywhere at all, as the hon. member said at the beginning of her speech. I feel that is extremely honourable.

What could we have done to protect our workers who go to sea every day?

[*English*]

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, some people may not be directly connected to the ocean. Maybe they are just taking a ferry to Îles-de-la-Madeleine and going on a tour. Maybe they are from the Prairies and are not connected to the ocean. However, all of us as Canadians are connected to the plight of workers. All of us as Canadians understand worker health and safety. We understand when we send people off to work in the morning and they do not come home. We understand workplace tragedy no matter where we are from.

That connects us, and in connecting us we know what the solutions are. We know we actually need to legislate on this issue. We actually need workplace safety regulation. We need this independent agency. We need things written out in law. Voluntary does not work for industry. We cannot have voluntary compliance with safety regulations when we are dealing with industry. We need mandatory compliance. It is that kind of legislation that has been saving lives for decades. We have the labour movement to thank for that. It has done incredible work ensuring that our family and our loved ones get to come home at the end of the night. That is the thing that does bind us. We do all understand that tragedy and we understand as well that we cannot afford to let it keep happening.

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Terrebonne—Blainville, Privacy; the hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, Veterans.

Resuming debate, hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be here to debate Bill C-5. It is an unexpected surprise for me to be able to support this bill, at least at second reading. The opposition rarely agrees with the government's proposals, particularly in matters of workplace health and safety.

In its ideological way, the government generally believes that occupational health and safety is not a priority, but something that gets in the way of companies trying to make a profit. The opposite is true. Companies that have healthy, well-trained employees who work safely improve their productivity and their contribution to the Canadian economy.

In eastern Canada, Atlantic Canada, eastern Quebec and my riding, Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, people are very familiar with occupational health and safety issues. People in mining, forestry and fishing, even people who work on pleasure boats, risk their lives every day to build Canada's wealth. We have to help them.

There have been many tragedies. One of them led to the Wells inquiry, an inquiry into safety that focused on the transportation of offshore oil and gas development workers.

People in my region are talking about this issue. Oil and gas development is on the rise in the Atlantic Ocean and is likely to begin in the Gulf of St. Lawrence as well as in the Arctic.

We absolutely have to have tools that make workers feel completely safe at work. That is the part of the bill before us that I find most interesting. Offshore workers will have the same rights as those who work on land, at least when it comes to workplace health and safety. Many people are surprised to discover that not all workers in Canada have the same rights. Their rights change from province to province and in regions under shared jurisdiction, such as oceans. Workers also have different rights depending on whether they are under federal or provincial jurisdiction.

Today we see that Bill C-5 is trying to harmonize the legislation at the federal and provincial levels. We have waited a long time for this progress to be made. As I said a few moments ago, we have waited 14 years for this bill to be introduced in the House of Commons. We have waited long enough.

In Nova Scotia, the NDP government brought forward a bill that would be the equivalent of Bill C-5. The Progressive Conservative government of Newfoundland and Labrador also did its part. The only party we were waiting for was the Conservative government, which seems to infringe upon the rights of workers all too extensively and frequently. The Conservatives were dragging their feet. Now they have finally introduced this bill, which unfortunately does not go far enough. However, it is still a step in the right direction.

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The government is moving in the right direction in terms of harmonizing legislation at the federal and the provincial levels. This is important because when people are injured, or risk their lives for work-related reasons, they need to know that they are adequately protected by their governments. Again, the current federal government often seems to forget that it is there to protect Canadians and not to allow for mere exploitation.

Unfortunately the government did not go far enough. The Wells commission really started a major debate on the health and safety of workers in marine areas, especially in the oil and gas development industry.

• (1605)

In recommendation 29, Commissioner Wells proposed establishing independent and stand-alone organizations to regulate health and safety issues. Bill C-5 does not address that recommendation, and one has to wonder why that is. What could have prevented the government from enshrining in law the most important recommendation, as Commissioner Wells described it when he presented his report? He did not say that it was frivolous or incidental; he said that it was likely the most important factor. Unfortunately, we do not see any sign of it in the bill. We will support the bill at second reading, but it will be interesting to see what the witnesses say before the parliamentary committees. It will be particularly interesting to hear workers from the maritime regions talk about the tools they need. I would also like to hear what they think about Commissioner Wells' 29th recommendation. These workers are much more familiar with the reality than we members of Parliament are. I hope that they will have a chance to speak to this issue and that they will be called to testify before the parliamentary committee. In the meantime, we are debating this bill at second reading so that it can then be studied in committee.

The legislation is designed to improve laws governing oil development organizations in the maritime regions, including the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board and its equivalent in Nova Scotia, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board. Both of those organizations have the authority to manage oil development. We know that workers in Newfoundland and Labrador have criticized the fact that the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board is in a position of conflict of interest. It passes legislation on oil development, but it is also meant to monitor the work to ensure that it is being done safely. That is why Commissioner Wells included recommendation 29, which proposes dividing that authority and creating an independent safety regulator.

I think many will understand this reality. An individual or organization that is developing a resource may have priorities that do not include the health and safety of workers. We have seen this many times: when it comes to workers' safety in the mining, forestry and fishing industries, it is not until workers join forces and create an independent body that their rights are respected by those who would take advantage of the situation and exploit them. This rather basic notion has been debated here in Canada since Confederation. Considerable gains were made in this area in the 1930s, and yet here we are almost 100 years later debating the basic issue of workplace health and safety.

I do not understand why we are still facing this shortcoming today, although it is perhaps the most important aspect that Bill C-5 fails to take into consideration. This organization will be dedicated to the health and safety of workers, especially those at sea and in the oil and gas industry, which is a fast-growing industry.

In my riding, we are on the brink of seeing oil and gas development in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We know there is a possible deposit between Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, one that straddles the border of both provinces, so it is hard to know where the boundaries are. However, that is another debate. We know we have to face the reality of oil and gas development, so we have to debate it and be prepared for it.

• (1610)

In the Gulf of St. Lawrence, we at least have the luxury of taking the time to do things properly. We have before us the tools we need to make sure that the health and safety of our workers will be a priority. We also have the tools we need to make sure that the health and safety of our ecology are a priority. We can do it, but we also see the shortcomings.

The shortcomings of the bill are not just about recommendation 29 in the Wells report. We also know that, if there is ever a spill at sea, it will not just be the workers who are at risk; the environment will be at risk too.

In a report published in February this year, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development focused on the fact that we do not have the equipment we need if ever a spill occurs at sea. Not only do we not have the tools to guarantee the health and safety of the workers, but we also do not have the equipment to guarantee the health and safety of our environment. A great many improvements need to be made in oil and gas development in eastern Canada. Unfortunately, it seems that we are dragging our feet when the deficiencies are already known.

Today, we should have been able to debate a number of factors with a view to regulating, standardizing and improving the health and safety of workers. Unfortunately, we are doing it piecemeal, little by little. Do we think that, if we do this today, we can do the rest another time?

It makes sense to do it today. We have the opportunity to do it and we have the time to do it. The government always insists on gagging debate so that it can rush bills through quickly. It does no consultation, but collaboration is one of a government's most precious tools.

Bills are always improved if we take the time to speak to interested organizations. We do not do it enough and that is largely due to the fact that the government does not give us the time to do so. We are always rushing bills through. The government has broken all kinds of records for passing bills. The result is clear: the bills are poorly drafted and they often create more problems than they solve.

Amending the Employment Insurance Act so drastically has created an economic catastrophe that is felt every day in my riding, and that is largely due to a lack of consultation.

Government Orders

I am very pleased to see that in this case, the government took the time to consult the provinces so we can all be on the same page and so we can pass a bill that will work for everyone.

I would like our government to take a similar approach to all the other bills it introduces in the House of Commons. The bills would be better for it.

The Conservative government seems to think that Canadians are proud of this government. Unfortunately, that is rarely the case, especially in my riding. I can guarantee that there are few people in my riding who think that their views are reflected by the Conservative government.

The bill before us today is an improvement. The government seems to be listening more. I think this is encouraging and is a step in the right direction.

However, I want to point out that the government could have done better. We already have various independent organizations to protect health and safety in maritime regions. This is not uncharted territory. This topic is well known.

Many other countries already have this type of regulations. Take for example, Norway, the United Kingdom and Australia. Even the United States is thinking about creating an independent organization in the Gulf of Mexico area. The accident in the Gulf of Mexico was disastrous. That spill created an ecological problem that will last many years. The workers were in a considerable amount of danger when that accident happened.

Canada has the luxury of looking to the United States' example to determine whether we might be on the wrong track.

We can learn from bad experiences in other countries and also learn from good experiences in countries that passed social democratic bills.

•(1615)

These countries have adopted legislation that emphatically prioritize the health and safety of workers.

In eastern Canada, Atlantic Canada and eastern Quebec, including my riding, workers take risks every day. They are proud of their work and proud to contribute to the Canadian economy. This benefits the entire country and allows us to share our wealth in a way that is truly unparalleled anywhere in the world. We have the privilege of living in a rich country, which is quite capable of taking care of all its people, without exception.

The fact that it took 14 years to put forward such a simple and fundamental improvement as the bill we are discussing today says much about the Conservatives, and also about the Liberals before them. They seem incapable of supporting a basic value such as respect for our workers. Our workers respect us and create the wealth that allows us to enjoy the free, democratic and rich society we live in. We owe them a great deal of respect. The bill before us today is a step forward. It is just one step, but it is important. I hope the government will go much further.

As far as the Wells commission is concerned, I would again like to stress its proposal for an independent regulator whose primary obligation would be the health and safety of workers. This would not

just be an important element. In his own report, Wells said that the recommendation following this explanatory note would be the most important in the entire report.

This is not just one of many elements: this is the most important one. The Conservative government has forgotten it. Has it intentionally forgotten? I cannot answer that because I do not know. However, I know that for our side, human rights, health and worker safety are issues on which we do not accept compromises. This should have been included in the bill before us today, but that did not happen.

Our side is still pleased that the government has taken steps to foster co-operation between the provinces. We have the enabling legislation for the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, and we also have it for its counterpart in Nova Scotia. We also have similar legislation that will probably be enacted in Quebec. This involves the same issue, namely oil and gas development.

Harmonization is absolutely necessary. There is only one Gulf of St. Lawrence and we cannot have multiple rules and laws to manage a single resource. We will have the same situation in the Arctic. We cannot have multiple jurisdictions trying to manage, each in their own way, the natural resources that are so important to Canada's wealth and the preservation of its values.

The Gulf of St. Lawrence spans five provinces. Half of Canada's provinces are represented in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Promotion is not the only goal of co-operation. We must work together in order to ensure the sound and consistent use of resources leading to sustainable development.

Failure to do this led to the collapse of one resource: the fishery. Cod is still endangered and cod fishing has not returned to 1990 levels. Cod was overfished. We forgot that co-operation is invaluable.

We can see the beginnings of co-operation in this bill. I hope that the Conservative government will go even further and improve not just this bill but all their bills through better co-operation with the provinces and workers.

•(1620)

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his passionate speech. I can see that he is an ardent defender of workers' rights.

In the report from the Wells inquiry into offshore helicopter safety, it was recommended that an independent safety regulator be established and given a clear, unambiguous safety mandate.

Why did the government wait 14 years to take a step in the right direction?

Government Orders

•(1625)

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I can see that he too is an ardent defender of his riding, and I acknowledge the fine work he is doing. His region has had some very difficult times lately, particularly in terms of rail safety. We must never forget that people risk their lives every day, nor should we forget how costly disasters are on an economic level and especially on a personal level.

Why has it taken so long to improve the health and safety of Canada's workers? That is a good question. We have had several governments. We change governments, moving from Liberal to Conservative and back again. We do not seem to be gaining ground. The tools are there; we have them. They are right in front of us. It is not rocket science. We have been talking about this for years. We have colleagues who know about the dangers in the workplace. People have testified. They even come to testify before parliamentarians in Ottawa. We thank them and put the report in a drawer. It is time we took them seriously.

The bill before us today is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough. We need to go much further. The tools are there, and we need to take advantage of them.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his speech. I agree with my colleague who asked the previous question.

I know that the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine is passionate about standing up for his constituents. He really understands the issues they care about. As the MP for a coastal region, what does he think of the fact that the government waited so long to introduce this bill and really take action? What impact have the Conservatives' delays and failure to implement these measures had where he is from?

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her excellent question. I would also like to thank her for the work she is doing in her riding and her fondness for the people of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. I know that she cares about them.

The long wait has made people very concerned about the offshore oil and gas industry. Had the government introduced regulations and laws to protect the health and safety not only of workers, but also of the environment much sooner, people in our region would have had an opportunity to share their ideas long before now. They would have had a chance to air their concerns, and they might have found their way to a consensus about how to develop marine resources.

Unfortunately, the government did not do that, and that is why people are hesitating now. They are very scared. They are worried about the fact that this could endanger all of the region's other industries, including tourism and fishing. Now, people are just not ready to give the go-ahead to offshore oil and gas development, and they have good reason to be concerned. The government could have implemented regulations and laws to ensure safe and sustainable development, but it did not. It did the exact opposite.

Because the government eliminated all kinds of environmental protections in Bill C-38, and because of the shortcomings of Bill C-5, which is before us now, people are not at all keen to give the go-

ahead to offshore oil and gas development. The government should have been more reassuring. The government is supposed to protect the people, but it seems more inclined to do the opposite and endanger them. That is absolutely unacceptable.

•(1630)

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech.

Newfoundland and Labrador's Minister of Natural Resources said that although discussions with the federal government regarding the implementation of recommendation 29 are ongoing, Ottawa has not shown any interest in creating a separate body to regulate safety.

Someone mentioned timelines. It took over 10 years for Bill C-5 to be finalized and debated in this House. In this case, we are also talking about a deficiency the Conservatives seem to have in their attitude towards their provincial counterparts.

We also saw this with the health transfers and plans to enhance a Canadian pension plan. We see this in other areas as well. What is happening in my colleague's riding regarding employment insurance is a very good example of this Conservative government's lack of co-operation, failure to listen and lack of leadership when it comes to working with the provinces.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. She raises a very important point.

Co-operation can only be beneficial. However, the Conservative government never seems to want to meet and co-operate with an organization. It does not want to meet provincial premiers. It always has a hard time putting forward legislation that ensures sound development from coast to coast.

The government is prepared to introduce bills that allow the exchange of finished products in a free trade market in Canada. However, it seems to have problems protecting the rights of Canadians. When we are dealing with Canadian values, it always hesitates and seems to back down. The Conservative government is unable to co-operate in a healthy, respectful and, above all, permanent fashion. It always acts randomly and on an ad hoc basis. We never know when it wants to co-operate.

Normally one would expect the federal government to always want to co-operate with its provincial counterparts. Unfortunately, the government always digs in its heels and is unable to accept the idea that its legislation is just not perfect. This is a very ideological approach and it is not based on facts.

This is why today we also fought for keeping InSite in Vancouver open. We would like to see other regions of Canada benefit from Vancouver's experience. Again, the Conservative government is unable to co-operate with experts from the regions of Canada to improve the health and safety of citizens onshore.

Government Orders

Today, we are also dealing with health and safety offshore and the government is unable to co-operate. Whether it is onshore or offshore, there is no co-operation. All that is left is, perhaps, extraterrestrial co-operation. I do not know whether the government will have more luck with the Americans in space. However, I do know that when it comes to the law on earth, the government has a lot of problems.

I would love to see the Conservatives work more effectively with their counterparts and show that they understand the reality of workers, who are merely asking for some respect. They want the government to stand up for them. This is a value that the Conservative government does not seem to understand and find extremely difficult to support, assuming it can even support the idea of protecting the right of workers in Canada.

I hope the Conservative government will carefully re-read the Wells commission report and draw the appropriate conclusions.

● (1635)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand today to speak to this particular piece of legislation. We are talking about the offshore, and there is so much happening offshore of Newfoundland and Labrador right now. It has been one of the major things that has contributed to our economy over the last 10 to 15 years. There is more and more happening in the offshore.

We are fortunate enough to have this resource off the coastline; we are using it to our benefit and are seeing the benefits from it. However, when there is any sort of employment offshore or on the water, there are risks involved, and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are no strangers to the risks involved with working offshore and in hostile environments. They do so knowing that government is there to protect them if something goes wrong and that government and industry are there to move things forward in a proactive manner to ensure workers' rights are protected, whether it is the fishery or offshore oil.

The benefits are really being seen in Newfoundland and Labrador now from the offshore developments. In particular, in the riding I represent there are two more developments on the horizon. Hebron is being built in Bull Arm in my riding, again another offshore development, and the west White Rose extension GBS is going to be built in Argentia, also in the riding of Avalon. People are really pleased to see the offshore being further developed. However, they are no strangers to the accidents that happen when they are working in this environment. We remember the *Ocean Ranger* disaster of many years ago and the number of lives that were lost. It is something always close to our minds and hearts.

More recently, there was the Cougar flight 491 on March 12, 2009, shortly after my election to this place. We had to deal with that. There were 17 victims in that particular crash, whom we remember. They were ordinary people who got up in the morning to go to work and did not come home. Of those 17 victims, five were from my riding: Gary Corbett from Conception Bay South, Wade Duggan from Witless Bay, Derrick Mallowney from Bay Bulls, Paul Pike from Shearstown and Allison Maher from Aquaforte. We remember the workers who went to work that day and did not come home. That is where we are today with this piece of legislation.

The Wells inquiry had 29 recommendations to try to protect and enhance safety in the offshore, and many of the recommendations have been dealt with by industry and the C-NLOPB so that accidents do not happen again. Recently, I had an opportunity to tour Cougar Helicopters' operations in St. John's and speak to representatives about their search and rescue capabilities and how they have managed to implement some of the recommendations from the Wells inquiry, one of which is wheels up in 20 minutes. The Cougar employees work search and rescue 24/7, 365 days a year. They are very proud of what they do and that they are there to protect workers in the offshore. They have the technology and capability to perform search and rescue. This is solely for the offshore oil. This search and rescue is only contracted by the oil companies.

Then there are the men and women at CFB Gander and the search and rescue squadron there that supplements the search and rescue capabilities for the offshore. It is somewhat limited in its response times after hours, and it is something that the government needs to move forward.

● (1640)

Another aspect of the offshore that impacts Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly in my riding, is that all this production of offshore oil has to go somewhere. The majority is shipped in supertankers down to the eastern seaboard or into New Brunswick to be refined, but a lot of it goes in through Placentia Bay and into the transshipment facility there, next to Arnold's Cove and Come By Chance.

A lot of people do not realize that Placentia Bay is the busiest seaway in all of Canada. Yes, we have the St. Lawrence, which is busy in traffic and the number of ships, but St. Mary's Bay actually has the highest tonnage of traffic in all of Canada. It is something we have to be very mindful of, because it is not a matter of whether there is going to be an accident, but a matter of when.

Accidents do happen. This is where we need to be more prepared to get in there and respond. That is where government, working with industry, needs to come together and be ready to go. The Coast Guard needs to pull up its game. A number of reports have come forward saying the Coast Guard does not have the ability and response time for a major oil spill in Placentia Bay. Industry is also tasked with an oil spill response time, and it must continue that preparedness and have the resources, supplemented by the Coast Guard.

Government Orders

Getting back to the bill at hand, it is the first update of this legislation in over 20 years. We have been working in the offshore of Newfoundland for more than 20 years. It started with the first development, with Hibernia and all of the exploration that happened around that. This is really the first update in the last 20 years of this particular piece of legislation. It deals with occupational health and safety and the frameworks around that. It recognizes workers in transit for the first time, those workers who travel via helicopter to the offshore production rigs, as well as the offshore exploratory rigs. There is a lot of exploration going on off the east coast.

We need to make sure our workers are protected, and we will support this piece of legislation because it does update the necessary aspects. The only problem is that this law is somewhat behind the times. Most of what is recommended in this legislation is already in practice right now because of the Wells inquiry and the C-NLOPB. A lot of this has already been done. It is not something that requires industry to do a whole lot more, because it is doing it anyway. No flights in bad weather, unsafe seas, and having new immersion suits and breathing apparatus are practices that are already in place right now. This legislation does not really do anything to enhance the protection of workers; it just implements what is actually current practice.

I know we sometimes criticize people for the sake of criticizing, but I also like to give credit where credit is due. I know from my conversations with the C-NLOPB, the Canada–Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, that the people there do take occupational health and safety and the safety of workers very seriously. They have the tools to make sure the oil companies are abiding by the rules. They have the tools to go offshore and go on these vessels and production facilities to make sure that occupational health and safety are number one.

We can always do better. This is where this piece of legislation falls short. It has been two years since the Wells inquiry, since the final chapter of the report of the Offshore Helicopter Safety Inquiry phase II came into play and the response from the C-NLOPB. It was August 15, 2011.

• (1645)

Two years have gone by, and the government has not seen the need to implement a few of the recommendations. Those recommendations have been spoken about today. I will re-highlight two aspects of the recommendations that came forward and on which the government has not acted.

It would have been a pleasure to come here today and say the government has acted upon all the recommendations from Justice Wells. It was a very substantial piece of work. However, one of the recommendations that the government has not acted upon is the 30-minute run-dry capability. One of the key recommendations from the Transportation Safety Board when it did its reports and analysis of the Cougar flight 491 crash was this run-dry capability. It is an issue that has been identified on this particular helicopter, and it is something that needs to be implemented in regulation. These helicopters that are travelling offshore need to have this capability.

As we move forward, we are going further east and further offshore to do exploration. We are going further north off the coast of Labrador. These helicopters only have a certain range at the best

of times. A couple of the Cougar helicopters that we saw have internal fuel tanks to make sure they have that range.

Now that we are continuing further east and further north, we need to make sure that if something happens, the helicopters do have a 30-minute run time, so they can get low, get to the coast, and land safely without incident.

This is one key recommendation that Justice Wells made that has not been acted upon.

The other key recommendation that was made, which was also mentioned earlier, is recommendation number 29, and that is the focus on a separate offshore regulator for safety. This was a key recommendation from Justice Wells that needed to be done.

The C-NLOPB does do good work; it is safety conscious. However, one of the checks and balances between industry and the petroleum board would have been an offshore independent safety regulator.

This is a key recommendation. The government has had two years to think about this recommendation. Some of the families of the victims of the Cougar crash have said the government has come up short and has not looked at these two key recommendations. That is something that should have been incorporated into the bill, but it was not.

The government has not gone far enough. It has only gone up to where the industry and the offshore companies are right now. They have not done anything beyond their capabilities.

That is something that needed to be done, and the bill falls short.

We will be supporting this piece of legislation and calling upon the government to go even further in promoting and securing the safety of the employees and our loved ones who go offshore. Many of them work very long hours and spend large amounts of time away from home. I have personal friends who have suffered a lot of stress. I have neighbours who work offshore and who travel a lot. It is a hostile environment. It is very nerve-racking to get on that helicopter. A lot of people have some stress and anxiety when travelling to the offshore. They need to know that they are in the safest helicopters, that they have the safest equipment, that their government is there to protect them if something goes wrong, and that industry is there to search for them and rescue them if something goes wrong.

Sometimes the government needs to step up to the plate and push industry and the regulatory board to do more. This is a case where the government has only come to where it is right now. As we start going further east and north, as I said earlier, it is important that we do look at it.

The bill does a little bit. It crosses over many jurisdictions, such as labour, health, transport, and intergovernmental affairs. There are many aspects to this situation. This is just one piece of the offshore in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia, because it applies to both offshore petroleum boards.

• (1650)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on March 12, 2009, a very tragic incident occurred off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Government Orders

Would the hon. member elaborate a bit more about that incident? What could have been done to prevent it? What effect did it have on the good people of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, especially on the families of those unfortunate victims?

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, it did have a great impact on our province and on those families. They never find closure in this matter. The victims were near and dear to them. They are constantly reminded about what could happen as they travel our province. When they go to St. John's and see the helicopters flying offshore, they will be forever reminded of this tragedy.

The provincial government is erecting a monument to honour these families and the victims of that crash, which will soon be unveiled, and Councillor Danny Breen in St. John's has been doing a really good job. His family was directly impacted by that tragedy. As I mentioned earlier, we think of the five individuals from my riding and their families. Whenever we see a helicopter going out over Signal Hill, we remember that tragedy.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker, regarding my colleague from Avalon.

I believe there is a rule in this House about neckties. I have been here for 16 years and I have been stuck with wearing a tie all along. I wonder if the rule has changed. To be recognized by the Chair, we have to be wearing a tie. I would like a ruling on it.

The Deputy Speaker: The rule in fact remains the same: all male members of the chamber, in order to be recognized, must be wearing a jacket and a tie.

I have been observing the member for Avalon and I cannot tell from this distance or from looking at the screen whether or not he is wearing a tie. I would ask him to address a comment to the House and indicate whether or not he is in fact wearing a tie.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, I always have an extra tie in my drawer, and today I am wearing a tie. It is very cold here in Ottawa, and you are probably not seeing the tie through the sweater I am wearing today, but yes, Mr. Speaker, I am indeed wearing a tie.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the advocacy work the member for Avalon does, not only for his own constituents, but for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. He has been there in many different ways to make sure the community is well represented.

We have before us a piece of legislation that has been in the works for a period of time. I cannot help but think that the government could have done more, given the amount of time we have been waiting for legislation to deal with the issue of workplace and environment safety and things of this nature. I believe the government could be doing more to bring forward better ideas to protect the interests of our workers in their work and travel environment.

I would appreciate a comment in regard to the helicopter ride, for example, from a base on land to one of the oil rigs in the ocean.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, the government absolutely has not gone far enough. It has been five years since that tragedy. The government has had two long years since the recommendations were made by Justice Wells.

I am sure the Conservatives have had analysis done on all 29 recommendations. They have seen which ones have been fulfilled and which ones have not, but even today, when a question was raised to the minister in the House of Commons, the Conservatives had no clue about recommendation 29 and the offshore safety regulator.

It is a bit disappointing that they put forward this legislation, which we support, but it has not gone the full distance in making sure our workers offshore are protected in the best way they can be.

• (1655)

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, having worked in health and safety on behalf of workers for a number of years, I know that once one is aware of risks, there flows from that an ethical obligation to address those risks and eliminate them, or at least diminish them or mitigate them to the best of one's abilities. Those obligations fall heaviest on us as legislators.

Since the Liberal Party has raised the issue of time, I wonder why in the five years that its members had to address this issue from 2001-2006, they did not take the opportunity of those five years in government to actually address what they knew were risks to workers in this country.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, like that member who has only been here a couple of years, I have only been here five years and I can only look at what we have done in the last five years. I am not familiar with what governments have and have not done in previous years, so I cannot answer that question.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, has the hon. gentleman from Avalon had any conversations with the good people of Newfoundland and Labrador in the government regarding recommendation 29?

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, yes, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador has pushed forward, saying that recommendation 29 on an offshore safety regulator is a priority. It is very disappointed that its federal cousins have not moved forward with this recommendation.

It has pushed the federal government, as we continue to push here, but it has received no answers on this recommendation. The provincial government is on board. It has done its part in the Wells inquiry and continues to do so. It has been asking when the federal government going to step up and do its part.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a little earlier, my colleague opposite asked a very interesting question. I was not an MP in 2001 either. However, you do not have to be an MP to know what is going on in Parliament.

The federal government and the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia began negotiating safety measures for offshore workers in 2001. The Liberal government had plenty of time to put this type of measure in place.

Why did it not do so? Why not drop the rhetoric and talk about the real actions and achievements of the Liberal government on issues related to worker safety?

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue. One is not here to cast blame on one government or act in a very partisan nature by asking why one party was there but did not do anything. Maybe our party did not do enough. Maybe the current government is not doing enough. This is about moving forward. With all that information and everything that has happened since, the time to act on this issue is right now.

The government has had all the information from the Wells inquiry to do this particular piece of work, but it has not acted. We did not have the Wells inquiry. After the *Ocean Ranger* disaster, there were many changes made to the offshore oil production platforms in the province with regard to exploration.

It is sad that an accident has to happen for things to change, but once that accident does occur and there is an inquiry, then it is up to governments to act. The government, in this case, has not acted on the current situation and the Wells inquiry.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is being very friendly to some of the questions that have been posed by the New Democrats. It is interesting. When we come up with a report, we hope that the government would respond in a timely fashion. I suspect that if it were put in chronological order, we would find that actions were indeed being taken.

However, we have to put into perspective the many challenges that occurred when the NDP and the Conservatives worked together in order to prevent good, solid Liberal initiatives, particularly during the minority days. It is unfortunate that we are not seeing the type of legislation that could have or should have been passed had the NDP not voted consistently with the Conservatives, ultimately defeating the Liberal government.

I appreciate the questions from the New Democrats, but I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker—

• (1700)

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, this is an august chamber where we are actually supposed to discuss facts, not Liberal fiction.

Corruption brought that member's government down. Corruption and the Canadian people threw them out. That is on the record, and it needs to be kept on the record.

The Deputy Speaker: That obviously was not a point of order. Perhaps we will give the member for Avalon an opportunity to respond. He only has about 30 seconds.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Mr. Speaker, I will keep the focus on the current government. The NDP likes to spatter everywhere.

Sometimes the NDP makes good recommendations and the Liberals make good recommendations, but the current government is not fond of recommendations made by the other parties. In this particular instance, we are talking about recommendations from a judge and a full-fledged inquiry. That is where the focus of this debate should be.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put on the record that I am wearing a tie tonight.

I want to thank all the colleagues, but before I start I first want to say a little prayer and express thoughts for the 17 people who were killed in the terrible incident in March 2009 when the aircraft went down. Unfortunately, I guess sometimes it takes an accident for good things to happen. I want members of the government to know that the NDP will be supporting the bill at second reading, on the premise and in hope that the government will recognize that recommendation 29 is extremely important.

To reiterate, section 29 would make the safety aspect of the board completely stand alone. The reality is that we cannot have the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board or the Canada-Newfoundland Offshore Petroleum Board patrolling themselves when it comes to safety. We need to have someone who is independent, a firm that has the authority to go in and double-check all the safety standards, to ensure that the legislation and the laws of the land are being monitored and followed properly, and to also ensure that the regulatory board does what it does in terms of oil and gas exploration but that the safety aspects of that are done by an independent board. Mr. Wells' report was very important.

The fact is that Bill C-5 is a culmination of over 12 years of negotiation, starting in 2001 between the federal government and the Provinces of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. The proposed amendments to the Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act and the Canada-Nova Scotia Atlantic accord implementation act aim to strengthen offshore health and safety practices in the oil and gas industry. Bill C-5 seeks to fill a legislative gap created by the 1992 amendments to the Atlantic accord that separated the health and safety issues, resulting in the provincial offshore petroleum regulatory agencies enforcing health and safety issues contained in draft regulations. Bill C-5 largely puts existing practices into legislation by placing authority and the fundamental principles of occupational health and safety within the accord acts. This is an important improvement to the offshore occupational health and safety regime that the NDP has been calling for in all relevant jurisdictions.

Very clearly, in July 2011, in phase II of the inquiry's report, the Hon. Robert Wells wrote:

The oversight role which I am recommending would not conflict with the roles of other regulators, but it would when necessary enhance other regulatory measures....

Worldwide, the thinking and practices of safety have developed and changed greatly in the past quarter-century. In the C-NL offshore, it is time for a new and more comprehensive approach to offshore safety regulation.

Bill C-5 fails to establish the options set out in recommendation 29 of the Wells report. The Newfoundland government stated that while discussions have been ongoing with the federal government on the implementation of recommendation 29, the federal government has not yet indicated any interest in establishing a separate safety agency. The NDP will remain firm and is steadfast in ensuring that the federal government and the provincial governments work together to ensure this independent, stand-alone safety aspect.

Government Orders

We are not quite sure why the government would have been reluctant to put this in there, but there has to be a particular reason why and we would like to know why. We were hoping that when we support the legislation being sent to the committee these questions will be asked. I am glad to see that the Liberals and most members will be supporting it. Hopefully Robert Wells will be invited to reiterate as to why he felt this was such an important recommendation. As well, we are hoping that the committee members on both sides will ask, and maybe just once in a committee will be able to work together to change the Conservatives' mind on the legislation and put this very important aspect into being.

While I am on my feet talking about the Canada-Newfoundland and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board and the accords, I cannot help but go back into a bit of the history of how the hon. member for Central Nova once said in the House of Commons that if somebody in his own party voted against the budget, they would not be kicked out of the caucus.

As members know, there was quite a debate here in the House of Commons over the Atlantic accord in terms of whether there were gaps, whether there were caps to the accord, whether Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia were receiving all the benefits attributed to them from the offshore oil and gas sector. There was quite a heated debate going on in the House of Commons back and forth for quite some time.

• (1705)

Mr. Bill Casey, the then hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, was quite adamant and correct in his opposition to the Conservatives' plan against that accord.

I repeat, the reality is that the member for Central Nova said that they would not kick people out of their caucus who voted against the budget. Very shortly after that, the hon. Mr. Casey stood up in the House and voted against the government's budget when it came to the Atlantic accord. Before he even sat down, his computer was completely emptied and the accounts that he had with the riding association were done. That man was *persona non grata* before he even sat down in his chair after the vote. I remember the whip of the party at that time doing that.

The fact is that we have to ask ourselves this. When it comes to the accord discussions, did the Conservatives say one thing and do another? It was a cabinet minister who said they would not kick people out of their caucus if they voted against the budget. That is what Mr. Casey did, and before he even sat down, he was toast. Everybody knows that if a politician is on the front page of the fold of any newspaper in the country in a positive light for six days in a row, he or she is cooking with gas. Actually, that is what we want.

The problem with all of that was the discussion of the cap and whether we on the east coast were getting all of the benefits attributed to both provinces from the oil and gas sector that we thought we deserved.

I personally want to thank Mr. Williams, the former premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Dr. John Hamm, the former premier of Nova Scotia, for working with the Martin government to secure those additional monies, which I believe was almost \$2 billion going to Newfoundland and Labrador and about \$800 million

going to Nova Scotia, that went toward paying down the respective debts and services within the provinces. That was a good thing. However, they should not have had to go cap in hand in order to do what is considered the right thing.

Getting back to Bill C-5, I want to thank the government for the opportunity to bring this forward and that it at least understands that the good people of the east coast have asked for this for a long time. Unfortunately, as stated by other members in the House, it took a tragedy wherein 17 very good people lost their lives, but fortunately one person did survive. What were the reasons for it? We can argue that it was the helicopter and everything else. However, if this legislation had come before that incident happened, maybe those lives could have been saved, although we do not know for sure. We will never know. That is speculation, and I would not want to impugn the reputation of anyone in that regard. I know that Cougar Helicopters in Newfoundland and Labrador is a very good company. It has wonderful people and great management. It has been a long-time employer in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This was a most unfortunate incident.

However, I and my party are hoping, and I am sure most parliamentarians on all sides would hope, that the regulatory framework in Bill C-5 will go forward to improve the aspects of health and safety in this regard so that there would be no other incidents in the future.

While I am on my feet, I also want to mention the *Ocean Ranger*, which went down in 1982, killing an awful lot of guys who were working on the rig. That was a horrible incident at that time. Fortunately, we have never had another incident like that again on the east coast. However, as members know, the governments of the day move fairly quickly to work with industry and the provinces in order to improve and enhance safety features for the men and women who work on the oil rigs. It has now been almost 31 years and we have not had another major incident of that kind. Thank God for that, because when the *Ocean Ranger* went down, it was unbelievable.

I encourage every single person in the House, and those who are listening, to pick up a copy of Ron Hynes' song *Atlantic Blue*. He refers to the *Ocean Ranger* and that incident. It is one of the most haunting and beautiful songs the master of a thousand songs has ever written. It is a beautiful song about those men who served on the *Ocean Ranger*, which unfortunately went down in that horrific storm in 1982.

We hope that Bill C-5 will do what it is intended to do. We also hope that the government and the committee will be amenable to recommendations, changes, and amendments to ensure that when it leaves the House and goes over to the Senate, they will do a proper and thorough job of so-called sober second thought to ensure that it does exactly what all of us hope it will do. Most important is that we have an independent safety regulator in this regard, because that is the crux of all of this.

Government Orders

•(1710)

Mr. Wells wrote a very well-thought-out and enhanced report and spent a lot of money doing it. He is an esteemed gentleman who knows exactly what he is talking about. The people who were with him listened to the testimony from the witnesses and understood. Then following that, recommendations were made. Just maybe this time we can get it right.

Hopefully, we can enhance other safety regulations in the future across our country so we do not have to wait for an accident before we do the right thing.

Why does the government not want to have an independent safety regulation board in this particular regard? What is it that the government is so opposed to? I am not sure anyone here has ever answered that question. We will keep asking it and keep on going in that regard.

The reality is that this particular legislation would enhance the safety of the men and women working in the offshore, but also those flying the helicopters back and forth. Also, if we have enhanced safety procedures and everything else, it gives people and the industry the confidence that there are proper regulations in place to ensure that all the checks and balances are done. Maybe with this proper enhancement it would improve and enhance the aspects of oil and gas exploration off the east coast. One never knows. The reality is that everyone knows that there are opportunities here to work in the offshore.

I do not know, Mr. Speaker, if you have ever been in the North Atlantic, 200 miles off the coast in November, but I do not think it is the most pleasant place to be on the planet. However, those brave Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and everyone else working there, are some of the hardest souls ever. They spend an awful lot of time away from their families to work on the rigs for a certain period of time. Then they come off again. They enjoy that work because it pays them very well in health benefits as well as wages. It is an important aspect to the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. Thus, it is an important aspect of our economy right across the country.

The minimum that we can do is to ensure that the men and women who literally risk their lives to provide the energy supplies that we use on a daily basis are confident that the provincial and federal governments have their safety in mind, are listening to them and the industry, and are ensuring that when they go to work they do not have to die.

April 28 is our national day of mourning when we recognize all the people who have gone to work in the morning and unfortunately, did not come home at night to their families. In Nova Scotia alone, we have had 28 occupational deaths this year, and the year is not even over yet. That is 28 too many people who have passed away.

I am sure I speak for all parliamentarians when I say this: no one should get up in the morning, go to work, and not come home again. This is not just about Bill C-5 and the safety regulations of the offshore of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, but right across the country. We should be working with all companies. We should be working with the labour movement. We should be working with the provinces and the municipalities, anyone out there

who can provide the proper advice to ensure that every single person who goes to work in the morning, or on shift work, knows that they will be able to go home to their families. That is the crucial aspect. It is what I believe is the litmus test for this legislation if we are to indeed improve it.

It was already done after 1982. We have not had another rig incident since then. People are probably very proud of the fact that nothing has happened in 31 years, but unfortunately, it took the 1982 incident for that to come into being. Unfortunately, it took a helicopter coming down, which took the lives of 17 people, to once again get governments, and for that matter all parliamentarians and provincial folks, to react to this particular issue.

It should not happen. We should be sensible enough, proactive enough to ensure that when industries like the oil and gas sector off our coastline are in effect and working well, that before an incident happens we have ensured the highest level of safety protection is there. That is just like how we would push to make sure that the highest environmental standards are there, because if we have proper environmental standards, proper health and safety standards, then the industry, the workers and management, the people who work in those industries will be allowed to flourish.

•(1715)

On behalf of our federal New Democratic Party, I want to personally say that we will be supporting this legislation. I am proud of my colleagues from St. John's East and St. John's South—Mount Pearl who have been big promoters and supporters of this. I am also proud of the provincial NDP government, especially Mr. Frank Corbett, who was very active in promoting this. Unfortunately, we are not the government there anymore, but maybe one day we will be back.

The reality is that this is an important issue that crosses political lines. It crosses bipartisanship in terms of Conservatives, Liberals, and New Democrats. It crosses provincial concerns as well. I think it is vital that this legislation is passed, with the caveat that the government and everyone involved carefully and seriously look at recommendation 29 to ensure that an independent safety regulator is going to be there.

That sector may grow. It may become enhanced. If more oil and gas is found, and a lot of deposits that may be out there, we are going to see a lot more expansion and a lot more traffic. We needed to have this type of legislation as of yesterday, not necessarily tomorrow.

With that, I will be more than happy to take any questions or comments that the good people of this legislature may have. I understand that my hon. colleague from Acadie—Bathurst wishes me to say a couple of more words, but I am more or less done. I would be happy to take any questions.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore for his work and his passion in regard to the people who live in the Atlantic provinces, not just in his riding but all along the coast. He truly is an advocate, whether it is for veterans or workers. I am very proud that he is indeed my colleague.

Government Orders

The member made mention of safety issues. We know that the North Atlantic is absolutely unforgiving when it comes to weather and we know the dangers, whether for fishers or for those working on the oil rigs. Some time ago I read a novel called *February*. It was about the sinking of the *Ocean Ranger*. That novel talked about the devastation for families and what happened to the kids of the dads who never came home and to the wives and lovers. It truly underscored how absolutely critical it is that we take into account the safety of the workers in this country. This bill does, and so it should.

My colleague made mention of the impact on families and communities. If we want to be absolutely pragmatic, perhaps the economy is at the root of the work that goes on. If we do not have proper safety rules and regulations, the things that protect families, how on earth can we grow our economy?

Would people be willing, by any stretch, to put themselves and their families at risk if there were no safety regulations? If we do not have workers, then we do not have an economy.

● (1720)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, I just have to point out the Westray mine in Pictou, Nova Scotia. It was in the Stellarton, New Glasgow area. It showed what happens when we do not have proper regulations in the coal mining industry. Unfortunately, a lot of people lost their lives in that explosion. After the inquiry, it was very clear that the safety regulations were extremely relaxed. They were not followed at all.

This is what happens when there is no independent oversight or proper, thorough, thoughtful regulation to protect workers, and not just workers but management as well, who were working in those very unforgiving and dangerous climates.

The Westray mine was a classic example of how it can be screwed up. The reality is that it was simply avoidable. It did not have to happen. When there are companies that do not think about the workers' safety or their families, this is what happens. We do not want to go back to that history again.

I am hoping that these regulations that come forward in Bill C-5 go through a careful peer review by the committee once we bring in the witnesses, Mr. Wells, the provinces, and everybody else to ensure that we get it right. It is critical to get it right.

As I said earlier, my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst knows exactly what it is like to work in a mine. They are not the safest conditions in the world. My colleague from Timmins—James Bay knows exactly what it is like up in Kirkland Lake for the men and women who work as hardrock miners. The same kinds of hard work and dangerous situations exist in a different format out on the oceans. We had the *Ocean Ranger*. We had the incident of the helicopter going down. Both cases were very unfortunate.

As Parliament, not just as a government, we have a duty to those workers and their families to ensure that we get it right so that nobody else has to lose a life in the dangerous situations in the economy and in the work they do out on the east coast of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, which was very convincing as usual. I thank him for standing up for workers' safety.

In his speech, he talked about collaboration. I know that we are not used to having the government collaborate on a regular basis. However, if we send this bill to committee, the government will have to collaborate in order to continue moving in the right direction, especially with respect to shared responsibilities such as transportation safety, food safety and even sustainable development.

Could my colleague tell me how the government opposite could collaborate more with the provinces, municipalities and others to arrive at fairer laws and social justice befitting of society?

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, that was from one of the finest MPs ever to grace the House of Commons. I am sure that my colleague from Quebec will have a long and outstanding career in this great legislature that we call *la Chambre des communes*.

The member brings up a very important point. It is not just oil and gas safety but also rail, vehicle, and school bus safety. The reality is that nobody in this House has all the answers. We need collaboration, not just with other parliamentarians and the bureaucrats that hang around us but with the provinces, industry, experts, workers, and management. We should all work together, not just in terms of the oil and gas sector and Bill C-5 but in all aspects.

Again, I cannot help but think of those poor unfortunate folks in Lac-Mégantic and what happened earlier this summer with the rail. It is something that did not have to happen, but it did, and now we are reacting to it.

I know that the Conservatives are not the greatest at collaboration, but maybe this time they will be. I am always a hopeful fellow. My mom always said to look on the bright side. God love her, she is 91. I just want to say “Hi, mom.” She said that sometimes if you just keep talking to them and keep convincing them, maybe the Conservatives will do the right thing.

Through collaboration, we will be able to get this right. We will bring in the amendments and work with other people to ensure that the proper safety procedures for offshore oil and gas are implemented once and for all and that the human and financial aspects are there as well. We must have the money and human resources to back up this legislation.

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be quick. This bill has to do with offshore activities.

The Conservatives are trying to improve health and safety, which is a good thing, but then they turn around and shut down search and rescue centres. What will they say if there is an accident? Will they say that they made cuts, that they never should have made them and that they made a mistake?

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about these kinds of dichotomies in the Conservatives' policies.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, that, sir, was from the future of the New Democratic Party. She is a wonderful new member of Parliament and a great representative for the province of Quebec.

The member is absolutely right. We stand here in the House of Commons and talk about the legislation, but on the flip side, the Conservatives cut search and rescue and other aspects from all the departments. One cannot talk with one hand and do something else with the other. That has to change.

When the bill goes to committee, those types of questions should be asked. What happens if there is another incident? Do we have the men and women and resources in place to ensure that we can get to the aircraft, or whatever it is, quickly and safely? These are the types of questions that need to be asked in committee. I hope the member will get an opportunity to do that, because she is brilliant in both official languages.

Maybe then we can get the government before us and really find out what it is doing. Only through careful consideration in committee does an individual have the time to go through the bill very carefully, line by line, word by word, to ensure that what we hope to do is actually done in the future.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst has two minutes to begin his speech, after which I will have to interrupt him.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will support this bill so that it can move to the next stage, but we hope that amendments will be made in committee to add protections for workers. As I said in the House of Commons this afternoon, as a miner, I remember that the rules in the mines in 1975 were not particularly great. I remember that the Brunswick mine lost six workers in 18 months. That is when the province finally adopted legislation on the right to refuse work. It ensured that the workplace was safe.

After that, there were incidents across Canada, but the big accident was at Westray mine. My colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore remembers it well, as does my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. I think all Canadians remember the 26 miners who were trapped underground. When I worked at Brunswick mine, I was a rescue worker. I was part of the team that went underground if there was a fire, for example. I was also a member of health and safety committees. Back then, companies would say that they did not want to be bothered and that if the health and safety laws were too strict, it would be detrimental to production and earnings.

Do we want to put earnings ahead of the lives of men and women with children? That is the question. We need to develop mechanisms to ensure that the men and women who get up every morning and put in a hard day's work return to their families at night. Governments have a responsibility to put mechanisms in place to ensure that happens. I hope that when the bill goes to committee, the government will be prepared to provide better protection for all workers. Companies would not exist without workers. We need to provide health and safety protections for them.

● (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst will have approximately 17 minutes and 40 seconds to complete his speech when the debate resumes.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE

The House resumed from November 7 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., pursuant to the order made Thursday, November 7, 2013, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

● (1810)

[English]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

*(Division No. 11)***YEAS**

Members

Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg	Boulerice
Brahmi	Brousseau
Caron	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Crowder	Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Fortin	Freeman
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Larose
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rankin
Ravnat	Raynault
Rousseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Scott
Sellah	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone

Tremblay

Turmel— 94

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
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Bezan
Block
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Bruinooge
Byrne
Calkins
Carmichael
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Chong
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Crockatt
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Dreeshen
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Easter
Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Foote
Galipeau
Garneau
Glover
Goldring
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Hsu
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lauzon
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Opitz
Pacetti
Payne
Preston
Rajotte
Regan
Rempel
Rickford
Saxton
Schellenberger
Sgro
Shipley
Smith

Adams
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Armstrong
Baird
Bélanger
Benoit
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Butt
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chisu
Clarke
Cotler
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dion
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Eyking
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Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Fry
Gallant
Gill
Goguen
Goodale
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
James
Jones
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Lebel
Leef
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacAulay
MacKenzie
McCallum
McGuinly
McLeod
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Murray
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
O'Toole
Paradis
Poilievre
Raitt
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Reid
Richards
Ritz
Scarpaleggia
Seeback
Shea
Shory
Sopuck

Private Members' Business

Sorenson
St-Denis
Strahl
Toet
Trottier
Truppe
Valeriotte
Van Loan
Warawa
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Trost
Trudeau
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Wallace
Warkentin
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer— 184

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

* * *

THE PHILIPPINES

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, a take note debate on the subject of the crisis in the Philippines take place, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, on Wednesday, November 20, 2013;

during the debate, no quorum calls, requests for unanimous consent or dilatory motions shall be received by the Chair; and

any Member rising to speak during debate may indicate to the Chair that he or she will be dividing his or her time with another Member.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: It being 6:14 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

MANDATORY DISCLOSURE OF DRUG SHORTAGES ACT

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP) moved that Bill C-523, An Act to amend the Department of Health Act (disclosure of drug shortages) be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present Bill C-523, Mandatory Disclosure of Drug Shortages Act.

Drug shortages are a public health issue. Shortages have a significant impact on the health of Canadians, the practices of health care professionals and system costs.

Private Members' Business

The most important issue is that of patient health. Drug shortages are a danger to their health because they delay access to drugs and patients are given a less-effective drug with a greater risk of adverse effects. Drug shortages do not allow for a transition period, which is very important for patients on certain drugs.

Drug shortages are not a new problem, let alone a problem unique to Quebec or Canada. This is a global problem that has existed since the 1970s. However, the problem has become more pronounced in recent years. The number of shortages has exploded. Between 2005 and 2010, the number of shortages of FDA-approved drugs increased from 92 to 310.

The Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec recorded 33 shortages in 2006, but 207 in 2010, before the major Sandoz episode in 2012. This crisis attracted a little more interest for this important public health issue.

Following this crisis, the NDP called for and got an emergency debate, but most importantly, we had a motion pass unanimously in March 2012. The motion read as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should: (a) in cooperation with provinces, territories and industry, develop a nationwide strategy to anticipate, identify, and manage shortages of essential medications; (b) require drug manufacturers to report promptly to Health Canada any planned disruption or discontinuation in production; and (c) expedite the review of regulatory submissions in order to make safe and effective medications available to the Canadian public.

What has been done since then to implement this motion? The Conservative government's database for voluntary reporting of drug shortages failed to ensure a transition period that is crucial to the health of Canadians. The government is leaving the health of Canadians in the hands of pharmaceutical companies, which are the only parties that decide when to report drug shortages.

More recently, the Minister of Health also announced the introduction of the multi-stakeholder toolkit and the protocol for the notification and communication of drug shortages, which:

...sets out clear expectations, principles and processes for how and when stakeholders across the supply chain share information in anticipation of or response to a drug shortage.

These are interesting and necessary tools, but they are far from sufficient. Neither the protocol nor the toolkit require manufacturers to provide accurate and timely information, and most importantly, no one is ultimately responsible for ensuring compliance with the protocol. This is not up to par—Canadians deserve better, and that is why I introduced this bill.

Moreover, in January 2013, Diane Lamarre, president of the Quebec order of pharmacists, stated that what the federal government had done so far was not enough.

• (1815)

Quebec's Minister of Health, Dr. Hébert, shared a similar sentiment when he said, "If the federal government was doing its job properly, shortages would be better prevented".

The bill on mandatory disclosure of drug shortages addresses the need to introduce a transition period to ensure that the health of Canadians is protected.

The bill stipulates that the pharmaceutical company shall notify the minister of any planned or foreseeable interruption of the

production, distribution or importation of a drug at least six months in advance. If a pharmaceutical company decides to cease producing, distributing or importing a drug, it must notify the minister at least 12 months in advance. The bill also stipulates that any companies found in violation of the act are liable to a fine.

Although we are talking about the regulatory framework for disclosing drug shortages, I am not suggesting that we reinvent the wheel.

Mandatory disclosure of drug shortages exists in the United States, New Zealand and in the European Union. Why not here in Canada? It has been called for by various groups, including the College of Family Physicians of Canada in a letter to the Prime Minister in 2011, and the Ordre des pharmaciens du Québec. Even officials at Health Canada have recommended to the minister that it be required.

Mandatory disclosure of drug shortages will have a direct positive impact on the practices of health professionals.

This bill has had many supporters. Some of the groups that support my initiative include: the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities; the College of Family Physicians of Canada; the Ordre des pharmaciens du Québec, which adopted a resolution to support my bill; the Association des anesthésiologistes du Québec; the Newfoundland & Labrador Pharmacy Board; the Prince Edward Island Pharmacy Board; the Association des pharmaciens des établissements de santé du Québec; the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions; and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta.

Drug shortages have a direct impact on the health of patients, first and foremost. These shortages undermine the health of Canadians and make it harder for our health system to run smoothly. The facts are overwhelming. Drug shortages have a significant impact on patient health and the work of health care professionals and put enormous pressure on health care costs.

The survey confirms that shortages are becoming increasingly common, as 78% of pharmacists said that they had difficulty sourcing a drug in their last shift at work. The survey also confirms the effects this has on the health care system, since 91% of hospital pharmacists agreed or strongly agreed that drug shortages are increasing costs to the health care system, and 76% of hospital pharmacists reported a significant impact on their workload.

The impact that drug shortages have on the patients is even more worrisome. According to a survey, 64% of doctors indicated that shortages of drugs had consequences for patients, and 78% of hospital pharmacists agreed or strongly agreed that the shortages adversely affect patients.

Furthermore, 91% of pharmacists said that their patients had been inconvenienced as a result of drug shortages. The impacts are greater in certain cases. For some, the consequences are limited to having to take—and pay for—a sometimes more expensive alternative drug.

Private Members' Business

●(1820)

For people with epilepsy, for example, the situation is more severe. When people suddenly stop taking anticonvulsants, seizures can become longer and more serious, and may require urgent care. They can sometimes even be fatal. Between 2009 and 2012 there were shortages for five different anticonvulsants, some of which were made by the same pharmaceutical company. These shortages forced some people to use a different preparation or, if available, another drug without the benefit of a transition period. That is unacceptable and it needs to change.

The Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society published the results of a survey of its members last June in the *Canadian Journal of Anesthesia*. The statistics are alarming. The sample included 60% of the society's members in all Canadian jurisdictions.

The survey revealed that 66% of respondents had experienced at least one shortage, forcing 49% of respondents to administer an inferior anesthetic. In addition, 8% of respondents witnessed drug errors caused by a shortage, 14% regarded drug shortages as having prolonged patients' recovery from anesthesia, and over 10% viewed shortages as resulting in an increased number of postoperative complications. That, however, is not the worst of it. The worst part is that, according to the survey, four respondents indicated that a shortage of anesthesia drugs and other essential drugs led to postoperative deaths. The drug shortage has become a human tragedy. We have to act now to put an end to that tragedy.

It is also clear that these shortages have had a significant impact on the work of health professionals. In the fall of 2012, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Pharmacists Association and the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists surveyed their members. That survey revealed alarming findings.

The survey confirmed that shortages are becoming increasingly frequent, with 78% of pharmacists stating that they had difficulty sourcing a drug in their last shift at work. The survey also confirmed that this situation is affecting the health system because 91% of hospital pharmacists agreed or strongly agreed that drug shortages are increasing costs to the health care system, and 76% of hospitals reported a significant impact on their workload.

We have wasted enough time. According to the Canadian Press, Health Canada did not choose mandatory reporting, in spite of the recommendations of the department's officials, because of the time required.

I will quote a Canadian Press article from December 27, 2012. Steve Outhouse, spokesperson for the former minister of health explained:

...a voluntary system was chosen because it would take too long for Health Canada to bring forward regulations mandating companies disclose production gaps.

More than a year later, nothing has been done to move in that direction. Because of this government's failure to take action, people are paying a high price.

I realize that mandatory reporting will not solve the problem of drug shortages. However, it is an indispensable tool that can help better manage the situation and provide patients and their health care

providers with pertinent and complete information in order to better manage the consequences.

The United States, the European Union and New Zealand have all opted for mandatory reporting.

There is nothing revolutionary about this bill. It is based on what is happening around the world.

●(1825)

The financial penalties included in the bill are modelled on a proposal contained in a bill passed by the U.S. Congress. The principle is as follows: if the act is not enforced, there must be consequences.

It is important that we move towards mandatory disclosure. This is not a witch hunt against the pharmaceutical companies because I know they did a lot during the 2012 crisis. Sandoz, in particular, notified its clients of upcoming shortages. However, it is important to ensure that patients are safe and have access to the treatment they need in a timely manner.

I am asking all my colleagues and the government to support the bill because it is in the best interests of all Canadians.

[*English*]

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this private member's bill would propose creating an entirely new layer of bureaucracy charged with the near-Herculean task of having to monitor mandatory reporting.

I do not understand how the member opposite believes that this would achieve anything. The United States has mandatory reporting and it has never once been able to levy a fine. Could the member explain this?

●(1830)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for asking the question. I feel it is a relevant question.

In fact, the bill will not have a financial or administrative impact. When the reporting is not mandatory, the consequences are more costly. We know that human lives have been lost.

In terms of the penalties in the United States, I will say that the penalty was still in force when I introduced the bill. However, it has subsequently been withdrawn.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in response to what the parliamentary secretary said, I wonder if she has thought about the fact that in the U.S. the FDA does not have to monitor the fines because it has a mandatory system. It is because of the mandatory system that there is reporting. The Americans have not actually had to use the fines. They are there as a penalty, but in talking with officials at Health Canada, my understanding is that the mandatory system in the U.S. has meant that they have not even had to use the fines. It is actually a positive thing, but maybe she has not thought about that.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the NDP health critic. I know that she is working very hard on the health portfolio.

In the United States, as in New Zealand and Europe, everyone chose the mandatory system over the voluntary system. Here, we deplore the fact that the government gives companies the option to report drug shortages or not. In fact, the poll indicated the effects quite well. Human lives have even been lost.

The United States may have withdrawn the fines, but they were there initially. The approach is mandatory, not voluntary.

[English]

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, in fact this private member's bill also appears to attempt to amend the wrong act. Pharmaceuticals are already regulated under the Food and Drugs Act, yet this bill proposes to amend the Department of Health Act. The word "drug" only appears once in the entire Department of Health Act, and when it does appear, it is because it is referencing the Food and Drugs Act.

I would ask why the member opposite proposes to amend an entirely different act from the one in which pharmaceuticals are actually governed.

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to amend the bill, but I am asking that the mandatory reporting of drug shortages be included. I want to see it in the bill.

I know that my colleagues opposite might not agree, but, as I said and I repeat, I am totally open to amendments being made in committee. What matters to me is that we are already starting to see the mandatory approach.

[English]

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-523 and to take this opportunity to highlight our government's efforts to address drug shortages in Canada and to briefly outline why I believe this bill is not the right approach for Canadians.

Drug shortages are a global problem our government takes very seriously. Many of us have heard from our constituents about the impact drug shortages can have on patients and health care providers. Patients and their families need to be confident that they will have access to the drugs they need when they need them. This country's doctors need to know that when they write a prescription for a patient or make a request for a drug to be available during surgery that it will be available. Addressing these concerns, however, is no easy task.

Figuring out how best to address this issue has been a principle concern of our government and other key stakeholders across the health care system. That is why we are working with drug companies and the provinces and territories as part of a pan-Canadian strategy to manage and prevent shortages and to reduce their impact.

Our government recognizes that the only way to effectively prevent and manage drug shortages is through a multi-stakeholder

approach. That is why we have called upon stakeholders across the drug supply chain to work together to take action.

In 2012, in partnership with the government of Alberta, we jointly launched the Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee on Drug Shortages. This committee includes membership from industry, health professional associations, and governments. They are all working together on concrete measures to address three priority areas, including prevention of drug shortages, advanced notification and communication, and shortage mitigation and crisis management. I am pleased to say that this collaborative approach was endorsed by federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of health in 2012.

While this multi-stakeholder approach is relatively new, I am pleased to report that we have seen real progress in public notification of shortages on an industry-funded website; concrete tools to mitigate drug shortages across the supply chain; and coordinated action on recent drug shortages between the federal government, provinces, territories, and industry. Through our productive working relationship, industry has taken important steps to improve public notification of shortages and to provide Canadians, health care practitioners, and patients with the information they need on drug shortages.

• (1835)

[Translation]

However, Canada's drug supply system is changing and improving. It is also becoming more open and transparent.

[English]

In response to a call from the Minister of Health, industry launched drugshortages.ca in 2012. Through this site, industry has been working collaboratively and voluntarily to provide public notification of actual and anticipated drug shortages. The information available on this site is critical to helping all elements of the health care system adapt to potential supply disruptions before patient care is negatively impacted. Most importantly, this approach is working. Back in August, for example, one major company, Sandoz, voluntarily posted a number of upcoming drug shortages to this site, well in advance of an anticipated disruption.

We will continue to monitor and push industry to ensure timely and comprehensive posting on this website to build on the success we have seen thus far.

Private Members' Business

The multi-stakeholder approach has also resulted in the collaborative development of concrete tools to prevent and manage drug shortages across the supply chain. This September, two tools were announced by the Minister of Health, jointly with her Alberta counterpart, alongside industry and health professional association representatives from the committee. The first of these tools is a national protocol for the public notification of drug shortages. This protocol sets out clear expectations for how and when stakeholders across the supply chain share information in the event of a drug shortage. This protocol provides much-needed direction on roles and responsibilities and details on how to communicate to ensure that Canadians continue to receive the most up-to-date information on potential and actual drug shortages.

The second tool is a multi-stakeholder tool kit that identifies key measures that can be taken across the drug supply chain to prevent and reduce the impact of drug shortages. This tool kit provides a detailed outline of Canada's drug supply chain and the roles and responsibilities of key players in the event of a shortage.

Finally, the multi-stakeholder approach has resulted in unprecedented levels of collaboration and coordinated action on recent drug shortages among all levels of government and industry.

When these shortages are communicated or detected, stakeholders from across the health care system and drug supply chain are now coming together to identify the best available measures to address them. These improvements will help ensure that all stakeholders have access to the essential information necessary to support a robust supply of drugs in Canada.

The benefits and successes of our current multi-stakeholder approach to addressing drug shortages provide a useful background as to why I will not be supporting Bill C-523 and why our government will instead continue to support ongoing multi-stakeholder efforts.

This bill seeks to amend the Department of Health Act to require drug suppliers to notify the Minister of Health of any disruption in the supply of drugs and to impose fines for non-compliance.

Where Bill C-523 falls short is that it ignores the significant good will and positive momentum seen to date to address this important issue. In doing so, this bill prematurely concludes that mandatory notification is possible, enforceable, or would necessarily lead to a reduction in the frequency and duration of these shortages. I do not think this bill can achieve that.

This bill also fails to recognize the complexity of the supply chain and the distinct roles and responsibilities of its stakeholders in the event of a shortage. Industry's primary role in the event of a potential or actual drug shortage situation must be more than just providing notification. Our multi-stakeholder approach demands much more from industry than just notification. It demands that industry work collaboratively with stakeholders across the supply chain to review their manufacturing practices, find alternate products, and make the health and well-being of Canadians their principle concern.

Rather than focusing attention on all stakeholders and their different but complementary roles, Bill C-523 seeks to expand the role of the federal government. In doing so, this bill attempts to impose additional bureaucracy, burdensome oversight, and needless,

unenforceable penalties. This ineffective, big government approach would not reduce drug shortages.

It is because of our efforts with all stakeholders that companies are providing advance notice of shortages online, including information about alternative treatments.

The lessons learned from the 2012 report of the Standing Committee on Health and from current multi-stakeholder efforts are that improved notification is only one component of a comprehensive strategy. We now know that this comprehensive approach to drug shortages requires an integrated focus on prevention, notification and communication, and mitigation and crisis management.

While our government will not support Bill C-523, we will continue to monitor this issue very closely. We are also open to considering a mandatory approach, if needed. Embarking upon such an approach at this time, however, would hinder the progress we have made so far.

Going forward, we will continue to expect greater transparency and accountability from industry. We will implement a new public register of manufacturers that have committed to advance notification and will publicly post letters to industry members who fail to comply.

However, let me be clear. If at any point it becomes clear that industry is not fulfilling its obligations to provide Canadians with timely, comprehensive, and reliable information on drug shortages, our government will not hesitate to bring forward a plan for stronger federal action.

• (1840)

In closing, Bill C-523 falls short of the strong, collaborative approach and action we have taken on drug shortages. It is an action Canadians expect and deserve from our government. We will continue to build on the successes we have seen so far, to draw on the strength of our partners, and to work together to prevent and manage drug shortages in Canada.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party will be supporting the bill. We think it is timely.

I listened to my hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary, use terms like "needless". This bill, which intends to deal in a real way with drug shortages, is not needless at all. I will tell members why later on.

The parliamentary secretary talked about bureaucratic big government. I do not think this is bureaucratic and big government. In fact, it is bureaucracy that is standing in the way of the kinds of processes we need to get drugs out into the community as soon as possible.

We should not be referring to Sandoz in any positive light. It was Sandoz that cost communities for intravenous anesthetics in the hospitals. It was a huge problem for everyone. It catapulted this problem onto the front pages of the newspapers and onto centre stage.

Private Members' Business

However, this is not something new. The college of pharmacists and the Canadian Pharmacists Association identified this problem in 2010, saying that about 90% of pharmacists had a difficult time filling prescriptions, because they could not find the drugs they needed. At that time, about 58% of physicians said that they actually could not find the drugs they needed and had to look for substitutions.

That was in 2010. We, as Liberals, had a round table with all the stakeholders and came up with a good sense of the situation in Canada. We knew that this was not just a Canadian problem. This is also linked to global shortages of drugs in terms of raw materials, et cetera.

We also watched the United States deal with this problem in a different way than Canada did. The Food and Drug Administration in the United States identified the problem back in 2010, just as Canada did. The President created a group of 11 extra people within the Food and Drug Administration to work solely on drug shortages. They were to identify upcoming shortages before they actually occurred, look for alternatives for those drugs at an early stage so that patients could get them when they needed them, and look at whether there was collusion at all in the drug industry with regard to shortages.

We know that a lot of these shortages are from generic companies. Many of the drugs we are talking about are old tried and true drugs that have been in the pharmacopoeia for physicians, patients, and pharmacists for the last 30 years. Now they are no longer being made, in many instances, because they are not profitable, and they cannot find the raw materials, et cetera.

It is not a needless problem or a needless intervention the parliamentary secretary referred to.

Here is what has happened since 2010, when pharmacists and doctors identified this problem. In 2012, since the government has taken the steps the parliamentary secretary talked about, the situation has worsened. Now 95% of pharmacists say that they have trouble trying to get the drugs that are prescribed, and 68% of physicians, an increase from 52%, are now saying that this is a problem for them in treating their patients.

What happens when patients cannot get a drug that has been working for them and is being prescribed? First, physicians have to find an alternative. That is very difficult to do if one does not know in advance. For people who understand about drugs and about patient care, they will know that they cannot suddenly, even if they could find an alternative, switch a drug right away in a day. One has to be weaned from the drug. One has to find out if the alternative will work for the patient. The patient may get side effects from that alternative. In the meantime, what happens when patients cannot get access to the drugs they need is that they get very sick and go to the ER. That is a cost to the system. That also makes them enter hospital for a period of time while they try being put on a new drug without consequences. That takes up hospital beds. We find that it backs up the system. Patients can get worse in terms of the progression of illnesses.

We see that this is a real problem in terms of patient care. It is not just something on a piece of paper. The pharmacists and doctors are flagging this as a real problem for patient care.

We are suggesting that we do something about it, in spite of the voluntary reporting system. No one is suggesting that it is not done in good faith. In an ideal world, all drug companies would say that they think they are going to have shortages and that they will happen in six months, and they will flag them early. However, they do not.

● (1845)

This is not an ideal world. It has shown over three years that the system of voluntary reporting has not worked. It is time to go into a mandatory system. It is time to identify beforehand. It is time to look at what the United States has been doing successfully with this drug shortage problem, listen to it and maybe learn something.

Do we listen to best practices? No, but we should look at them. We should see that at the end of the day, this is not about the industry. This is about patient care. This is about people having access to the drugs they need when they need them.

Let me give the House an example. Hospital pharmacists and people who are treating patients for terminal illness and for certain cancers have found that some of the chemotherapy treatment obviously has side effects. The drugs to treat those side effects are now no longer easily available. The other drugs that they might use have far more side effects than they would want in a patient who has cancer or a terminal illness. Again, we are finding that people are unable to use the substitutions.

Epilepsy is another example. If people do not have the drugs that they have been taking for many years, which have been out there in the marketplace for a long time and have worked for many epileptics, and if they cannot find them, they have to go on to newer drugs that may or may not work for them and that may have many side effects for them, causing them to get sicker. By the way, if they do not get the drug and they have to wait for two weeks, the problem for patients is that they can start going back into epileptic seizures, when they had been controlled for 20 or 30 years.

This is an issue of patient care. The government does not have to continue with the voluntary measures that it has used and that have been shown to not work. We are talking about evidence here. If we had it for three years and it is making things worse, fix it. What is the big problem? I do not believe that if the United States is able to get industry to work with government and mandate certain things without industry getting mad at it, the government has taken a strong step forward. People there obviously give a hoot about their patients and what happens to their citizens.

Private Members' Business

The problem here is that we have to get on top of this. We have to be proactive about it. We have to mandate getting it out there. Many drugs, and I could go down an extensive list of drugs right now, are in short supply and will never flag on time. Timeliness is an issue, not simply mandating reporting. The thing about timeliness is that it gives the doctor and the pharmacist the ability to find a new and alternative drug, to search around and see if they can find that drug to tide the patient over while they are trying the new drug. This is an essential component of patient care. It is important for patients. For those here who have family members who are ill, especially with chronic diseases, or family members with acute diseases who cannot find immediate care for themselves, this is a real problem.

The government should stop doing the job thing and the ideological thing and look at actual outcomes. It should look at whether the situation it has had for three years is working and move forward to have a better system to emulate the practice in the United States. It is not a bad thing to emulate good practices. The government should emulate the practice of the United States Food and Drug Administration and what Mr. Obama has done. Let us take care of Canadian patients.

This is what we intend to do. This is why this bill has come forward. This is why we, as Liberals who flagged it and came up with similar ideas in the beginning, will support the bill. It is a good bill, it is a solid bill, and it will help patients in the long run.

• (1850)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, for bringing forward Bill C-523. It is a straightforward bill and one that is really needed. Basically, it would amend the Department of Health Act to oblige drug suppliers to advise the Minister of Health of any interruption or cessation of the production, distribution, or importation of drugs and oblige the minister to prepare and implement an emergency response plan to address drug shortages. It is straightforward and necessary.

In debate tonight, we have heard how serious the issue of drug shortages has been. There are thousands of patients and families across Canada who have suffered terrible anxiety, pain, and stress because they suddenly have found out that the prescription they require as a pain control measure or for epilepsy or a special condition is not available. It has had a huge impact on the medical community, pharmacists, doctors, anesthesiologists, and hospitals. By and large, the biggest impact on Canadians and what is causing the greatest anxiety and suffering is that their health and well-being have been compromised as a result of these shortages.

I am proud of the fact that the NDP has been monitoring and pushing for accountability on drug shortages ever since it became visible that there was a huge issue that was not being addressed by the federal government. In March of 2012, we brought forward a motion in the House of Commons for the government to, in co-operation with the provinces, territories and industries, develop a nationwide strategy to anticipate, identify and manage shortages of essential medications, require drug manufacturers to report promptly to Health Canada, and so on. It was adopted unanimously. It clearly laid out a course of action that needed to be taken. It was interesting that the government supported the motion in May of 2012.

We also tried to call for a review of that motion a year later to find out what progress had been made. We heard something in that regard from the parliamentary secretary tonight. A multi-stakeholder steering committee was set up with the provinces and health care organizations on purchases and supplies. We had a briefing in October of this year from Health Canada to find out how that work was going, and we still have significant concerns about drug shortages in Canada. As a result of that briefing in October of this year, I wrote to the Minister of Health on October 29 outlining some of the concerns we had.

Our major concern is that although the government has set up this multi-stakeholder steering committee and does involve the key players, there is still no system in place for accountability and to ensure that suppliers live up to their obligations. As we heard tonight, the system that has been put in place is basically a voluntary one, so there is no accountability to ensure it is being followed. As a result, it is left to regional purchasers such as hospitals, health authorities, and the provinces to chase after the suppliers to find out what problems there are and what they need to do.

The second concern I identified to the minister was that accountability should also extend to how the shortages were reported. I pointed out that there was only a voluntary system in place for companies to report shortages, and no consequences if they did not immediately report them, even in delays that would compromise patient health. This particular point is very much at the heart of my colleague's bill. We have been pressing for a required or mandatory reporting system. As we have heard, this is in place in the United States, New Zealand, and the European Union. It is a good practice and one we should be emulating.

• (1855)

The third issue that we have identified as a concern, as a result of hearing about the progress that has been made, is that there is no system in place that tracks systemic manufacturing violations. We know from Health Canada that it has identified approximately 46% of drug shortages are due to manufacturing issues, including safety violations, yet there has been no way to track which companies may be negligent in their production. In fact, Health Canada officials stated to us that they had not yet been able to address the root causes and the preventive measures that were required to address drug shortages. A system of accountability for manufacturing standards would also help in minimizing drug shortages.

Therefore, while I appreciate that the minister has taken some steps, frankly speaking, they are not adequate. They have not gone far enough. Out in the health community there is still an enormous amount of concern that we will face further shortages, that we will be scrambling as we did in 2012, that there will be yet another crisis. At the end of the day, it will be Canadians who are already in very difficult circumstances and who are already in many ways suffering, maybe in chronic pain, who will bear the brunt of a system that is not working properly.

Private Members' Business

The last comment I want to make is that we have studied this issue quite carefully. In fact, the parliamentary health committee had a study on drug shortages. The report issued by the committee was okay, it was adequate, but we felt it did not go far enough. Therefore, in the minority report from the NDP we made a number of recommendations, which I would like to refer to.

We urged the Minister of Health and the federal government to review the appropriate federal agency to assume responsibility for drug shortages notification website and to work with its provincial and territorial counterparts to set up and provide an investment for a public mandatory reporting system whereby drug companies would be required by law to report supply disruptions.

We also urged the Minister of Health and the government to convene an expert committee to identify critical drugs and require that any company marketing these critical drugs would have to give Health Canada a minimum of six months' warning of supply reductions.

Finally, there were other recommendations, but we also urged the Minister of Health and the federal government to convene a study to identify factors causing the drug shortages to determine if there were regulatory measures in addition to mandatory reporting that would identify and prevent drug shortages.

These are very extensive recommendations that we made.

I will finish with this. I was a bit aghast at the parliamentary secretary's comments earlier. On the one hand, she said that they were not going to support the bill because it sought to expand the role of the federal government and sought to expand the bureaucracy. She kind of trashed it. Then in the next breath she said that they would support mandatory reporting if it was needed. It seems to me that there is a contradiction. Conservatives supported the motion last year that came through the House as a result of an emergency debate.

Let us focus on the issue. Let us ensure that there is a system in place as outlined in this very good bill. It is very straightforward. Let us learn from what has happened in other jurisdictions and let us do a better job in Canada. We are not convinced the multi-stakeholder process that is in place now will actually do the job that is required. We urge members of the House to consider the bill and to support it when it comes to a second reading vote.

● (1900)

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be here today to speak to Bill C-523, a bill that would undermine our current approach to mitigating drug shortages. Drug shortages are a global problem that our government takes very seriously. We have gone to great lengths to address the issue in a collaborative way, and we are making real progress in preventing, communicating and addressing drug shortages.

Bill C-523 would make it mandatory for drug suppliers to provide notification of any interruption to drug supply and would impose fines for non-compliance. It would increase the regulatory burden and even reduce our ability to prevent shortages.

Indeed, our government has been doing good work with drug companies, and the provinces and territories, as part of a pan-Canadian strategy to manage and prevent shortages and reduce their

impact. As a result of our actions, the drug supply system is changing and improving. It is also becoming more open and transparent.

As my colleague, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health noted, the Minister of Health herself recently announced improved communication strategies to ensure that all players are working together and clearly understand their roles when problems do occur.

Make no mistake, it is a priority for our government to work with all key stakeholders to prevent and manage current and potential drug shortages. However, we cannot do this alone.

Drug supply chains involve many players, including drug companies, doctors, patients, pharmacists, group purchasing organizations and all levels of government. That is why we are committed to a drug shortage strategy based on collaboration. Each player in the drug supply system has a specific area of expertise as well as a unique set of responsibilities. By working closely with these players, we can take advantage of that expertise to prevent and manage shortages.

Our government has established productive relationships with these diverse players. Together we have been able to create important tools for addressing shortages, such as the protocol for the notification and communication of drug shortages, and the stakeholder toolkit, as announced by the Minister of Health earlier this year.

This protocol sets out clear expectations for how and when stakeholders will share information about drug shortages. It emphasizes that early warning is the key for the health care system to react to shortages. Stakeholders have agreed that all shortages, anticipated or actual, will be posted on the dedicated drug shortages website at drugshortages.ca.

The tool kit details the Canadian drug supply chain, clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all key players, and identifies the tools and the strategies available to prevent and address drug shortages. In creating the protocol and the tool kit, collaboration was absolutely essential.

I have already remarked on the complexity of the system and the many players involved in it. The only way for us to benefit from a stable drug supply system, a system that Canadians expect and deserve, is if all players do their part and work together toward the long-term solution.

The federal government's primary role in the drug system is to regulate the safety, quality, and efficacy of drugs and health products. However, we are also playing a strong and collaborative role with multiple jurisdictions and stakeholders to assist their efforts to anticipate, mitigate, and manage drug shortages. We have a strategy for dealing with shortages based on multi-stakeholder collaboration, and it is working. It takes advantage of diverse roles, responsibilities and expertise.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-523 would alter this completely, increase the regulatory burden for industry, and risk the positive momentum that we have built with diverse stakeholders. I urge all members of this House to maintain this goodwill, support our collaborative approach, and vote against the bill.

The bill is wrong for Canada because it undermines collaboration. It is also flawed because it prematurely assumes that mandatory notification is feasible and enforceable and would lead to a reduction in the frequency and duration of drug shortages.

Bill C-523 would impose a mandatory six-month advance notification for shortages and twelve-month notification whenever a manufacturer decides to stop making a drug, and it includes hefty fines for failures to notify.

The problem with these proposed regulations is that they fail to recognize important collaborative work that has been happening across the drug supply system. Given that stakeholders throughout the supply chain are currently willing to work with us, it is not clear how mandatory notification would improve our ability to address shortages at this time.

● (1905)

Because of our efforts, companies are providing advance notice of shortages online, including information on alternative treatments. Indeed, industry has been voluntarily posting potential and actual shortages on drugshortages.ca since March 2012.

One point I found particularly interesting is that under the voluntary notification in Canada, industry is publicly posting a wider range of shortages than is posted on websites for jurisdictions where notification is mandatory. It has to do with all of that collaboration that I discussed earlier. For example, public notification in the U.S. is limited only to medically necessary drugs with the greatest impact on public health. It is hard to see how this system would be an improvement over the current Canadian approach in which all anticipated and actual shortages are publicly posted.

Mandatory notification in Canada could threaten momentum and goodwill. Bill C-523 does not make any of these considerations. I simply cannot support a proposal to overhaul a voluntary system that is working increasingly well without any evidence that a mandatory prescriptive system would have a positive impact. If, for some reason, industry were to stop providing Canadians and health care providers with timely, comprehensive and unbiased information, then we would certainly have a reason to move forward with stronger federal action.

As mentioned earlier by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, our government would consider a mandatory approach if we failed to see continued success under our voluntary approach. With the current collaborative approach, mandatory notification would be a risky and unnecessary approach to an issue that this government is already very effectively addressing. Industry is in the best position to quickly inform health professionals when supply problems occur. It is the first to know when changes to manufacturing business practices occur that could lead to shortages.

In Canada, industry recognizes this, and, I repeat, is voluntarily posting shortages on drugshortages.ca. I encourage everybody to check that out. That means that Canadians and health care providers

have easy, timely access to important information about which drugs are in shortage and can react accordingly. Transparency and communications around anticipated and actual drug shortages are key to enabling all relevant stakeholders to act accordingly.

We will continue to enhance transparency through initiatives like a new public register of manufacturers, which has committed to provide advance notification, and by publicizing instances where companies have failed to do so. For these measures to be successful, we must continue to recognize distinct roles and responsibilities so we can effectively limit the impact of drug shortages on Canadians.

As I mentioned earlier, the federal government's primary role in the drug supply system is regulating the safety, quality, and efficacy of drugs for the Canadian market. It is industry's responsibility to understand the need for their drugs and to provide public notification when it cannot meet such demand. It is encouraging to see that industry is effectively fulfilling that responsibility.

However, challenges remain, and we will continue to monitor the situation and to push industry along a collaborative path that is already showing progress. As I have said already, if stronger federal action is required, the government will take it. We recognize that all players in the drug supply system have distinct and important roles to play, and we are working closely with provinces, territories, and the industry.

This work has yielded progress, and our coordinated responses to drug shortages are encouraging. Recent supply disruptions saw government officials, both federal and provincial, collaborate closely with manufacturers to monitor and address those shortages. Going forward, we will continue this collaborative approach so that all players exercise their respective roles effectively and fulfill their important and complementary roles to one another. The government will do its part, and we expect others to do theirs.

In today's global marketplace, with a wide variety of drugs available to meet Canadians' health needs, a well-organized system is necessary to manage our drug supply. I assure everyone that thanks to our collaborative efforts, the Canadian drug supply is increasingly open, transparent, and well coordinated. Our collaborative approach protects patients by allowing all players to work together to prevent and manage shortages. We are going to continue to monitor this issue very closely to determine if a mandatory approach should be considered in the future.

Private Members' Business

● (1910)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

* * *

[English]

AFGHAN VETERANS MONUMENT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 37, the House will proceed to the consideration of Motion No. 448, under private members' business.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should commit to honouring our Afghan veterans through a permanent memorial either at an existing or a new site in the National Capital Region, once all Canadian Armed Forces personnel return to Canada in 2014, and that the memorial remember (i) those who lost their lives and who were injured in the Afghanistan War, (ii) the contribution of our Canadian Armed Forces, diplomatic and aid personnel who defended Canada and its allies from the threat of terrorism, (iii) the contributions made by Canada to improving the lives of the Afghan people, and (iv) the hundreds of Canadian Armed Forces personnel who remain in a non-combat role in Afghanistan today, helping to train Afghan forces.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to rise today to present Motion No. 448. I am mindful of the veterans across our great country who have served our country while defending the principles of freedom, human rights and democracy. They are veterans like Master Corporal Jeff Walsh who was killed while on active duty on August 8, 2006, in Afghanistan, leaving his family to cherish his memory. They are veterans like Major Derek Prohar who was wounded by an improvised explosive device during an enemy ambush but continued returning fire and helped to gain control of key terrain in September 2006, and who continues to wear the uniform through his employment in the Department of National Defence. They are veterans like Officer Bill Green, a reservist and teacher, and the many others who demonstrate a remarkable courage and valour to all of us here at home. They and their families made great sacrifices for the sake of preserving our freedom, our human rights and our democracy.

Although the sacrifice these veterans and their families make cannot be calculated, we can begin to repay that debt through remembering and honouring their service. I also hope that this motion provides some closure for the families of the 158 fallen Canadian soldiers.

Our government has stood, and will always stand, shoulder to shoulder with the men and women who have helped build this great country and defended its values and ideals. I would like to add that Canadian veterans and the men and women currently in uniform, along with their families, have a strong ally in the Minister of Veterans Affairs. In him, they have a proud and hard-working individual who is always there to champion their best interests. I know all members will join me in saluting his service and devotion to the cause of veterans.

Only short steps away from this chamber are powerful reminders of the service and sacrifice that Canadians have made in defence of

freedom, human rights and democracy. We have the Peace Tower, the iconic centrepiece of our parliamentary buildings, which serves as a memorial itself. Within the Peace Tower lies the Memorial Chamber, a quiet and sacred space that is dedicated to the memory of Canadians who have died in military service. Within the Memorial Chamber lie seven books of remembrance, where a page in each book is turned every morning in a special ceremony at 11 o'clock. These books offer a special tribute to each and every individual fallen soldier since World War I.

A short walk from here stands the National War Memorial, an awe-inspiring memorial that has become a Canadian icon and the national focus for Canadians every Remembrance Day. The National War Memorial is also the last resting place of Canada's Unknown Soldier. Every Remembrance Day since the Unknown Soldier returned home, thousands of Canadians have adorned his tomb with their poppies in respect and remembrance.

Not far away in Confederation Park are the stirring memorials to our first nation veterans and those of the Korean War. Of equal prominence is the memorial to Canadian peacekeepers, which is located in Major's Hill Park, just off of Sussex Drive.

All of these memorials were designed and erected with the greatest artistic skill and sensitivity, and all are meant to ensure that their message of remembrance is expressed in a manner that will resonate down through the ages. However, we are also aware of the memorials that stand in villages, towns and cities in every area of our great country. I would think that all of us here today have stood before them on occasions that honoured Canadian veterans, and we did that just a few short days ago on November 11, Remembrance Day.

A number of these memorials were established at private expense and to this day are respectfully tended and cared for by those who understand the motto "lest we forget". They remember, and do so in reverence and quiet dignity. These memorials serve as a reminder and challenge to all Canadians to appreciate the sacrifice that our veterans have made in the defence and promotion of the values that define our country, and by extension, ourselves.

● (1915)

Edmund Burke, the great English philosopher, once stated, "It is not what a lawyer tells me I may do, but what humanity, reason, and justice tell me I ought to do".

His statement defines the very reasons why we went to the aid and protection of the people of Afghanistan. His statement defines Canada as a nation and speaks to why our nation is admired and trusted throughout the world. We have and always will defend the right to self-determination and of people's right to be free from tyranny and oppression. In defence of these principles and human justice, Canadians have always been in the vanguard.

The mission in Afghanistan has been the most significant Canadian military engagement since the Korean War. It has been the fourth most costly in terms of lives lost in our nation's military history after the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War.

Private Members' Business

Tragically, 158 Canadian Armed Forces members were killed and more than 2,050 members were injured. It also took the lives of five civilian Canadians, including a senior diplomat, two aid workers, an engineer, and a journalist. We remember their service.

We remember the sacrifice, and it is our fervent hope and prayer that those who continue to serve in Afghanistan until the mission is ended will come home safe and sound to their loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, hon. members, let us do the right thing. Let us act responsibly. I seek support of members to pass this motion and pave the way to ensure that the Canadians we call “soldiers” can reflect with pride and compassion on the effort and sacrifices of the Canadian men and women who served in Afghanistan.

Lest we forget.

● (1920)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Palliser for moving this excellent motion. It goes without saying that this type of commemorative monument would be erected to honour the memory of soldiers who were killed. I would like to thank my colleague for this worthwhile initiative.

I would like to ask my colleague a question. He moved this motion on May 30. Just weeks later, the Minister of National Defence announced that he would repatriate an existing cenotaph that was erected at the Kandahar airfield. Does my colleague feel that we could use the cenotaph that was repatriated and that is currently travelling across the country, or should we build a new one?

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, the site for the monument and the design of the monument is all to be planned out in the not too distant future and ready for presentation in 2014 later in the fall. We have a window of about a year to seek input from various groups like the Legion, army and navy veterans, Parliament, and other bodies that have an interest in the memorial to come with their thoughts. We look to receive a lot of input and then have a committee to decide on the design and where it should go.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a profound statement that we hear periodically, particularly on November 11 when we have the privilege and honour as members of Parliament to participate in Remembrance Day from coast to coast. The saying is, “Freedom is not free”. I understand it was Walter Hitchcock, a retired air force colonel from the U.S., who originally coined that phrase.

When we give a good deal of thought to it, we get a better appreciation of the huge sacrifice. Members of our forces know that and they put their lives on the line. When we talk about Afghanistan, we need to recognize the contribution of our forces, of the men and women who were engaged in representing our freedom.

To what degree is the member approaching this issue in ensuring we do the right thing in honour of our veterans, those who have fallen in particular? To what degree is he open to new ideas coming forward to the House to ensure we properly and adequately do the right thing in this situation?

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, the thought is that the input from all parts of Canada will be somehow married into this edifice that will say “good job” to the men and women of the Afghan war.

We have not decided anything in terms of placement. We have not decided anything in terms of design. We wanted to decide that we were going to do this as a Parliament, to recognize soldiers, the men and women who have given their lives in the pursuit of freedom.

Right now, it is open. We encourage input from everyone who has something to say about it. We look forward to putting together something that is reflective of coast-to-coast-to-coast Canadians.

● (1925)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his motion to recognize the sacrifice of all those members of our Canadian Forces who died in Afghanistan.

In particular, we had a young man from our riding, Sapper Stephan Stock, who belonged to the South Alberta Light Horse and who gave his life. I think this is a fitting memory.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, just as the hon. member for Medicine Hat has shared with us, that is the kind of input we want.

We want to hear what people have to say about it. We want to include text in the memorial. We want to make sure that it is reflective of everyone who has something invested in democracy and freedom, and that is every Canadian.

Hopefully we will have lots of input and we will design a memorial that we can all be proud of.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are in the House today to debate an important motion regarding a monument to honour the memory of our Afghan veterans.

On May 30, the member for Palliser moved a motion to erect a monument for our Afghan veterans. We are proud to support this worthwhile motion because we feel it is important to honour the contribution of our veterans and members of our diplomatic corps who worked in Afghanistan. The NDP is proud to say that it respects the sacred duty to honour and take care of our injured veterans.

Our military personnel have been participating in foreign missions for more than a century. Military personnel heeded the nation's call to defend our values, freedoms and democracy. Now it falls to us, Canadian citizens and parliamentarians, to do our duty and honour the memory, the service and the sacrifices of our veterans. They did it for us. Our soldiers and their families answered the call with honour, and it is now our turn to return the favour.

Private Members' Business

Canadian monuments honouring our veterans are where Canadians pause to remember the contribution of all our veterans to preserving our rights and freedoms. As evidenced by the participation of Canadians in the Remembrance Day ceremonies, they are there to remember our veterans, but also to support active members of our Canadian Forces.

The support of Canadians for our troops is unwavering, both in good times, such as when we celebrate the obvious relief of military families when they are reunited again, or in bad times, when we learn of untimely deaths. Canadians then get together to pay a final tribute. We are all proud of the great work done every day by Canadian Forces to protect Canadians and to uphold human rights and the rule of law.

In my role as deputy critic for veteran affairs, I frequently meet members of the Canadian Forces and, of course, veterans. I am always very impressed by their pride, their solidarity and their perseverance.

Yet, the unique lifestyle of these families is far from easy. The frequent moves, the unexpected postings and the daily risks weigh heavily on the family unit and on its economic survival. Moreover, it is impossible to imagine what these men and women feel during their deployment, the sadness of leaving their loved ones, the fear of future battles and the worries about possible injuries or even death. Therefore, we must salute their courage in the face of adversity.

Even after their life in the Canadian Forces, our veterans—particularly those who are injured—and their families have a hard time dealing with the consequences that these deployments in conflict zones may have on them. The first obstacle is the return to civilian life. It is extremely difficult for them to quit the only career they ever had and thought they would have for the rest of their working lives.

However, before they can make a professional transition, they will have to embark on a rehabilitation program to address or alleviate their health problems. For the families that have to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder, this may be even more difficult. The spouse and children must be on the lookout for the veteran's mood swings.

Once, a veteran told me how extremely difficult it was to hear his son say that he did not know what kind of father he would have to deal with from day to day, since the veteran's mood was so unstable. It is very difficult for them to manage a condition that prevents them from participating fully in family life. Husbands and wives must be on the lookout for different crisis triggers to protect their spouse. They become increasingly defensive, which can result in isolation from the family.

Canadians must take care of them, and this is truly where the sacred duty of the government lies: in taking care of those who were sent into danger. Faced with the difficulties of deployment right up to their transition, including the treatment for their injuries, the soldiers and their families manage to cope. This is why Canadians are so proud of the veterans and members of the Canadian Forces.

I would like to speak briefly about today's issue, a debate on a new monument to the Afghanistan veterans.

● (1930)

Everyone remembers the events of September 11 and the deployment of our troops to Afghanistan. I will outline the key aspects of that mission.

The Canadian government quickly deployed special forces under U.S. command in the months after September 11.

In January 2002, the Canadian contingent in Afghanistan consisted of 3,000 soldiers. In 2004, Rick Hillier assumed command of the NATO mission. In 2005, Canada took command of the Kandahar region, where 2,500 troops had been deployed.

In total, 39,277 soldiers were deployed. Almost \$2 billion was invested in development aid. Furthermore, 158 of our soldiers as well as some civilians, including a journalist, lost their lives during this conflict. The final withdrawal of our troops should take place in 2014.

The motion was moved on May 30. However, on July 9, the Minister of National Defence announced the repatriation of a monument installed at the Kandahar airfield. This monument was brought back to Canada and is presently touring the country. The installation includes 190 commemorative plaques representing 201 Canadians who died in the conflict or, as I mentioned, soldiers and some civilians, including one journalist.

According to the National Defence website, the long-term objective is to reconstruct the Kandahar airfield cenotaph and return it to its original and legitimate form in a permanent, prominent, respectful and accessible location in the national capital region.

I would like to know the government's intention with respect to this motion. The member for Palliser said that a location has not been chosen and that no decision has been made about what monument will be erected and what will be inscribed on it. We would like some clarification.

I would also like to point out that Canada still does not have a commemorative monument for its veterans who participated in the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. It has been more than 10 years since that mission ended, and it is time that those veterans also had their own monument in order to pay tribute to those soldiers, their sacrifices and their service.

Beginning in 1991, tens of thousands of Canadian Forces members strived to help make the Balkan region secure and maintain the fragile peace. The largest number of Canadians to serve in a UN mission in the region at any one time was 2,000. In the Balkans, 20 Canadians lost their lives in the various missions, and many more were injured physically or psychologically. These veterans of peacekeeping missions also deserve to be honoured through the creation of a memorial for those who lost their lives. Of course, we are waiting for the government to make a move on this.

Private Members' Business

I would also like to point out that veterans are still calling for the return of a volunteer service medal and a medal for veterans of the Cold War, who protected Canada for decades.

My hon. colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking introduced a private member's bill in that regard, to create the first Cold War medal.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the NDP's unwavering support for our troops and our sincere desire to recognize the sacred duty we have to take care of our wounded veterans. We feel it is important to commend the service and sacrifices of our veterans through ceremonies and memorials. However, there is another way to honour veterans, and I think this is the best way to pay tribute to them: by providing them with the benefits and services that they need and deserve. We owe it to them.

After fighting on the front lines, our soldiers should not have to fight the government to get the benefits they deserve.

I would like to end by thanking my hon. colleague for this great motion to pay tribute to the troops that served in Afghanistan.

● (1935)

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise, first to thank the member for Palliser for moving this motion and second to lend our support to it.

The member made some comments about the hard work of the minister. Question mark? He mentioned some of the listening to the veterans community that the minister is doing. Question mark? We need to make sure that our soldiers and their sacrifices are recognized.

For my family, this year has been moving. The Silver Cross Mother chosen this year by the Legion was Niki Psiharis. She was the mother of Sergeant Christos Kariagiannis, who was killed in Afghanistan in 2007.

We need to move beyond just recognizing our veterans from Afghanistan to recognizing our veterans from other wars. This was brought up in committee today. I hope that as we move forward, we, as the House of Commons, start recognizing, not only the 158 men and women who sacrificed themselves in Afghanistan, but also the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform in other areas, whether that be in Cyprus, the Middle East, the former Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia or Hercegovina. We need to make sure that we recognize them.

There are other facts and figures that we need to recognize, besides putting up a monument and saying, "Here we are. Here is a great monument and we recognize your sacrifice". We need to make sure that the government is accountable to the veterans for the centres that it is closing. It is closing nine centres across Canada. It is closing centres that look after our veterans. They are Veterans Affairs centres where veterans can go, whether they are 60, 80 or 90 years old, to ask for help. In Windsor, for example, the centre is closed and a veteran will now have to go to London. The Thunder Bay centre has been closed. The Sydney centre in Nova Scotia has been closed and the veteran will have to go to Halifax.

I had the fortune, or whatever we want to call it, to take the drive from Halifax to Sydney in Nova Scotia to attend the rally of 3,500 to 4,000 veterans who were marching and asking the government not to close the centre. This was a couple of weeks ago. I have to tell the House that going over Kelly's Mountain was treacherous. Now, the Conservative government will force our veterans to drive down to Halifax if they are looking for help. The government is saying it is not going to do this, but it is going to send doctors or nurses and case officers to their homes. However, 27,688 veterans will be affected by the closure of these 9 centres.

It raises the question on the one side of saying that we are going to erect a monument, while on the other side the Conservative government wants to stick it to the vets.

I congratulate my colleague for bringing the motion forward. I ask him as we go forward that he speak to the minister and encourage him to take the veterans to heart. The new veterans charter is something we are going to be looking into at committee very soon. That has to be addressed and it has to reflect what the veterans really want.

Erecting a monument or bringing a monument back from Kandahar where we have lost 158 men and women is one thing; we need to do that in order to honour their memory. However, to truly look after them and say we care about them is outside of that window of opportunity between November 4 and November 11 when we have Veterans' Week and the minister and the Legion bring the veterans here for a meeting where they say "thank you" and give them a pat on the back and take pictures that the minister posts on his website. "That is a great job, minister".

The veterans are looking for more. Unfortunately, the Conservative government is failing to give them more.

● (1940)

The government makes vitriolic attacks on people who bring forward real issues, such as the issue of 27,381 boxes of medical records that the Department of Veterans Affairs ordered destroyed. That is the vitriolic attack of the minister on people who bring forward an issue.

Not only that, there are people like Sean Bruyey, Harold Leduc, and others, whose medical files have been breached. On one side, we talk about erecting monuments, and on the other side, they stick it to the vets. I hope that the government gets itself together, and as we move forward, we support our vets. We support our vets, because there is nothing less we have to do for them.

Do not remember them only from November 4 to November 11. Remember them 24/7, 365 days a year. When we see veterans, go up and thank them for their service to our country. If it were not for those vets, the 158 men and women and five civilians who died in Afghanistan whom we put in harm's way, we Canadians would not have democracy. We would not be able to stand in the House of Commons to debate, to speak, and to exchange ideas. Every one of us owes our position in the House to the sacrifices men and women made in order for us to have our democracy.

Private Members' Business

As we move forward, we on the Liberal side will be supporting this. I caution the government that the veteran community is looking, the 1.4 million veteran family is going to hold the government accountable and is going to hold its feet to the fire. We can dance and sing and say that we are going to do things, but we owe our veterans more.

We owe veterans, such as Mike Pehlavian, who is homeless at this very moment, in Vancouver, B.C. He is 36 years old. He came back from Afghanistan. The only thing holding the top of his body to the bottom of his body are two pins on his side and one pin on his back. He is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. He is homeless. We owe him not just the lump sum we are going to give him. We owe it to him to make sure that we are there to follow up with him.

It is one thing to say that we are going to honour the men and women who have died, but we have to honour the men and women who have suffered, who have been hurt and are coming back from Afghanistan. Over 1,500 soldiers are coming back hurt, and they need to know that we stand beside them. We owe them the courtesy to say that we as a country that put them in harm's way, that we parliamentarians who asked them to engage, are not going to forget them.

It is a moral obligation we have to these men and women. It is nice to have the song and dance of erecting a monument, which we support. However, the moral obligation is that the government deliver to men and women who are now returning as veterans and are suffering, men and women like Medric Cousineau, who are out there living in woodsheds. He lived in a woodshed for 25 years, because he was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. We owe him and what he has given to this country the dignity to look him in the eye and say that we respect what he did. We treasure what he did and are never going to forget what he did for this country.

I hope that my colleagues across the way will join me as we call upon the government to give veterans the respect they deserve. Let us forget.

● (1945)

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this important motion. Before that, I would like to make a comment with regard to some of the comments we have just heard from the member of the Liberal Party. I would remind that member that we are talking about our brave men and women who have made a tremendous contribution to our country and to the freedom that we so dearly enjoy. I would encourage him to stop spreading misinformation and using the scare tactics that he and his party employ.

One example he used in his remarks was how Veterans Affairs is destroying thousands of files and boxes, and so on. I can assure the House that none of those files or boxes would affect veterans who are living or receiving benefits. They are files and boxes from years ago. However, that member continues to spread misinformation and use scare tactics. These are real people—men, women, and families—we are dealing with. We need more respect for our veterans, especially from that member and that party over there. I hope that he and his party will stop spreading this misinformation, especially comments of the kind he made on Remembrance Day on national

television. He knows well what those are. I would encourage him to refrain from making comments such as those and have some respect for our veterans.

It is a privilege to rise and offer my support for this very important motion that calls upon the Government of Canada to honour our Afghan veterans by creating a permanent memorial at an existing or new site in the national capital region.

I would first like to congratulate the hon. member for Palliser, who has proposed the motion and has been accorded the well-deserved honour of opening this debate.

With parliamentary approval, this motion will be a fitting tribute and a recognition of the contribution and sacrifices made by the brave men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces and the memory of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of all Canadians.

I am pleased to confirm that the government will support this motion and I thank the Minister of Veterans Affairs for his hard work on this important subject. I personally would like to thank him for continuing to build upon the accomplishments this government has achieved in recognizing and supporting Canada's veterans. Our government has invested nearly \$5 billion in new funding to improve the benefits and services we provide to our veterans and their families. We have reduced the red tape so that our veterans can access the benefits they need, in addition to adding 600 points of service across the country from coast to coast to coast.

This government remains committed to continuing to work with Canadians on initiatives, such as our Helmets to Hardhats program to help Canada's veterans transition to fulfilling second careers in the private sector. Toward that time, those of us present today have the duty and indeed the honour to put the process in motion, if members will pardon the pun. I would submit that all members should take an active role in providing their input, and that of Canadians, as to where the memorial should be located, and continue to address other key elements of this important undertaking.

There are memorials throughout our great nation from coast to coast to coast, some only a short distance away from this chamber, that stand as an unwavering testament to our proud military history and the incredible men and women who have served Canada with bravery and distinction.

The Afghanistan mission is another chapter in that proud history.

● (1950)

I have a responsibility, as all members do, to promote and preserve such a record of courage and commitment. We are the ones who debate and decide the mission to which we commit our fellow citizens who wear the uniform bearing the flag of Canada on their shoulders.

Private Members' Business

Canada's mission in Afghanistan has been the most significant military mission since the Korean War. It has been costly in that 158 of our soldiers, sailors and airmen and women, and four Canadian civilians made the ultimate sacrifice combatting the spread of terrorism. Canada has lost some of our finest and bravest. Over 2,050 Canadians have been wounded, and for some their wounds are so severe that their military career has ended or will come to an end. Some face months of treatment and rehabilitation before returning to their units, their comrades, and their noble duties. Some need our support in their transition to civilian life and meaningful employment. Many have wounds that are less visible but equally troubling and challenging. These brave men and women are deserving of our support and recognition, as are their families and other loved ones who form such a vital part of their support network.

When I refer to Canada's veterans, I speak of Canadians who do not question the causes to which we commit them. They are highly trained professionals who apply their respective skills in the defence of the ideals and values that their fellow citizens define and believe are worth protecting.

From us and their military commanders, they expect a clear explanation of their mission and the provision of tools to get the job done. In return, they do not expect praise or reward. Their modesty and professionalism is simply astonishing. In short, they exemplify the Canadian way. They get the job done and move on.

In closing, I would like to remind my fellow members of the Afghanistan Memorial Vigil, unveiled and displayed here on Parliament Hill, which is travelling across the country. This vigil consists of the original memorial plaques from the Kandahar airfield cenotaph that honours those who gave their lives courageously defending Canada's shared ideals and values. As it travels across our great country and appears in the constituencies we represent, I urge all members to make every effort to support its purpose and promote its presence.

Our government has kept and continues to keep faith with those who have defended Canada. Canada's veterans stood up for us and we will always stand by them.

Let us do the right thing. Let us put actions to our words. We must keep faith and prove by our passing of this motion that we will never forget. The eyes of those who fell, the eyes of those who serve and the eyes of those who support them, are upon each and every one of us. We must not, we cannot fail them. Let us do our duty and pass this motion. Lest we forget.

● (1955)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

If a member of the House intentionally misleads the House or misrepresents the facts, that is a serious matter. It is a serious offence. The parliamentary secretary has intentionally misled the House when he said that there are no records. There were three people that I put forward to him.

Therefore, I would ask whether the parliamentary secretary would like to withdraw his statement that he is 100% sure that there are no people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt for his intervention. I do not

think in this case it is a point of order because it really speaks to a matter of debate about the facts that have been exchanged in the House here this evening in debate. Therefore, as is usually the case, we do not really look at that as a point.

There is no decision to take on that, so we will continue. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion, which I will support of course.

Unfortunately, I must mention a rather important point, namely that we were supposed to debate the motion on November 6. However, that debate did not take place because on that day the Leader of the Government in the House preferred to table a time allocation motion on a government bill. Therefore, at the end of the day, we did not have time to discuss this issue, because of the time required to vote.

We could have discussed this motion during the week preceding Remembrance Day. I think it would have been a very appropriate time. However, because of undemocratic tactics designed to cut off debate, we are discussing the motion two weeks later.

Knowing that veterans and troops in Afghanistan are fighting for democracy, I find it rather ironic that the Leader of the Government in the House would propose undemocratic measures and try to muzzle members. I find it particularly sad that we were not able to debate the motion during the week preceding Remembrance Day.

I am now going to talk about what the war in Afghanistan means to me. I enlisted in the Canadian Forces shortly after September 11. In fact, I joined the forces on May 11, 2002. The mission in Afghanistan had just begun.

After basic training, we are often asked for what mission we want to sign up. I wrote very clearly that if I was asked, I would volunteer for Afghanistan. However, I was not asked to go.

I wanted to make that clear because I want to point out something rather important. CF members have political opinions and some of them did not necessarily agree with the mission in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, and despite the risks involved, many of them participated in the mission. They did so with honour and incredible dedication. They decided to serve their country and to wear the uniform. I think we should remember that.

CF members can disregard political considerations and fight for their country and for democracy. Even if they do not believe in every aspect of the mission, they feel it is extremely important not to let down their brothers in arms.

Private Members' Business

I remind members that this is an extremely stressful situation. Even if you do not participate in the mission, you always fear losing a friend or an acquaintance. When we were in the cafeteria at Canadian Forces Base Valcartier, we would all stop eating and watch with wrenched hearts as we heard the news that there were deaths in Afghanistan. We all worried about losing a colleague. The names would appear on a screen. I never lost anyone close to me.

For a few seconds, we would be relieved to know that we had not lost a friend, but then we immediately felt unbelievably sick, knowing that there was probably someone in the room who knew that person. We knew that that person had family. We could imagine how difficult it must have been for our own families.

I think we always have to remember that despite what goes on behind the scenes with a mission, the people who decided to go there are able to deal with it.

It had been a long time since the Canadian Forces had participated in such a dangerous mission. Nevertheless, the men and women of our armed forces answered the call. They knew that they might never see their children again after they left for the mission, but they were prepared to do so because it was what their country expected. They were fighting for democracy.

● (2000)

This is what we should remember when we think of Afghanistan.

Considering the sacrifices that these people were willing to make for this mission, it seems only right that the government be willing to commit to and work for our veterans to ensure they really receive adequate medical care, among other things, and that their families also receive the services they need.

Since the mission to Afghanistan, the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder has been incredibly high. This has caused divorces and has had an enormous impact on families. Some people have been scarred for life by these events. In this mission, 158 of our soldiers were killed and more than 2,000 injured. It is estimated that 15% to 20% of our soldiers are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, with varying levels of intensity. These are often the forgotten injuries.

If a monument is erected in memory of the Afghanistan veterans, I hope we will also consider those who are perhaps not physically injured, but whose minds will never be the same for the rest of their lives. They will never be the same. Some may learn to live with this disorder and recover. However, these people will never be the same. It is important to remember this.

Just seeing people get seriously injured, even if you are not the one injured, is traumatizing. These people have nightmares, and I believe that they, too, should be considered wounded. I do not want the government to acknowledge only physical injuries. I think it is important not to forget the psychological injuries that people have experienced on the ground.

I would like to express my hope with respect to this motion. It is just a motion, so it is not binding on the government. However, when we vote on this motion, I sincerely hope that the government will consider it binding and take real action. This motion must not be allowed to fade away. I sincerely hope that, when I stand up to vote in favour of this motion, the government will understand that we

want a real commitment. Unfortunately, because it is a motion, there is no firm commitment.

I also hope that this will happen fairly quickly. All of the troops are supposed to be back in 2014. I would like to see the monument soon, and I would like to have the opportunity to attend, along with all of my colleagues, the unveiling of the monument in the national capital region, as specified in the motion. I would like the chance to see that.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that the situation in Afghanistan was unique, especially at the beginning of the mission. People were not ready when they got there, but they adapted as well as they could. Despite everything, they were able to face the challenge.

The Liberals were in power at the time. Who could forget that the soldiers showed up in the desert dressed in green? They looked kind of ridiculous, but that does not matter because they fought anyway. That shows just how unprepared everyone was.

When I began training, we were still being taught to fight an enemy force advancing on another force. We were not being taught that enemies were hiding behind people who had nothing to do with the conflict. The way we were taught to act in a conflict had nothing to do with the new reality on the ground. Despite their fears, people adapted and carried out the mission successfully.

That is why I hope that we never forget what veterans did over there. Lest we forget. *N'oublions jamais.*

● (2005)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Winnipeg North, I will just let him know we do not have the full 10 minutes available. There are approximately six to seven minutes remaining in the time for private members' business this evening. I will give him the signal when we get close to that time. Of course, he will have the remaining time when the House next resumes debate on the motion.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what a privilege it is to be able to stand in this wonderful privileged place here in Canada, the House of Commons.

One of the most touching moments I ever had was when we had war vets come to the floor inside the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. At the time, there were three rows. I sat in the back row. I could virtually put my hand right behind me and touch one of the war vets.

I truly appreciate, as I am sure all members do, the valuable role that members of our forces, from yesterday, today, and going forward into the years ahead, play in ensuring we have the freedoms that we have today. It is one of the reasons why I made reference to what I thought was a fairly profound statement in a question that I got to pose just 45 minutes earlier, and that is that freedom is not free. It is something that we should never take for granted. It is also important that we appreciate the members of our forces and those individuals who have passed as a direct result of Canada being in conflict positions in the past, and to a certain degree, even today, where we have members of our forces in places in the world where there is significant conflict. They do an exceptional job and make all Canadians, as a whole, feel very proud. They have a high sense of pride.

I served in the Canadian Forces. I had the privilege to serve in the forces, in the air force. I can tell members that the response I got from the public, as a whole, during the days of my serving in the military was quite encouraging. We understand and we appreciate the feelings that are expressed to us, in particular, in other countries. Canada is looked on as a great nation, a nation that has provided a force to be reckoned with, whether it was in the heat of a battle or it was in the form of a peace mission.

Our forces also play roles of interest, in terms of national security, by providing support all over Canada, such as fighting floods in the province of Manitoba or even now, fighting this horrific typhoon that hit the Philippines. We send members of our forces. We do not recognize, I believe nowhere near to the degree in which we could, the contributions that the men and women of our forces make every day, which are very real and tangible.

When I look at the motion, Motion No. 448, as my critic made reference to just a few moments ago, it is a motion that we, as the Liberal Party, support. We recognize the importance of monuments. The mover of the motion made reference to the Peace Tower. A few weeks ago I was in the Peace Tower, not for my first or second time but probably my fourth or fifth time. It is very touching being in the Peace Tower and seeing the pages of the names of all those fallen soldiers, going back to World War I. We get a sense of what has taken place and the sacrifices that were made.

Afghanistan is a significant mission that was played. We still have personnel in Afghanistan. At some point, it will come to an end. I do believe it is appropriate that we recognize those fallen soldiers' efforts and the vets who are coming back. The government might have been somewhat sensitive to what my colleague was pointing out, with regard to the vets. I know it is because he feels very passionately, as Canadians feel.

I thought it was interesting when the parliamentary secretary said that there is no living soldier today whose files were destroyed. No doubt we will have to find out whether or not it is true.

● (2010)

The parliamentary secretary was given the opportunity to retract or correct the record. He can count on the Liberal Party to make sure that this is true. However, it is a little off topic. We are talking about monuments. We need to look at how we can actually contribute to the debate.

Adjournment Proceedings

Every so often I get to drive down Selkirk Avenue in Winnipeg's north end where there is a beautiful memorial for Tommy Prince. He was a well-established, decorated soldier. It embodies a great sense of pride in Winnipeg's north end.

It is not just the monument. Monuments, murals, we have all sorts of representations throughout our great nation to pay tribute to the men and women who have given the ultimate sacrifice to ensure that we have the freedom we have today.

It is not only important to recognize the need to add to the current stock. It is also important to ensure that the resources are there to properly care for the monuments and other tributes.

My time has come to an end. I will wait for the second hour of debate on this very important issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Winnipeg North will have three minutes remaining for his comments when the House next returns to debate on the question.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (2015)

[*Translation*]

PRIVACY

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians and Quebecers are becoming more and more concerned about their privacy, but the Conservatives seem less and less committed to updating our privacy laws.

My Bill C-475 addresses Canadians' concerns by bringing the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act into the digital age with reasonable, balanced measures that have been supported by a number of experts, consumer protection groups and businesses. Unfortunately, the Conservatives continue to oppose my bill for no reason.

For example, the Conservatives say that I did not do enough consultation before I introduced Bill C-475. However, while the bill was being drafted, I held dozens of consultations with experts, academics, consumer protection groups and businesses subject to the PIPEDA.

Furthermore, Bill C-475 is the result of recommendations made by several witnesses at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, during the parliamentary study on social media and privacy.

In short, I consulted all of the major Canadian companies affected by this bill, the foremost experts in Canada, as well as the organizations most involved in consumer protection and civil rights protection.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Conservatives are saying that Bill C-475 does not fall within the PIPEDA framework. In fact, Bill C-475 simply increases the commissioner's powers if an organization does not comply with the law and decides not to follow the commissioner's orders. It can function perfectly well within the PIPEDA framework.

In addition, the Conservatives are wondering why the fines apply only to organizations that do not follow the commissioner's orders. That is precisely the strong point of my bill. It is very balanced and does not try to further burden businesses. Simply put, if an organization amends its practices that do not comply with the law, it will not have to pay a fine.

We are now in the age of big data. Personal data is found all over the Web and they are priceless. We need to ensure that they are protected. With the age of big data came the rise of Internet megacorporations. According to the Privacy Commissioner, it is increasingly difficult to ensure compliance with the PIPEDA and compel companies to honour it.

The measures contained in Bill C-475 will encourage companies to adequately protect the privacy of Canadians, because if they do not, there will be real consequences. If the government really wants to protect consumers, as it promised to do in the throne speech, it must make a serious commitment to privacy.

Bill C-475 builds on this commitment to consumers by creating a greater incentive for companies to respect our Canadian privacy legislation.

It is high time that the Conservatives take the protection of privacy seriously. It is time they respond to the concerns of Canadians and support Bill C-475 instead of defending themselves with baseless counter-arguments and spreading scurrilous allegations about this initiative.

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to respond to comments made by the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville regarding Bell Canada's new privacy policies.

The privacy of Canadians is of utmost importance and our government places high priority on protecting their personal information. Canada has strong privacy protections in place and these protections work for the digital age.

In fact, the privacy rules already contained in the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, PIPEDA, address the inappropriate and indiscriminate collection of personal information by businesses. Companies cannot simply siphon information and decide to do whatever they want with it. They cannot force their customer to turn over personal information that has nothing to do with the product or services they are providing. They cannot sell information about their customer to whomever they want.

PIPEDA empowers individuals by giving them control over what can be done with their information. It also gives the Privacy Commissioner the power to ensure companies are following the rules, and this is exactly what happens now.

The Privacy Commissioner has already confirmed that she has launched an investigation into Bell Canada's proposed activities. Any Canadian who believes their privacy has been violated should raise these concerns with the commissioner.

I fail to understand why the opposition does not share my trust and confidence in the commissioner's ability to conduct a thorough and fair investigation. Instead, the opposition seems intent on using the situation for political gain and to advance a flawed and incomplete bill.

Our government is prepared to take action to protect the privacy of minors. Bill C-475 is silent on this.

Our government is prepared to make companies accountable for breaches to private data under their control. Bill C-475 would bury the commissioner in paper.

Updates to PIPEDA must provide meaningful improvement to the protection of individual privacy, while encouraging the growth of secure and trustworthy modern commerce. Bill C-475 does no such thing.

● (2020)

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary's response clearly shows just how little he understands about the issue of privacy and the need to update our laws, because they are no longer relevant in the digital age.

I have complete confidence in the commissioner's ability to investigate in that regard. The problem that the commissioner herself has identified is that she is powerless to do anything. Once an investigation is complete and recommendations are made, if they are not implemented, her hands are tied. This is what my bill would correct. It creates incentives to ensure that businesses obey the law. At present, if they do not obey the law, nothing happens. They simply get a little slap on the wrist and then carry on. There is no doubt that huge corporations and huge Internet companies will not obey Canada's laws if real consequences are not imposed.

I am asking the government to step outside of its bubble and update our privacy laws in order to ensure that Canadians are better protected.

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, Canada does not need a heavy-handed approach that adds red tape for businesses and increases costs, which is what the NDP member opposite proposes. Our government's approach will be well thought out and will balance the privacy rights of the individual with the legitimate needs of business to access personal information.

Despite the attempts of the opposition to mislead Canadians, let me confirm that the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, PIPEDA, gives Canadian consumers important rights when dealing with their privacy being violated.

Adjournment Proceedings

I look forward to the findings of the Privacy Commissioner's investigation into this matter and I have full confidence that Canada's privacy laws will be respected.

[*Translation*]

VETERANS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked for an adjournment debate today because I heard some horrible comments in response to a question I asked the Minister of Veterans Affairs, which went unanswered. Those are two reasons why I asked for this debate.

On November 4, I asked the Minister of Veterans Affairs why less than 30% of the budget for the funeral assistance program had been disbursed. He said that he had doubled the limits of the program.

The next day, I tried again. I asked what was the point of doubling the limits of a program when veterans and their families are not even eligible for it. I was very shocked to hear the minister reply that it was wishful thinking on my part that more veterans would die so more money from the funeral and burial program would be used. That is shameful.

That would be like me saying that the minister is cutting veterans' care because he wants them to die more quickly to save even more money. I would never stoop to making the kind of remarks made by the Minister of Veterans Affairs. However, in light of his answer and comments, I cannot help but wonder.

Following this despicable comment, the minister told me that the answer, or non-answer, was the same: he had doubled the limits of the program. In fact, it was a non-answer. To ensure that the parliamentary secretary clearly understands the question, I will put it back into context.

Using the assets to assess the net worth of a veteran's estate is problematic because it restricts a veteran's access to the program. The Royal Canadian Legion stated that the government had effectively limited the ability of the Last Post Fund to carry out its mandate by reducing the estate exemption from \$24,000 to \$12,000. That happened under a Liberal government, between 1995 and 1997 if I am not mistaken.

Since 2006, nothing has been done, with the result that since that year, 67% of requests submitted by veterans' families—which felt that these veterans were living below the poverty level—have been denied. The families were asking for help under the funeral and burial program to cover the veterans' funeral expenses. We all agree that \$12,000 in assets is not much.

To summarize, the minister said he had doubled the amount last year. Indeed, until last year, the government gave about \$3,600 to cover funeral expenses of veterans in need. It was not enough, of course, since these expenses usually total around \$8,000 or \$9,000. The amount was therefore doubled and is now around \$7,600.

However, the problem is that veterans and their families are not eligible for that program because the criteria are very strict. When a veteran dies, his assets must not exceed \$12,000, otherwise the request is denied under the program.

Will the government agree to expand the eligibility criteria so that more veterans' families have access to this program to cover the veterans' funeral expenses, so that they can get a decent funeral?

I am asking the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs to answer the question: is the government prepared to expand these eligibility criteria?

• (2025)

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are many myths that seem to persist about the funeral and burial program for veterans, but the facts are as follows.

Our program is helping to provide a dignified funeral and burial for all veterans who die from an injury suffered while they were serving Canada. The program is also there for eligible veterans who were in financial need when they passed away.

Those are the facts. Over the years, this important program has helped tens of thousands of families through a profoundly difficult time in their lives. Canadians can be proud of that. Canadians can also be proud that their government is taking real action, as the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed, to make the program even better. Thanks to budget 2013, we have more than doubled the maximum reimbursement rate for funeral expenses from \$3,600 to \$7,376. Thanks to budget 2013, we are simplifying the program for veterans' estates, making it more flexible to reflect the religious and cultural differences of the men, women and families we serve.

These are the right changes to make, and they reflect the Government of Canada's determination to provide the support veterans and their families need, when they need it. These changes also build on the Government of Canada's record of investing in veterans and their families at record levels. Again, the facts speak for themselves.

Since we implemented the New Veterans Charter in 2006, the Government of Canada has invested almost \$5 billion in new funding to enhance veterans programs, benefits and services. In the coming year alone, as we outlined in the 2013-14 main estimates, the Government of Canada is planning to spend almost \$785 million more for veterans than was spent annually eight years ago. There is no disputing that we are providing an extra \$785 million a year to enhance financial benefits and provide world-class rehabilitation services for injured and ill veterans. We are providing an extra \$785 million a year to operate 10 specialized clinics for veterans struggling with mental health conditions, to provide career transition services valued at up to \$75,800 for veterans starting new careers, and to recognize and honour all veterans and their families for their accomplishments and their sacrifices.

Adjournment Proceedings

The funeral and burial program is an important part of our efforts. It is ensuring that Canada's veterans are laid to rest with the full respect and dignity they deserve. The program is also maintaining these gravesites in perpetuity, so that future generations of Canadians will know when they are passing by the final resting place of someone who served and sacrificed everything for our great country.

The only thing I do not understand is why the member opposite is against this.

• (2030)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, we are against it because, for the past two years, the government has done nothing but cut services to veterans. It is closing the offices veterans had access to. That is what we are against, not anything else.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs threw out all kinds of figures to support his claim that the government is supporting veterans. It is not enough.

Let us set everything else aside and focus on the \$7,300. First of all, that is not enough, even though it is better than before.

Second of all, the eligibility criteria are too narrow. When a veteran dies, he can have no more than \$12,000 to his name. If he has more than \$12,000, his family gets no support to cover the cost of a dignified funeral and burial service.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs said as much in committee today. He is waiting for the committee's recommendations with respect to eligibility criteria, but that was all done two years ago.

Will the minister step up to the plate and fix the eligibility criteria so that more families can afford dignified funeral and burial services for veterans?

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how I can be any more clear. We are determined to provide the programs, benefits, and services veterans and their families need, when they need them, and our recent enhancement to the funeral and burial program proves this.

We have improved the program by more than doubling the reimbursement rate for funeral expenses and making it more flexible to meet the different religious and cultural practices of the Canadians we are serving. This is good news. These measures build on Canada's unique position as one of the few countries providing funeral and burial services for its veterans, and they increase our reimbursement rates, which were already among the most generous in the world.

In closing, I want to reassure the member opposite that it is okay for him to say, "Well done".

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:34 p.m.)

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